

## Research - Fall 2010

The overall goal of this project is to create a T/TAC Online for Parents portal that seamlessly integrates current T/TAC Online content and new and/or modified parent-specific content for a positive user experience for parents. The goal of the research plan is to determine, from parents, where and how they currently obtain information about special education, the specific information they seek, and how it might best be delivered to them.

## Background

Data does not currently exist that would tell us what parents of students with a range of disabilities might be interested in finding on a special education website and how they might want delivery to occur.

## Research Objectives

The design team will gain an understanding of parents educational information needs for the portal.

The information obtained must come from the source (the parents).

The design team will fill the data gaps via focus and usability testing of the existing T/TAC web site.

## Research Questions

How do the parents of children with special needs articulate/verbalize their special education information needs?

Why do they deem some pieces of information to be important?

How do parents find information they need? Why do they search in the way they do?

What do parents believe is missing in terms of available content? Why is that missing information important?

What value, if any, do parents see in the existing T/TAC Online site? What is that value? Which sections of the site are valuable? Why are they valuable?

## Drivers for the Research Team

The ongoing project sponsorship from the George Mason University T/TAC Team.

The content analysis of the existing T/TAC Online website.

The ongoing collaboration with Arc of NoVA, PEATC, and the Parent Resource Center.

Weekly access to the Subject Matter Experts.

## Barriers for the Research Team

Lack of direct access to target audiences.

The need to rely on contacts from organizations, ex. Arc of NoVA, to recruit parents for focus and usability groups.

Project scope must be completed by May 2011, the end of the George Mason University academic year.

### Methods/Types of Research

1. Focus Groups – October 2010
2. Walk throughs of T/TAC Online – November 2010

### Why these groups?

The first (3) groups in the chart below were chosen as they are the largest of the (6) special needs groups in terms of parent members. Additionally, the background data for the number of children in specific special needs groups, by area, in Virginia can be accessed on the Virginia Department of Education website (see Appendix A).

Group	Dates	Disability	# of Participants
1. Parent Resource Center	Tue 10/19	Autism	8
2. Arc of NoVA	Wed 10/20	Intellectual Disability/ Developmental Delay	6
3. PEATC	Thu 10/21	ADHD - Speech/ Language/Learning Disability	4
4.		Emotional Disability/ED	
5.		Sensory (Hearing Impaired/Sight Impaired)	
6.		Homeschooled Students	

### Methodology

The design team will conduct qualitative research via focus groups.

The design team will facilitate three groups representing the largest special needs groups, recruited via corresponding associations; Parent Resource Center, - Autism, PEATC- ADHD Speech/ Language/Learning Disability and the Arc of NoVA- ID/DD Intellectual Disability/Developmental Delay.

When: October 19, 20, 21

Total number of focus group participants anticipated: 36

### Appendix A

1. Focus Group Discussion Guide
2. Parent Recruitment Letter
3. Coordinator Contact Letter
4. Virginia Department of Education, Totals For Students With Disabilities By Disability and Age, Ages 0 - 22+, State Totals and Individual Division Totals; [http://www.doe.virginia.gov/special\\_ed/reports\\_plans\\_stats/child\\_count/2009.pdf](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/special_ed/reports_plans_stats/child_count/2009.pdf)

### Results of the Data Analysis Plan

The goal of the focus groups is not to make generalizations about the entire population of Virginia but to determine the educational needs of the parents and how they articulate those needs. The team, via the focus group facilitator, has probed deeply into the attitudes, emotions and needs of the parents. The plan will include a full review of audio tapes, review of researcher notes, and identification of common themes.

### Process of FG analyses:

Immediately following the post group discussion, the design team documented how the participants articulated their experiences.

(Guide question responses)

### Key themes at this point:

Parents have had mixed experiences with professionals (teachers and principals) in the educational system.

Early intervention is key.

Parents have spent a lot of time on intensive research without adequately finding their needs.

Parents want (need) a road map (manual).

There is no separation between the medical needs and educational needs of the child(ren).

A brief and simple overview of federal, state and local policy with commentary would be helpful.

There are additional challenges for non native speakers of English (in terms of accessing information).

### Preliminary implications:

Parents need a central source of information (a roadmap).

Parents prefer Information to be grouped by disability.

Information need information regarding federal and state policies.

Availability of information to all parents, regardless of language, is needed .

Educational and medical information needs to be interlinked.

Special needs awareness and training for school administrators (teachers and principals) is needed.

For a consolidated view of the research results, please refer to the Performance Analysis/Needs Assessment.

The design team's next steps will include the creation of portraits and TTAC Online site walk throughs.

## 2. Walk Throughs

### Who

A total of 36 participants are projected, from the Parent Resource Center, Arc of NOVA and PEATC groups in addition to participants from the Sensory, Homeschooled and Emotional Disability groups. The goal is to get parents who have previously used the TTAC Online website along with parents who have not previously used the site.

### When

Walk throughs will take place the 1st week in November 2010.

### Methodology

The design team will provide users with scenarios.

The design team will observe and take notes on participants' behavior and questions.

The design team will read all written responses from the scenario question forms.

### Results of Data Analysis Plan

The goal of the walk throughs is to continue formative evaluation by measuring users perceptions and impressions of TTAC Online, as well as the functionality, value and navigation of the site. The plan will include a full review of participant answers, an identification of common themes and behaviors and a written summary of findings.

### Findings Walk Throughs

Immediately following the walk throughs, the design team documented the findings, based on how participants articulated their experiences.

### Valuable items on TTAC Online:

The information included in the "Check it Out" box on The TTAC Online HP.

The list of activities T/TAC Online provides

The TTAC Online User Guide

The descriptions of each assessment included in the VA Assessments tab.

The instructional resources drill down.

### Missing items (common to experienced and non-experienced site users) on TTAC Online:

Definitions (of the various special needs) are not on the T/TAC site.

Standard assessments are not on the site, only alternative assessments are represented (parents would like these for comparison).

There are no age specific resources on the current site.

There isn't a list of available government funding on the current site.

Links to community and specialist resources.

### Content/currency/accuracy issues on TTAC Online:

The site is an example of "information overload".

For categories that are in amalgam conditions such as developmental delays, emotional, developmental delays, the resources are very generic.

Content currency (some of the areas, ex. Events, are not up to date)

Content accuracy (ex. Online training, by disability, in the Parents and Family area) had some instances of unrelated topics.

### Navigational challenges on TTAC Online:

The participants had difficulty using the search engine.

The fonts in the toolbar are too small.

The tool bar view by disability can not be viewed on every page,

The participants mentioned not being able to access the home page after entering the site.

The participants described the content presentation as long and heavy, and would like to see subcategories listing the type of disability, and age and grade specific information.

First time users were challenged by the Tabs in "getting to where they wanted to go".

Resources: were found to valuable but hard to navigate.

### Appendix B

1. Walk through booklet
2. Recruitment letter

### Consolidated Research Findings

The findings will address all five research questions, which can be found in the Performance Analysis/Needs Assessment.

The research objectives need to be achieved.

The consolidated results include focus groups results, walkthrough results and the synthesis of both, details of which can be found in the Performance Analysis/Needs Assessment.

### Initial Consolidated Findings include:

About 70% of the current content on TTAC Online is usable, leaving approximately 30% of new content to be developed.

A roadmap from diagnosis to expectations over time.

A "one stop shop" or a single source for information.

Policy information at the state and local level.

Keep the human factor in mind.

Additional language options.

Current research needs to be included.

## Research Schedule

Date	Focus Groups	Usability Groups	# Participants
Special Advisory Group Arlington	Tue 10/19		8
Arc of NoVA	Wed 10/20		6
PEATC	Thu 10/21		4
Parent Resource Center		Thu 11/4	3
Arc of NoVA		Wed 11/3	2
PEATC		Tue 11/2	4

### Priorities

The focus and walk through groups are to be completed by the 1st week in November. The data analyses will be completed by the 2<sup>nd</sup> week in November.

### Recommendations (the "must have's")

The roadmap will be the portal's HP and the first thing the user will see.

- Chunking information will need to be done, in terms of the content flow and visual presentation (layout).

- A better functioning search engine.

- Information needs to be current and updated consistently.

- A personal (human) look and feel is needed.