

Transition Through Teamwork: Professionals Address Student Access

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In 2013, the Deaf and Hard of Hearing State Transition Team formed in Washington State to evaluate the data for deaf and hard of hearing students as they left public school programming. Our goal: to create a systematic plan to assist students and their families with students' postsecondary education, training, and employment.

Prior to 2013, there was no collaboration around the transition services for deaf and hard of hearing students in Washington State. Washington had numerous agencies providing excellent support, but those agencies were not working together. It was not until January 29, 2013, when pepnet 2 hosted the Building State Capacity to Address Critical Issues in Deaf Education: Transition from Secondary Education to Postsecondary Options conference in Austin, Texas, that we realized the importance of collaborating for the good of our students. Five of us from Washington found ourselves in small groups talking with individuals from other states about what they were doing collaboratively, and we realized that we needed to step up ... and quickly!

Pepnet 2 opened the eyes of those of us working at the state level. Following the conference, we started gathering folks with a like-minded focus. The first year we met three times in different locations throughout Washington. Travel wasn't new to us, but we quickly realized just how large the state of Washington really is. It takes seven to eight hours of driving just to cross the state east to west. Getting our various agencies together from across the state would prove to be a challenge. The second challenge was that most agencies were feeling effective in their individual transition work and activities with youth. Moving toward collaboration was another effort for those individuals. It didn't take long, however, for everyone to realize the benefits.

Fast forward to 2015. Our team has evolved and we now have established a Deaf and Hard of Hearing State Transition Team that meets quarterly. Our team includes representatives from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), the Center for Change in Transition Services, the Washington School for the Deaf, Able

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The authors welcome questions and comments about this article at sbube@seattleu.edu, carolc@cwu.edu, and cinda@seattleu.edu, respectively.

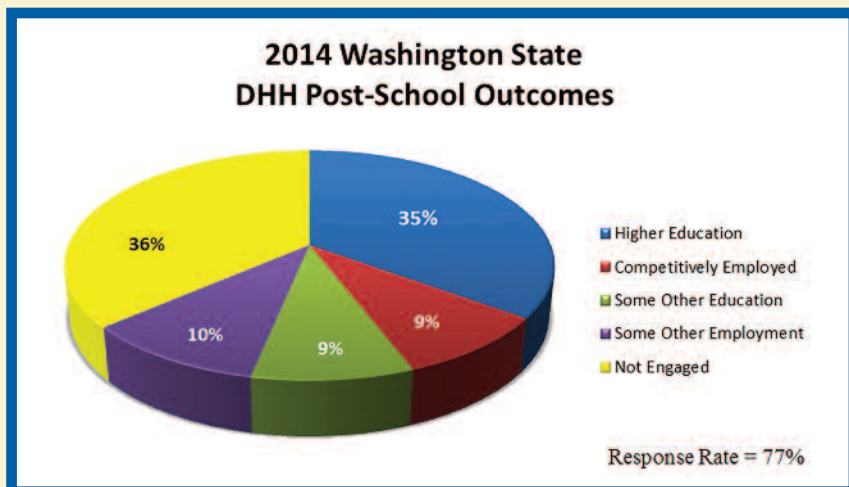
Opportunities (a vendor for DVR), the Washington Career Academy for the Deaf, Washington Sensory Disabilities Services, and the Center for Childhood Deafness and Hearing Loss. What have we learned by meeting together? Plenty! Separately each agency had connections to youth, schools, and regional educational service districts. Now we share our connections and work with a common purpose to improve outcomes for deaf and hard of hearing youth.

Although Washington State has been collecting post-school data since 2000, our team began with the data from the past three years. We found that 100 deaf and hard of hearing students had graduated, dropped out, or aged out during the 2012-2013 school year. Of those, 84 percent had earned a diploma—a figure that was 5 percent higher than that of other youth with disabilities. Approximately 33 percent reported attending a two-year or four-year college and successfully completing their first term. An additional 9 percent were attending a

certificate program such as welding, food handling, or forklift operating—6 percent higher than for all youth with disabilities. An additional 9 percent were working for pay at or above the minimum wage in a setting with nondisabled co-workers—environments we called “competitive”—and 10 percent had worked at least 90 days in less competitive work environments. These numbers were three times higher than those posted for students with other disabilities.

Digging deeper, we saw that responses varied by degree of hearing loss. Those students who were hard of hearing were employed at double the rate of students who were deaf. Students who were deaf were engaged in additional education at eight times the rate of students who were hard of hearing. In fact, students who were deaf had an overall engagement rate in higher education that was 5 percent higher than students who were hard of hearing. The survey yielded one troubling statistic: 36 percent of deaf and hard of hearing youth were neither

Table 1:



Higher Education: Former students have been enrolled on a full- or part-time basis in a community college (two-year program) or college/university (four-year or more program) for at least one complete term at any time in the first year since leaving high school.

Competitive Employment: Former students have worked for pay at or above the minimum wage in a setting with others who are nondisabled for a period of 20 hours a week or more for at least 90 days at any time in the year since leaving high school. This includes military employment.

Some Other Education: Former students have been enrolled on a full- or part-time basis for at least one complete term at any time in the first year since leaving high school in an education or training program (e.g., Job Corps, adult education, workforce development program, or vocational technical school, which is less than a two-year program).

Some Other Employment: Former students have worked for pay or been self-employed for a period of at least 90 days at any time in the first year since leaving high school. This includes working in a family business (e.g., farm, store, fishing, ranching, catering services).

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Feeling that it was important for parents, teachers, and professionals working with deaf and hard of hearing students to find and use relevant materials and resources, the team noted that materials and information were located on multiple websites and that the sites, having little to no organization, were difficult to navigate.

We identified agencies that worked with deaf and hard of hearing students at the middle and high school levels in order to create a conceptual map of the kinds of materials that would be most beneficial to helping students make the successful leap from high school to higher education, training, and employment. In collaboration with individuals from our collaborating agencies, we were able to identify relevant transition information and begin the long process of creating a web environment for dissemination of transition information to everyone involved.

Our second year began with another review of data and Kohler's Taxonomy, and a decision—after much debate—that our new goal would be to improve the involvement of families in the lives of our students. Although we did not have data, anecdotal information provided by team members indicated a lack of family involvement both in developing students' Individualized Education Programs and in planning for students' transition. We wanted to increase access to information so deaf and hard of hearing students and their families could make more informed decisions. To accomplish this, the team decided to work on several objectives simultaneously:

working nor in school.

The team also completed a literature review on the predictors of positive transition outcomes for students with disabilities, looking specifically at studies that included deaf and hard of hearing youth. We found that research supports our work with increasing agency connections as well as pre-employment work experiences (Test et al., 2009). Using this information and Kohler's (1996) Taxonomy for Transition Planning, a model for planning, organizing, and evaluating transition education, services, and programs, our

team decided that the first year's goal should be to expand awareness of each other's scope of work. To do this, the team returned to Kohler's Taxonomy and focused on the Interagency Collaboration Service Delivery Model which specified:

- reduction of system barriers to collaboration;
- information disseminated among cooperating agencies; and
- coordinated requests for information with schools, families, and agencies.

- to complete the website, making sure the information provided was student friendly;
- to create local transition fairs across the state that would bring together employers, service providers, students, and students' families to explore post-graduation options;

- to survey families to find out what information would be most useful; and
- to create a listserv and an e-newsletter to disseminate information.

Today much of our work is underway. We are planning a statewide transition fair for deaf and hard of hearing students that will incorporate a popular field trip to Junior Achievement's Biztown and Finance Park. This field trip, which brings together over 200 deaf and hard of hearing students from across the state, focuses on transition skills within the community. This year it will also include deaf and hard of hearing adult role models, information sessions for parents, and the presence of representatives from local agencies for deaf and hard of hearing individuals. Adding a transition fair to this already popular activity allows our team to

bring services and information to students in an efficient and effective manner.

Further, our goal of surveying parents is underway. We reviewed parent surveys from the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition and adapted many of the suggested questions to develop our survey. Now ready for dissemination, the survey will enable our team, which has relied primarily on experiences of team members, to hear directly from parents.

Working as a team has enabled professionals involved with the lives of deaf and hard of hearing students in Washington State to gather information, create and disseminate meaningful and target resources, and create meaningful research-based activities that will assist our deaf and hard of hearing youth to engage successfully in the full range of college and career options available to them.

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