The Parent Connection
Susie Gerometta & Christine Germeyer
Frederick County Public Schools Special Education Advisory Committee
The first time we informally met was at a back-to-school event in 2004. Christine was seeking out information and came upon Susie of the Parent Resource Center. Two years later, we officially met again, upon entering the special needs program.
In 2006-2007, parents of special needs children were invited to attend an information session and so began the Parent Connection.

The parents who attended began to rely on each other.

We formed friendships and we networked outside of the group.

Frederick County Public Schools Special Education Advisory Committee
We sought out information that could help other parents.

The friendships that were formed, empowered each of us.

We formed the first Parent-Teacher Organization at the regional program.

We helped to create a Santa’s Workshop and we organized the first carnival for special needs children which is now an annual event.

Frederick County Public Schools Special Education Advisory Committee
Within the group, leaders were born. One parent became the Executive Director for the Arc of the Northern Shenandoah Valley. One parent became the Chairman for the Frederick County Public Schools Special Education Advisory Committee after serving as Vice Chairman.
Another parent formed Essential Pieces, a support system for families with children of ASD, which has now created two satellite locations in Virginia.

One parent is an advocate for the March of Dimes;

another is working towards becoming a special education teacher.
The graduating parents became mentors to those that were “new” to the program. As some aged out, we relied heavily on the friendships we had formed. Christine found herself looking for a networking opportunity where she could continue to help advocate for families of children with special needs.
Susie suggested looking into serving as a member of the Frederick County Public Schools Special Education Advisory Committee.

Members of the committee must receive a nomination from the school principal.

Parents can ask their principal for consideration or you can be approached.
The bylaws state that we must have a member from each one of the schools; there are 20 schools within Frederick County and 85% are represented.

At the end of the 2013-2014 school year, the county was serving 1,454 students with disabilities out of a total population of 13,048.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Students with Disabilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FY09</td>
<td>12,913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY10</td>
<td>13,035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY11</td>
<td>13,046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY12</td>
<td>13,016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY13</td>
<td>13,066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY14</td>
<td>13,048</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Frederick County Public Schools Special Education Advisory Committee
SEAC meets, at a minimum, four times throughout the school year. Members can be an individual with a disability, parents of children with disabilities, or a community representative of a civic organization, public agency or local business.
When the names are presented to the committee, we vote on the incoming members and then select officers at the end of the school year.

One of our biggest roles is to take on a committee-wide project.

The projects vary, year-to-year, but the focus is the same;

Frederick County Public Schools Special Education Advisory Committee
Promoting a cooperative partnership between parents of children with special needs, the schools and the community.

On April 10, 2013 we held one of our SEAC meetings. In that meeting, our Transition Specialist, Sue Boyce, shared the details of an amazing program.
She explained what she had learned at a conference and had each of the members complete a one-pager to help demonstrate how easy the tools were to utilize.

Her message was clear and her delivery was filled with passion.

This program had found a way to give all children a voice.
It was a voice and no longer a label. One simply needed to answer the questions on the page by identifying their strengths, preferences, interests and needs.

A parent could utilize it, a teacher, a friend, a relative, a co-worker,

it didn’t need to be just an individual with special needs.

Frederick County Public Schools Special Education Advisory Committee
And in that laid the beauty of the I’m Determined Project. Our SEAC members realized its versatility. The following morning, my child had an IEP meeting which I had to prepare for just as I had done in previous years. Only difference being...
The information I had been obtaining through the I’m Determined website.

I found templates and PowerPoints for one-pagers, all about me, and a good day plan.

Before school began, I sat down with my child and began asking questions that were listed throughout the various tools.
As quickly as I could, I polished it up and took it into the IEP meeting. My child, at the time, was in 4th grade and about to enter 5th grade.
I appreciated the importance of this IEP because it would help drive the services he would later receive in 5th grade and as he transitioned into the middle school.
In the IEP meeting, the principal of the elementary school, Kathleen Weiss, saw how easily the one-pager expressed his needs and how it could be used by all.

Afterwards, I shared with her where I had received the information and told her I had plans to speak with an I’m Determined team member to learn more.
I contacted everyone I could find on the I'm Determined website (my apologies if any of you were approached) and I gathered information.

I had two purposes for reaching out; I wanted to know what an individual school had to do to implement the program and how it could be supported in its efforts.
But, as a SEAC member, I wanted to find out what we could do as a committee to bring these tools to students, parents, and teachers within our entire county. On April 23, 2013, I’m Determined was voted upon to become the annual project for our SEAC group to take on in the upcoming 2013-2014 school year.

*Frederick County Public Schools Special Education Advisory Committee*
We formed a sub-committee to spearhead this project which included the administrative team members of special instructional services for Frederick County.

Lynette Johnson, Director of Special Instructional Services

Michele Sandy, Assistant Director of Special Instructional Services
Sue Boyce, Transition Specialist
Kerry Mueller, Coordinator of Special Instructional Services for Middle School
Susan Gerometta, Parent Resource Center
Christy Allen, Holly Buck and Christine Germeyer, Parents

Frederick County Public Schools Special Education Advisory Committee
At the same time the sub-committee was being formed, Gainesboro Elementary School was finding out what would be required for them to adopt the program.

It was suggested, by the I’m Determined leaders, that the schools who see the greatest results are those that build a team which involve multiple individuals.

*Frederick County Public Schools Special Education Advisory Committee*
First and foremost, you had to have an administrator of the school, the special education team leader, the school psychologist, the regular education teacher and a parent. Once every member of the team had been approached and everyone agreed to the concept...

Frederick County Public Schools Special Education Advisory Committee
The I’m Determined project became a part of the 5th grade curriculum in the fall of the 2013-2014 school year and the entire 5th grade would utilize the one-pager. While all of this was coming together at the elementary school, the SEAC group was coming up with how they would share the information across the county.
July 10, 2013 was the start of our planning meetings. We met once a month for three months before we hosted our first workshop on October 24, 2013.
It was during our first workshop that I included my son’s Good Day Plan from the IEP meeting that had taken place in April.

**My Good Day Plan**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What happens on a Good Day?</th>
<th>Does it happen now?</th>
<th>What needs to happen to make it a Good Day?</th>
<th>Who can help me?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- I’m playing and relaxing in the sand on the beach.</td>
<td>- Only sometimes.</td>
<td>- Get days off of school.</td>
<td>- Mrs. Basham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I’m playing with Lego’s.</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Having vacations.</td>
<td>- Mrs. Basham’s aid (he can’t recall the name)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- When we have longer recess.</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Work in a smaller class with Mrs. Basham.</td>
<td>- Speech teacher (he can’t recall the name)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- When I’m with Mrs. Basham.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Physical Therapy teacher (he can’t recall the name)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Frederick County Public Schools Special Education Advisory Committee*
Planning for the second workshop began one month later on November 21st.

We met once a month until the 2nd workshop which was held February 6, 2014.
We believed that the message of this program would be embraced if we could get it from the point of a student. My son, along with other students, agreed to present one-pagers at our second workshop.
Three parents were asked to complete a one-pager along with the students.

It was an easy way to demonstrate how anyone could use a one-pager.
As we began closing in on the 3rd workshop, the frequency of our meetings increased to one every other week until March 27, 2014.
By our third workshop, we added community leaders to discuss how they utilized components of the program before it was conceptualized.

The Beginner’s Guide to Goal Setting
By Michael Hyatt

I wanted to offer a basic goal-setting primer. You can find plenty of advice online, but these are the five principles I follow in my own practice:

1. **Keep them few in number.** Productivity studies show that you really can’t focus on more than 5–7 items at any one time.

2. **Make them “smart.”** This is an acronym, as you probably know, and it is interpreted in various ways by different teachers. When I refer to **smart goals**, I mean this. Goals must meet five criteria. They must be:
   - **Specific**—your goals must identify exactly what you want to accomplish in as much specificity as you can muster.
   - **Measurable**—as the old adage says, “you can’t manage what you can’t measure.” If possible, try to quantify the result. You want to know absolutely, positively whether or not you hit the goal.
   - **Actionable**—every goal should start with an action verb [e.g., “quit,” “run,” “finish,” “eliminate,” etc.] rather than a to-be verb [e.g., “am,” “be,” “have,” etc.]
   - **Realistic**—you have to be careful here. A good goal should stretch you, but you have to add a dose of common sense. I go right up to the edge of my comfort zone and then step over it. (If I am not out of my comfort zone, I’m not thinking big enough.)
   - **Time-bound**—every goal needs a date associated with it. A goal without a date is just a dream. Make sure that every goal ends with a by when date.

3. **Write them down.** This is critical. There is a huge power in writing your goals down even if you never develop an action plan or do anything else (not recommended).

4. **Review them frequently.** While writing your goals down is a powerful exercise in itself, the real juice is in reviewing them on a regular basis. This is what turns them into reality.

5. **Share them selectively.** Only share them with those who are committed to helping you achieve them (e.g., your mentor, mastermind group, or business partner).

If you don’t have written goals, let me encourage you to make an appointment on your calendar to work on them. You can get a rough draft done in as little as an hour or two. Few things in life pay such rich dividends for such a modest investment.
We increased the meetings once again to finalize our preparations for the summit.

We met every week to discuss details until April 26, 2014.

When it came time to plan for the mini summit, we made phone calls, sent emails and relied on the knowledge of others to develop this event.

Frederick County Public Schools Special Education Advisory Committee
Christine was referred to Judy Averill at Chesterfield County Public Schools because they had been producing mini-summits to their students and families for a couple of years. They had good information to share with us and felt they had worked out all of the kinks in their program.
Once each of us felt like we had enough information to move forward we made it official by sending out announcements about the mini summit.

We sent the children home with the flyers and took it one step further by mailing them out with the VDOE special needs surveys.

Frederick County Public Schools Special Education Advisory Committee
Each parent of a student with special needs received a survey and this flyer letting them know of the upcoming summit and how they could register.
The next step was to create a registration form for the students. This would help us make sure we had volunteers to support everyone.
Dear Applicant,

CONGRATULATIONS! You have been chosen to participate in the Frederick County Public School Special Education Advisory Committee’s Youth & Parent Mini Summit. The summit will take place on Saturday, April 36th. Registration begins at 8:30AM. Attendance is limited to registered guests only, i.e., the participant and their parents/guardian.

Participants are asked to be accompanied by an adult throughout the entire day. Your attendance is extremely important to our planning committee. We ask that you contact us at 540-662-3889 ext. 88153 if you are unable to attend.

Upon arrival, you will be given your workshop assignments. Students will be attending separate sessions from their parent/guardian. A pizza lunch is being served at the conclusion of our day with a ceremony to follow.

Once again, congratulations on being chosen to attend. We’re looking forward to meeting you all!

Sincerely,

The Special Education Advisory Committee

Since we limited the amount of students to 50, we notified those chosen with a congratulations letter.
We opened our summit to all grade levels.

The elementary students were sent a postcard which listed what to bring and more importantly, what to wear.

Greetings Friend,

We are so glad to hear you will be joining us at our youth and parent summit. We have wonderful plans. You will be participating in a fitness session and art activity. Please dress in comfortable clothes and shoes because you may get dirty from all the fun!

If you can, bring in personal photos, magazines or other items you would like to use to create your one-pager. It is a “story” about YOU. All items will be returned to you but keep in mind that some things may get glued. Please call 540.533.5762 with questions. We look forward to meeting you on April 26th!

Sincerely,
Mrs. Holly Buck

Frederick County Public Schools Special Education Advisory Committee
We asked each of our presenters, volunteers and agency members to register as well. We needed to be sure we had enough materials and plenty of food.
We asked our volunteers to choose an area where they could serve. We gave them the time frame and a brief description of what was involved.

Frederick County Public Schools Special Education Advisory Committee
After months of planning, reaching out to others for donations and support,

Frederick County Public Schools Special Education Advisory Committee

hosted it’s first I’m Determined Youth & Parent Mini Summit.
Upon arrival, each individual was given a name tag, either a student backpack or a parent bag and program of the day’s events. Bags contained resources and gifts.
Dear Students and Parents,

On behalf of the Frederick County Public Schools Special Education Advisory Committee, it is our pleasure to welcome you to the first youth and parent mini summit.

The I’m Determined Project is an initiative that was first presented by the Virginia Department of Education in 2008. They recognized the importance of students developing an understanding and comfort level with their disability label. They wanted to increase leadership and problem-solving skills which would compel students to become more self-determined. Most importantly, students would gain an understanding and knowledge of how small successes are significant for growth.

Students, we hope to offer you a variety of tools which will empower you throughout your life. Parents, we are equally hopeful that this mini summit will provide you with information about the available resources in our area for now and in the future.

We believe that each of you has been uniquely created to become someone extraordinary. We are delighted you are joining us this morning.

Warmest Regards,

FCPS Special Education Advisory Committee

We welcomed everyone and expressed our belief that each of them was uniquely created to become someone extraordinary!
Inside the program we included a map of all the important locations.

We tried to utilize the building without making it too cumbersome.

We divided the sessions into three groupings: elementary students, middle and high school students and then the parents.

Frederick County Public Schools Special Education Advisory Committee
We used a section of the program to give a better description of what everyone could expect in each of the sessions. Again, we tried to keep it brief but wanted to acknowledge our presenters, especially our students.

Frederick County Public Schools Special Education Advisory Committee
Agency Fair

Access Independence
Area 13 Special Olympics
Blue Ridge Riding Center
Body Renew
Camp Follow the Leader, Valley Health
Camp Sandy Cove
Clarke County Parks and Recreation
Crossroads Counseling Center
EsSense of Play Therapy Center
Frederick County Parks and Recreation
FCPS Special Instructional Services Department
Lutheran Family Services of Virginia
Museum of the Shenandoah Valley
NW Works
Outdoor Education Center, Shenandoah University
Selah Theatre Project
Shenandoah University Writing Program
Team 84 Athletes
United Way
Winchester City Parks and Recreation
Youth Development Center

Part of our summit included an agency fair where parents could go and get additional resources in between the sessions.
Many Thanks

Many Thanks

to our
Donors and Supporters
You helped make this summit a huge success!

Admiral Richard E. Byrd Middle School
  Alamo Drafthouse Cinema
  Center for Family Involvement
  Chick-fil-A
  Frederick County Public Schools
  Martin’s Food Market
  McDonald’s
  Nerangis Enterprises
  Olive Garden
  Papa John’s Pizza
  Partnership for People with Disabilities
  Signet Screen Printing and Embroidery
  Target
Training & Technical Assistance Center @ George Mason University
  Virginia Commonwealth University
  Virginia Department of Education I’m Determined Project
  Walmart

Most importantly, we thanked everyone
who made a donation and those that
came out to support us. It wouldn’t have
been possible without them.
Each of our agency representatives was mailed a certificate of appreciation which was signed by the Director and Asst. Director of Special Instructional Services.

Frederick County Public Schools Special Education Advisory Committee
Our students were presented with a certificate of participation by the Superintendent of Frederick County Public Schools, Dr. David Sovine.

The look on the children’s faces was priceless; we did our best to capture it!
Frederick County Public Schools Special Education Advisory Committee
We even captured the attention of the local newspaper!

Frederick County Public Schools Special Education Advisory Committee
Meanwhile, the faculty leaders at Gainesboro Elementary School were preparing something inspirational to present to their families.

I’m Determined representatives were invited to witness firsthand, the impact this program had on the 5th grade students.

Frederick County Public Schools Special Education Advisory Committee
Fast forward to the current 2014-2015 school year...

Gainesboro Elementary School saw great success with their 5th grade students.

They have now added the I’m Determined program to their 4th grade curriculum.

Members of the Frederick County Public Schools Special Education Advisory Committee are already hard at work planning out this year’s workshops and mini summit.

We welcome you to join us on April 25th, 2015 as a guest or a presenter!

For more information, please contact Susan Gerometta at 540.533.5762.

Frederick County Public Schools Special Education Advisory Committee