



TREES NETWORK

November 2025 Newsletter

UPCOMING Parent/Family Meeting

Monday, November 3, 2025 7 PM - 8 PM

Least Restrictive Environment

Mark your calendars for **Monday, November 3, 2025 from 7:00 pm - 8:00 pm**. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

(IDEA) guarantees that all students with disabilities have the right to a public education in the least restrictive environment (LRE) that best meets their individual needs. That means that the LRE for one child may look different than the LRE for another child. Cindy Duch, Parent Training and Information (PTI) Project Director for Parent Education and Advocacy Leadership (PEAL) Center, is joining us to help us examine what an accessible education environment looks like and will share tips on advocating for the supports appropriate to create the LRE for your child. There will be ample time for Q&A. Anyone interested in learning more can register for the meeting by contacting Vicki Donne at donne@rmu.edu or Deanna Hiltz at hiltzd@rmu.edu or registering at [Google Registration](https://forms.gle/89PjxMBVSpaxAaSv9) (<https://forms.gle/89PjxMBVSpaxAaSv9>) Upon registration, registrants will be sent a Google Meets calendar invitation.

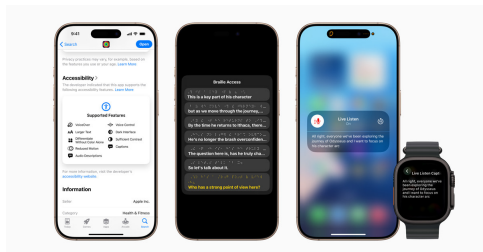


Assistive Technology Workshop

Apple Accessibility

How Tablets and Smartphones Can Help Bridge the Gap

Monday, November 10, 2025 6:00PM - 7:00PM



Join us virtually on Monday, November 10, 2025 from 6:00 PM - 7:00 PM to learn about the accessibility features within tablets and smartphones. Bekah Nesbitt, an Assistive Technology Coordinator for TechOWL, PA's Assistive Technology Act Program, will be joining us to describe assistive technology (AT), how AT helps individuals with disabilities, and how Apple Accessibility can be applied across disabilities. To register for this free

family/parent workshop, please contact Vicki Donne at donne@rmu.edu or Deanna Hiltz at hiltzd@rmu.edu, or register at [Google Registration](https://forms.gle/CMzEm7KngKyF4asa6).

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Pathways to High School Graduation Parent/Family Meeting

Monday, December 1, 2025 7 PM - 8 PM

Join us virtually on **Monday, December 1, 2025 from 7:00 pm - 8:00 pm** for our monthly family support meeting. Dr. Melissa Holler, Director of Pupil Services with the Allegheny Valley School District and her colleague, Mrs. Becky Dyer, High School Counselor, will be discussing the multiple ways for high school students to graduate. The pathways are a requirement that districts must implement, but there are options and alternatives for students in general education but specifically those in special education. Anyone interested in attending can register for the meeting by contacting Vicki Donne at donne@rmu.edu or Deanna Hiltz at hiltzd@rmu.edu or registering at [Google Registration \(https://forms.gle/crSGRw1FbZPTWP89\)](https://forms.gle/crSGRw1FbZPTWP89) Upon registration, registrants will be sent a Google Meets calendar invitation.



Special Education Conference SUCCESS

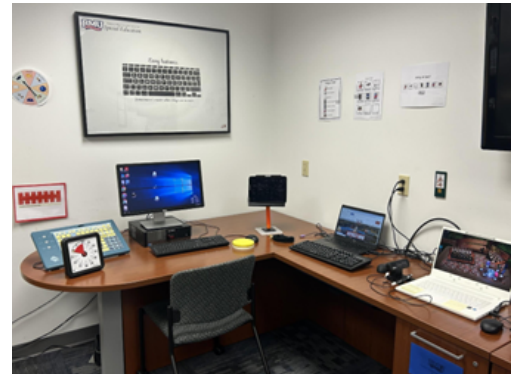
On Monday, October 13, 2025, the RMU Trees Network proudly held its annual Special Education Conference, themed **Leading the Way: Innovation and Inclusion**. This year's conference brought together a dynamic community of current and future educators, parents, and professionals who are passionate about advancing special education. Attendees engaged in a diverse lineup of incredible presenters who shared insights on a wide range of critical topics including: mental health and mindfulness, effective collaboration and co-teaching, inclusive practices, graduation pathways, dispute resolution strategies, artificial intelligence in writing, and reading instruction and literacy development. The day was filled with learning, sharing, and meaningful conversations that sparked new ideas and professional growth. A heartfelt thank you to all that attended, participated, and presented. We couldn't have done it without you! Together, we truly are *Leading the Way* toward a more inclusive and innovative future in education.

Individual IEP Collaborations and/or Conferences

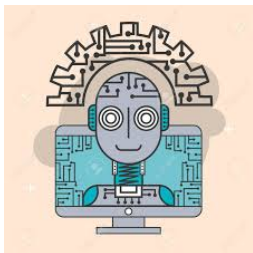
It is common for parents and guardians of students with disabilities to feel overwhelmed when reading through their child's Individualized Education Program (IEP). The RMU Trees Network has set aside hours to virtually meet with individual parents and guardians who have IEP related questions. Let us have an open conversation to help you make sense of your child's IEP and feel more confident in the process. Your questions will guide the discussion and no question is too big or too small. Whether you are new to special education or have been through several IEP meetings, we offer a safe and supportive space to learn and get clarity. Email Vicki at donne@rmu.edu or Deanna at hiltzd@rmu.edu to set up a conference time.

Trees Assistive Technology Device Center Open Lab Days

The Trees Network maintains an Assistive Technology (AT) Device Center for use by students and families. AT is any item, piece of equipment, software or product system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities (IDEA, 2004). AT can range from low technology (such as a pencil grip) to high technology (speech recognition software). The AT Device Center hosts Open Lab Days on **Wednesdays from 9:00 am - 3:00 pm**. The Device Center will be open to the public without an appointment. Visitors can explore a variety of AT, including adapted computer equipment, communication devices, and switch-friendly apps and toys. Staff will be available to answer questions; however, individualized support is dependent on the number of participants. Appointments are also available. Come to RMU, **Patrick Henry 333** and check out the various devices.



Featured Artificial Intelligence (AI)



Artificial Intelligence (AI) is becoming an integral part of education, transforming how students learn and how teachers teach. One of its most powerful uses is in creating personalized learning experiences. AI systems can analyze how a student learns, what areas they struggle with, and what interests them, then adapt lessons and materials to meet their individual needs. This means that students can move at their own pace, receive targeted support, and engage more deeply with the content. The following AI tools are designed to assist students with multi-step directions and schedules.

- <https://goblin.tools/> - **Magic ToDo** (a Goblin tool) is a web-based tool. It creates step-by-step instructions for individuals with ADHD and Autism. It is designed to simplify task management and productively. It automatically breaks down complex tasks into smaller, manageable steps, making it easier for users to organize and accomplish their to-do lists. The tool is particularly useful for those who struggle with complex tasks or need a clear breakdown of what to do next.
 - <https://www.lilplanner.com/> - **The Lil Planner** helps individuals with ADHD, emotional or behavior disorders, anxiety, and intellectual disabilities with organizing their day, tracking goals, and staying on top of tasks. This interactive app makes planning fun and engaging by allowing users to create personalized schedules, choose cute characters, earn treasure rewards, and use a built-in timer to stay focused.
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Events for Families at RMU



RMU Trees Network and the Delta Phi Epsilon sorority hosted the Band Together Halloween game day on Saturday, October 25 in the Olsen Basement. Everyone had a great time. Check out the Band Together Pittsburgh website for future events
<https://bandtogetherpgh.org/events/>

RMU hosted Envision Blind Sports for a decathlon on October 18. These student athletes were amazing - it was so much fun! Envision Sports will be back on campus for a skating/hockey event on November 9th. Contact Jillian Stringfellow at jstringfellow@envisionblindsports.org to sign up!



ICE SKATING AND HOCKEY CLINIC

 **Sunday, November 9**
4:45pm - 6:45pm

 **RMU Island Sports Center**
7600 Grand Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15225

 **\$25.00 per person**

 **For individuals who are blind and visually impaired - family welcome**

 **ENVISION**
Blind Sports
BLIND SPORTS

CONTACT JILLIAN STRINGFELLOW TO SIGN UP TODAY!
jstringfellow@envisionblindsports.org
251-610-3244



Upcoming Events Around the Area

The RMU Trees Network is a member of the Special Needs Consortium, a group of amazing service providers in the Pittsburgh area. The consortium exists to provide a forum where all service providers can network and opportunities can be shared, promoted, and advocated for to increase awareness of resources available to the community. For a full listing of member events, visit their [website](https://www.specialneedsconsortium.org/upcoming-events) (<https://www.specialneedsconsortium.org/upcoming-events>). We hope you will find some of these highlighted events of interest to you.

November 7th - 28th 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM Somatosensory Tactile Art Exhibit

An annual hands-on art exhibit where you are encouraged to touch the art as you explore sculptures by talented local artists and hear them tell the story of their creations through recorded statements. Hosted by CLP's Library of Accessible Media for Pennsylvanians and the Pittsburgh Society of Sculptors. The exhibit is on display at LAMP, 4724 Baum Blvd., Pittsburgh, PA 15213. The opening reception takes place from 4:30 to 6:30 pm on Friday, Nov. 7. For more information, call 1-800-242-0586.

November 8th 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM OR November 12th 4:00 PM - 8:00 PM**Hope Grows' Legacy Project: "Telling Out Story" Retreat**

This half-day retreat at the Iris Respite House will give hospice and family caregivers space to reflect, restore, and share their caregiving experiences in a nurturing, healing environment. Each retreat hosts an intimate group of 10–12 caregivers, offering guided reflection and creative expression. Guests will enjoy therapeutic activities, lunch, and a self-care kit to take home. RSVP online at hopegrows.org/legacyproject

November 12th 12:30 PM MasterClass with Brittany Maurizi, Founder of Balanced Behavior LLC

Join RMU Alumna and Founder of Balanced Behavior, LLC. Olsen Family Basement, RMU

November 20th 8:30 AM Special Needs Consortium Networking Meeting

Baierl Family YMCA, 2565 Nicholson Road, Sewickley. RSVP:
snc@specialneedsconsortium.org

November 21st - 23rd (starting at 5:30 PM)**Teen/Young Adult Weekend Retreat at The Woodlands: Farm to Fun Weekend**

From 5:30 PM on Friday to 11:00 AM on Sunday, this inclusive getaway for youth with disability and chronic illness is created for individuals ages 13-24. Each retreat offers a variety of activities that encourage social connections, health, and leadership skills. Activities encourage new experiences that spark creativity and self-discovery. To apply or for more information, contact Nicole Hicks, 724-935-5470 or nhicks@woodlandsfoundation.org
www.mywoodlands.org

December 2nd - 4th Elf The Musical Trip with Exceptional Adventures

Travel to Toby's Dinner Theater in Columbia, MD to follow Buddy the Elf on his journey to New York. Guests will also enjoy great accommodations with an indoor pool, hot cocoa bar and gift-making. Register here: <https://exceptionaladventures.org/adventures/>

December 14th – 18th Holidays in New York City, NY with Exceptional Adventures

Exceptional Adventures takes you on a scenic train ride to the Big Apple. Guests will enjoy all the holidays have to offer, including The Lion King on Broadway, shopping and delicious dining. Register here: <https://exceptionaladventures.org/adventures/>

OPEN UP Mindfulness Classes (free)

Open Up's mission is to teach mindfulness tools through movement practices and interactive arts while centering people living with disabilities. They believe that all people should be able to experience joy in community with others. They have inclusive movement classes at our studio and can be found in schools and community spaces around the city and beyond.

<https://www.open-up.org/>

DON'T FORGET TO THINK OF YOUR LOCAL LIBRARY FOR EVENTS

- **Allegheny Library Association Programs & Events**
(<https://aclalibraries.org/explore/library-programs-and-events/>)
 - **Beaver County Library Systems**
(<https://www.beaverlibraries.org/system-wide-events>)
 - **Butler County Federated Library Systems** (<https://www.bcfls.org/libraries>)
 - **Washington County Library Systems** (<https://www.washlibs.org/>)
 - **Westmoreland County Libraries** (<https://www.wclibraries.org/>)
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Council Events

- The Allegheny County Local Task Force (LTF3) holds monthly meetings. This month, **November 5**, the meeting will be in person and will center on a presentation from Al Condeluci on Building Successful Transitions through Social Capital. To register, please go to their website <https://www.ltf3.org/>. The doors open at 5:30 PM. Hope to see you all in person for our first special event of the academic year!
 - The Pittsburgh/Allegheny County Local Interagency Coordinating Council (LICC) is a group of families, professionals, and community members who work to improve the delivery of Early Intervention services for young children with developmental delays and disabilities. Their next meeting will be held virtually on Tuesday, January 27, 2026 at 9AM. To register, email strocheck@afit.org.
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Resources for Parents and Educators

The Network provides resources for parents and teachers and these resources can be found at the [RMU Trees Network Website](https://donne94.wixsite.com/rmu-trees-network) (<https://donne94.wixsite.com/rmu-trees-network>). Information on the Network and the previous newsletters are posted on the RMU website <https://www.rmu.edu/academics/provost/trees>. In each newsletter we provide links to resources related to the topics discussed in our parent meetings and workshops as well as other information that may be helpful to families, schools, and the community. **Below are some links to resources for our upcoming parent/family meeting on Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).**



- **Commonwealth of PA** - The purpose of this Basic Educational Circular (BEC) is to provide guidance regarding the least restrictive environment requirements for determining the placement of school-age students with disabilities as outlined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Title 22 Pennsylvania Code, Chapter 14 Special Education Services and Programs.
<https://www.pa.gov/agencies/education/resources/policies-acts-and-laws/basic-education-circulars-becs/pa-code/least-restrictive-environment-lre-and-educational-placement-for-students-with-individualized-education-programs>
- **NEA Today** - NEA supports the use of best practices and evidence-based inclusion strategies for every student with disabilities in the least restrictive environment and has recognized several steps that should be taken to achieve the goal of proper IDEA implementation.
<https://www.nea.org/nea-today/all-news-articles/maximizing-student-success-least-restrictive-environments-and-appropriate-models-inclusion>

- **PA Principals Association** - Inclusive learning environments have several benefits for students with disabilities compared to students in more segregated settings, including higher academic performance, fewer discipline incidents and better post secondary outcomes, according to the U.S. Department of Education, educators, researchers and families.

<https://www.papincipals.org/news/national-news-what-you-need-to-know-about-least-restrictive-environment-in-idea/>

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RMU Trees Website (<https://donne94.wixsite.com/rmu-trees-network>)
RMU Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/RMUtrees/>)

