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Right: Collaboration between families and the school enhance student success.

Photos by Clerc Center staff

partnering: teachers and parents design a plan for student success

By Joan M. Forney

When administrators, teachers, and other professionals join parents in developing meaningful goals for deaf and hard of hearing students, it is exciting, rewarding, and fun; it is also considerable work. However, the result is critical. These goals can be the key to success for deaf and hard of hearing students, especially when delineated in each child's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Major Challenge: Filtering Information, Weighing Options

The sheer volume of information facing the parents and educators of deaf children is overwhelming. There is compliance with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB); there is compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Both laws—updated constantly—require accountability standards and documentation of student learning. In addition, the U.S. Department of Education states, “All states and schools will have challenging and clear standards of achievement and accountability for all children and effective strategies for reaching those standards” (1997). The importance of this sentiment is echoed in



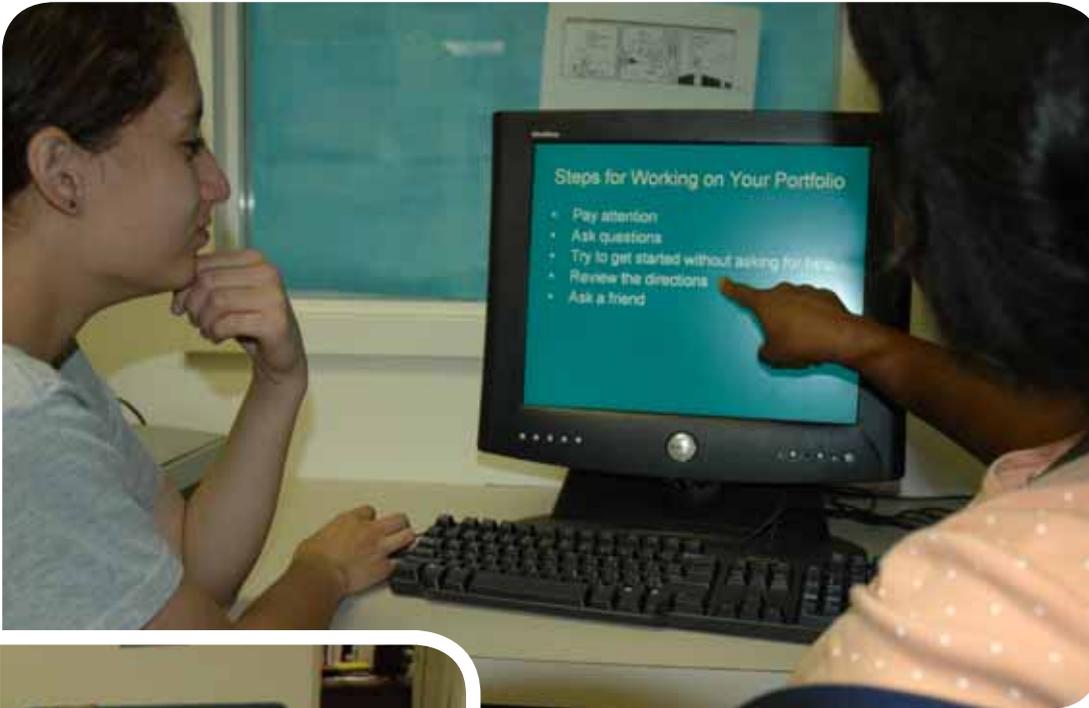
The National Agenda: Moving Forward on Achieving Educational Equality for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students (2005), which was created by several professional organizations in the field of deaf education to institute improvement in the quality and nature of educational programs and services. The National Agenda affirms that “deaf and hard of hearing students are entitled to an educational program in which system-wide responsibility is clear and involves procedures for accountability, high stakes

four on a variety of learning strategies; in addition, another article provided a perspective on a model for communication practices. This single issue illustrates how sifting through the information is awe-inspiring, and the task of evaluating each in relation to the individual deaf and hard of hearing student may be overwhelming.

Each parent and teacher must ask, “Will this particular program or strategy be appropriate in assisting this child?” To select one program is, of course, to eschew the others, and the question then becomes, “How do parents and teachers make decisions about the programs and strategies for their deaf and hard of hearing children?”

Paucity of Research

The National Agenda states, “Wide-ranging research is critical to the development of a quality, communication-driven education system for deaf and hard of hearing students” (p.37). It points out that the field of education of the deaf faces broad and unique issues—including the characteristics of hearing loss and deaf students’ communication and their impact on educational growth, small numbers of students in scattered locations, and ethnic diversity. Until sufficient



testing, assessment, and standards” (p. 25).

Plethora of Programs

One of the challenges facing students and their parents is the plethora of programs, many of them with competing assumptions and strategies, available nationally. The fall 2003 issue of *Odyssey* outlines some of these programs, including five programs focused on phonics, four on Cued Speech, three on American Sign Language, and

research can be completed, teachers face the challenge of making decisions on what to include in the curricula based on the information available and sound educational judgments.

Opportunity of the Individualized Education Program

The IEP, a vehicle for implementing a child’s education, enables teachers to link educational goals directly to the curricula based on the state learning standards. The learning standards should be addressed specifically within the IEP.

When the team members sit down at an IEP meeting to plan the next steps for a child, they should first hold an in-depth discussion concerning the child’s strengths at school and in the home. Parents, who know their child best, have a unique and valuable perspective. Teachers should provide facts about the proposed programs they are considering to assist parents in making decisions for their children. Parents also may have a specific program or set of materials that they feel would benefit their child. The benefits of all programs suggested by team members should be discussed.

Problems should be solved as a team as IEP team members consider and choose educational practices that are results oriented, designed for children who are deaf and hard of hearing, and specifically tailored to each child. The IEP process works within the framework of NCLB, state standards, and the guidelines and goals of the U.S. Department of Education and the National Agenda. The tailored education provided in each student's IEP allows parents and teachers to develop measurable goals, objectives, and benchmarks to assure students are making adequate progress in the general education curriculum.

The IEP team can only determine the setting and curricula that meet a child's individual needs through organized and structured assessment. Ongoing assessment determines if the child's instruction results in him or her learning what was proposed. In today's educational settings, teachers use a variety of assessments—tests mandated by individual states, standardized testing such as the Stanford Achievement Test, teacher-made tests, portfolios, and a number of other strategies—to measure learning.

As part of the IEP process and quarterly progress reports, teachers communicate the child's growth to parents. An IEP team that has knowledge of the child's strengths, weaknesses, and academic performance can determine realistic goals and write an IEP that will provide the child with educational benefit. Ongoing assessment provides IEP teams with the mechanism to adjust the child's learning environment, resulting in positive outcomes and successful results and providing data collection for

evaluating interventions. Although research is limited, teachers and parents have the ability to review critical factors of various programs and to choose the programs that seem best fitted to the deaf and hard of hearing students in their care.

Working together to develop IEPs that take into account the mandates of NCLB, the National Agenda, the states' learning standards, the awareness of parents and teachers of successful strategies and programs, and, most importantly, a child's individual learning style is a daunting task. However, it can provide children with effective teaching and lead to marked educational achievement.

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Challenge for Administrators

Whether a program involves complex goals for many students through years of schooling or involves a change in strategy or use of new materials for a single student through the course of an afternoon, the work of program administrators is complex. It doesn't matter whether they function as officers at the top of an educational hierarchy, as professionals leading an IEP team, or as teachers within a single classroom; an administrator has critical factors to consider when implementing an evidence-based program in classrooms.

One critical element is to ensure that the details of implementation of any new practice are followed exactly. The new practice—or intervention—must be implemented the way it was designed because making changes may alter the effect of the intervention. A second factor they must consider is documentation—whether the collection of data shows if

the new program meets the expectations established in prior implementations. The difficult activity of tracking data in the classroom is absolutely essential. When teams work together consistently, children have the best chance of gaining in educational achievement and literacy. Meeting higher standards requires a cohesive approach. The challenge for school administrators is to:

- establish curricula based on state standards;
- review the variety of programs available based on scientific research and educationally sound criteria;
- use the IEP process to develop plans for children that meet the rigorous standards established by law;
- assess the children's academic progress;
- assure the materials meet state standards; and
- re-evaluate what is taught and streamline the curricula.