

A State Reports: Collaborating to Reach a Summit

By Mary Held and Cindy Lawrence

Indiana will have its first statewide transition conference for deaf and hard of hearing students this spring. It is our goal that the conference becomes an effective vehicle to help professionals who work with deaf and hard of hearing students. We are planning for teachers, parents, and service providers to get together to discuss topics such as: understanding laws and rights, self-advocacy, self-assessments to help with career exploration, and responsibility and independent living. Students will also have opportunities to meet deaf and hard of hearing adults who have a variety of jobs and careers.

As everyone knows, conference planning is not easy. Funds for the conference were provided by pepnet 2, but it has been up to us to organize, form a team, and plan and implement this event. When we began, Indiana was one of the states without a coordinator for deaf education so nominations for the team were submitted by the coordinator for Early Hearing Detection and Intervention and the superintendent of the Indiana School for the Deaf (ISD). The Indiana team—six members who came from different cultures and provided different viewpoints—would ultimately include:

- a deaf educator from a public school district,
- a representative from the Indiana Secondary Transition Resource Center,
- the director of instruction for ISD,
- the outreach director at ISD, and
- two parents (one deaf and one hearing).

At the same time, new legislation created the Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education (CDHHE) in 2012 and required the new CDHHE and other state agencies to share data. The CDHHE's duties include "acting as a liaison with

Mary Held, PhD, CRC, is project coordinator at the Center on Community Living and Careers, Indiana Institute on Disability and Community at Indiana University Bloomington. Held's interests include teacher education, transition from school to adult life, self-determination, and curriculum development. Her responsibilities include research, training, technical assistance in education, and training for professionals and staff working in schools and adult services. With 30 years of experience in the disability field, Held has served as a high school special educator, a certified rehabilitation counselor, and a service coordinator in addition to supporting employment providers who worked with students. She has authored several articles and book chapters as well as done numerous state and national trainings.

Photos courtesy of Mary Held and Cindy Lawrence



Cindy Lawrence, MA-CCC-A, is the assessment coordinator at the Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education in Indianapolis, Indiana. Lawrence has served as an itinerant teacher, an educational audiologist, and interim superintendent of the Indiana School for the Deaf as well as director of Outreach and SKI-HI parent advisor for early intervention. She is facilitating the pepnet 2 Indiana Transition Alliance as well as working with transition to preschool from early intervention services.

The authors welcome questions and comments about this article at mabeld@indiana.edu and clawrence@isdb.in.gov.

all state agencies that provide services to individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing, including the Department of Education, the state Department of Health, the family and social services administration, and the Indiana School for the Deaf” (Education, 2015).

Over the last four years, three of the six original members have been consistently involved in transition work for our students. Ongoing discussions resulted in a decision to find the agencies and organizations that were doing the work of transition so that goals could be accomplished more quickly by using existing structures and resources. We also felt that it was important to bring individual representatives of interested groups into our discussion; the manager of deaf and hard of hearing services at the Indiana Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, for example, joined us two years ago.

Our team used a conceptualization process which helped us make a plan that recognized the importance of interagency collaboration and the many organizations that we could include

in order to improve outcomes for students. The team developed the mission statement and goals and then began work.

Our core team invited individuals from other organizations we thought would support our mission. Designed to improve outcomes for deaf and hard of hearing students in Indiana, the new larger group became the Indiana Deaf and Hard of Hearing Transition Alliance. The expanded group broadened the discussions and pulled everyone together around our common goals. Meetings averaged about 50 percent attendance, with between 12 to 20 people at each meeting, and we continued to find other individuals to replace or add to our team.

The Indiana Secondary Transition Resource Center (INSTRC), funded by the Indiana Department of Education, has been a valuable partner. The INSTRC work has focused on professional development related to transition and writing quality Individualized Education Programs. INSTRC has a website that sparked our team’s desire to develop a set of resources

specifically related to the transition of deaf and hard of hearing students, and we developed a manual, the *Indiana Secondary Transition Resource Manual for Deaf & Hard of Hearing Students*, that is now posted on the INSTRC and CDHHE websites. This manual can be downloaded in PDF format at www.cdbbe.isdb.in.gov.

The team was further inspired by information received at the Building State Capacity to Address Critical Issues in Deaf Education: Transition from Secondary Education to

Outcome Statements

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Indiana is expecting to accomplish the following:

- By April 2016, Indiana will have a transition conference including at least 50 deaf and hard of hearing students and their families for the purpose of providing information about available resources and services, learning how to advocate while developing a plan, and providing career exploration opportunities and assessments. Participants will also learn about education and training and post-high school opportunities. The conference will be held during school days. Pre- and post-surveys will show the increased knowledge of students.
- The resource manual with information and resources specific to transition for deaf and hard of hearing students will be posted on a dedicated website that provides additional parent resources and information.
- The Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education (CDHHE) will identify data points, in collaboration with Vocational Rehabilitation and the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) regarding indicators that can help track children through school exit. The information shared between IDOE and CDHHE will be analyzed to determine further needs in our state.
- The Indiana Deaf and Hard of Hearing Transition Alliance will be restructured for the purpose of taking previous activities and outputs and scaling up efforts. More information and resources will be made available to Indiana deaf and hard of hearing students and families.

~ From the 2015 Conceptualization Plan submitted to pepnet 2 by the Indiana team

Postsecondary Options Summit held in February 2016 in Washington, D.C., and material entitled *Leading by Convening: A Blueprint for Authentic Engagement* (Cashman, Linehan, Purcell, Rosse, Schultz, Skalski, 2014). We were working hard to form an effective alliance, and the information gave us tools to use for that purpose.

After reading these materials and listening to individuals report from other states, our team agreed to restructure. Our core team would meet frequently while the Indiana Transition Alliance would act in an advisory role. We also established subcommittees consisting of at least one core member and Alliance members. For example, the media subcommittee has Alliance members who are developing videos for the website along with the resource manual.

Getting together remains a logistical struggle; we meet both face to face and through electronic communication. FaceTime, conference calls via cell phones, and Zoom, a new Internet tool, have helped subcommittees meet with participants in various locations, saving travel time and allowing us to actively include our participants according to their communication needs. The meetings have spurred individual connections, and we see additional “meetings after the meetings” with further connections being made.

Kim Kause, the director of instruction for ISD, stated, “Now we have VR, ISD, public schools, and parents all working together for our common goal of improving outcomes for all students. Before we were separate entities working on our own.”

We are looking forward to our first state conference and hoping that conference participants will experience a wealth of challenging information and inspiring connections, that they will enjoy the entertainment provided by an accomplished deaf performer—and that students will leave inspired to pursue their dreams and see possibilities they may not have before realized.

References

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