

Giving every student a 'voice'

[Anna Rutledge](#) couldn't wait to share her excitement with others at the Center for Disabilities Studies, where she works as a graduate assistant. Earlier in the day at a nearby high school, she'd seen marked progress in a student with a disability who is working toward a more reliable means of communication.

"It was really inspiring. Just two weeks ago he received an iPad. Today, he was using it to communicate with staff about a vocational task. SPEACS is great," she said.

CDS began providing Systematic Processes for Enhancing and Assessing Communication Supports, or SPEACS, to school teams and parents in the 2013-14 fiscal year, thanks to funding from the [Delaware Department of Education](#). To help students with complex communication needs progress from using pre-symbolic communication, such as crying, to symbolic communication, CDS staff and other professionals train teams consisting of school administrators, educators, therapists, specialists and, when they're available, parents and guardians.

The collaborative approach allows the teams, or its members separately, to more effectively identify how a child is attempting to express himself or herself, and to craft strategies that enable the child to communicate more effectively and meaningfully.

"Behavior is almost always communicative but it can be easy to miss the intent of students' unique expression," said [Debby Boyer](#), director of the School Age unit at CDS.

There should be fewer misses because of SPEACS, and more successes as it gains a foothold in schools throughout Delaware.

"Giving every student a 'voice' is so important to students' independence," said [Christina School District](#) Administrator and SPEACS team member Jill Casey, "currently, and in the future." [Read more about SPEACS here.](#)



Anna Rutledge (left) shows fellow graduate student Ariel Perez some of the assistive technology CDS provides through the SPEACS project.