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**Right:** Parents take a break during an NMSD Outreach workshop.

# a team approach to quality programming

## FOR DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING STUDENTS

By Priscilla Shannon Gutiérrez

*In this issue of Odyssey, Joanne Corwin describes New Mexico's statewide partnership among several agencies for the provision of early intervention services to infants and children who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families (Effective Partnering of State Agencies to Achieve Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Benchmarks, p. 20). A key agency in the network of early intervention and school-age services is the Outreach Department at the New Mexico School for the Deaf. This article describes a successful endeavor initiated by that department.*

Many parents of deaf or hard of hearing children are overwhelmed by the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process and struggle to understand what it means for their children. As they try to work within the school system, comprehend federal and state regulations, and negotiate a wealth of academic information and testing data, parents find themselves confused about how to be a contributing member of the IEP team. Their concerns can be further complicated by school district staff that may not have a lot of experience or expertise in working with deaf or hard of hearing children.

An important goal within the Outreach Department at the New Mexico School for the Deaf (NMSD) is helping parents feel better able to participate in the IEP process for their child. One of the tools that the NMSD Outreach Department uses to achieve this is the Communication Considerations (CC) Dialogue Form or

*Workshop photo courtesy of Priscilla Shannon Gutiérrez*



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addendum to the IEP. The impetus for this form was the New Mexico Deaf Bill of Rights passed in 2004. The form was developed through collaboration between the NMSD Outreach Department and the Special Education Department from Albuquerque Public Schools using an already established addendum from Colorado as a guide. Since then, the New Mexico Public Education Department's *IEP Technical Assistance Manual* has included the CC addendum. Regardless of placement, or level of hearing loss, the form is a required part of the IEP process for any student in New Mexico who is deaf or hard of hearing.

### **A Quality Tool to Support Quality Programming**

A critical part of the IEP discussion about quality programming is the unique language and communication needs of the student and how these affect his or her access to classroom activities, as well as the student's ability to achieve state standards and benchmarks. The CC addendum is designed to ensure these

needs are addressed during the discussion. It addresses the following major points:

- Determining how fluid the student's communication is within a variety of settings.
- Determining if the student's proficiency in a particular language has been adequately assessed.
- Determining if the mode of communication being used with the student is fostering his or her ability to attain higher level academic and language skills.
- Identifying the types of supports the student requires to achieve grade-level skills.
- Determining if the student has opportunities to interact with fluent language users and/or models (both adults and peers).
- Identifying what options are available on the continuum of placement options for the student.
- Identifying what parts of the current school program can be adjusted to meet the needs of the student.



communication and instruction using his or her primary language and mode of communication.

- Whether the student has opportunities for direct peer interaction.
- How accessible school programming is throughout the school day—not just within the classroom.

Once these areas have been discussed and documented on the CC addendum, the IEP team must then design action plans to address any of the identified issues within each area. The action plan must include the necessary accommodations and supports to assist the student with access to learning and communication throughout the school day.

### Helping IEP Teams and Parents Use the CC Addendum

Since the development of the CC addendum in 2004, the NMSD Outreach Department has focused on helping IEP teams understand how to effectively use the form to plan quality programming. Initiatives to support educational teams as well as parents in this endeavor have included:

- A two-day intensive institute in the fall of 2005
- A series of regional trainings around the state for school personnel
- Presentations at meetings for special education directors hosted by the Public Education Department
- Parent-specific workshops
- More individualized on-site/district trainings by the NMSD outreach specialist assigned to that district

To ensure these needs are considered during the discussion, the CC addendum requires that the IEP team:

- Identify the student’s primary language and mode of communication.
- Identify the language and mode the family uses to communicate with their child (they are not always the same).
- Take both of these factors into consideration when determining the supports needed to help the student gain grade-level skills.

However, identifying the student’s primary language and mode of communication is not enough to assure quality programming. The IEP team must also determine the level of communication and access the student has within all aspects of his or her school day, including:

- The ability of staff who work with the student to communicate fluidly with him or her.
- Whether the student has opportunities for direct

### Comments from Educators Who Have Attended the CC Addendum Trainings

*“I learned a lot about how deaf children communicate.”*



*“This workshop helped me realize the importance of looking at many aspects of the students with hearing loss to best serve them.”*



*“Very informative! It made sense for those of us who do not deal with this information frequently.”*



*“I learned that we should be considering many more options and opportunities for our deaf and hard of hearing students.”*

These trainings have especially helped regular education teachers that work with deaf or hard of hearing children in mainstreamed integrated classes, who often are not familiar with their unique needs, understand issues of access for these students. The trainings have also helped special education directors and other school personnel who work with the students to understand and better plan for the types of supports and accommodations they need in order to make progress.

Parents have been invited to attend regional workshops about the CC addendum that focus on understanding the purpose of each component of the form, what a well thought-out form looks like, and how the CC addendum can be used to guide quality programming for their child. Prior experience with parents has taught us the importance of removing obstacles that prevent attendance and to value the time commitment from parents. Interpreting support for parents who use Spanish and for parents who use sign language is provided to ensure access and encourage participation in the workshops. Child care is also provided so that parents do not have to keep an eye on their children at the same time they are trying to learn new information. A pizza lunch, as well as snacks and beverages during break times, gives participants the energy they need to maintain their focus throughout the training.

Initially, IEP teams were encouraged to draft the CC addendum at the beginning of or during the IEP meeting as a way to guide development of the service plan for the student. However, this approach proved to be challenging as an IEP agenda is often packed, causing the CC addendum discussion to be rushed and viewed as just another form to complete. Recognizing the importance of this discussion, the NMSD outreach team developed a more effective approach that allows the discussion the time and energy it deserves.

This approach begins with

an NMSD outreach specialist doing a pre-IEP observation of the student and participating in a pre-IEP dialogue with parents and the educational team who works with the student. Parents can provide a wealth of information about their child that the teacher or educational team may not be aware of. Having a discussion about needed supports also helps parents understand how the unique needs of their child translate into quality programming and enables them to more fully participate in the IEP meeting. A pre-IEP dialogue also helps the team identify questions and/or areas that may need more investigation prior to or during the IEP meeting.

A draft CC addendum is developed as a result of the pre-IEP dialogue, giving all members of the educational team an opportunity to be on the same page because together they have carefully considered the unique individual needs of the child. (See the diagram below for highlights of the process.)

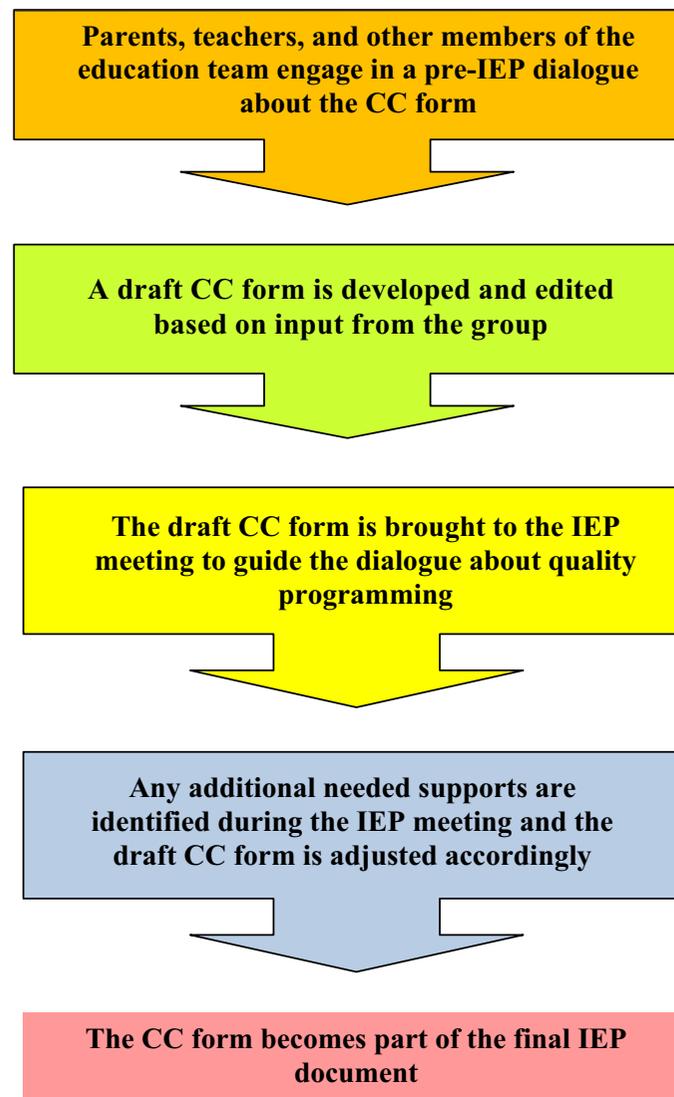
The draft CC addendum provides the IEP team with a working document that guides them toward determining the supports and accommodations the child needs throughout the school day. Including multiple perspectives in the draft form provides a much better picture of the “whole child.”

The process has proven especially helpful for parents who have participated in these pre-IEP dialogues. Comments from parents have included:

*“The dialogue helps address issues beyond the IEP form,” “Helps to ‘educate’ the IEP team about my child,” and “Best done with a TEAM approach, careful thought, a ROUGH draft, and patience!”*

### Next Steps

The NMSD Outreach Department plans to continue helping parents and educational teams understand the CC addendum through the expansion of pre-IEP





dialogues and the drafting of the form prior to the IEP meeting, as well as to continue to provide on-site training to teams who are unfamiliar with the form. One of the goals of this approach is that over time, the need for the parent and the educational team to “use” the outreach specialist to assist with drafting the form will be reduced. Another goal is that parents and the educational staff will be more capable of functioning as a team because they will be able to effectively consider a student’s language and communication needs. The responses from the most recent parent survey regarding NMSD outreach services indicates the approach is indeed having an impact and moving the department towards this goal. Parent responses indicated that by far, the biggest benefit of NMSD outreach services is that they feel an increased ability to participate in their child’s IEP.

As part of our continuing commitment to improve services to public school programs, NMSD seeks to be more diligent and thorough

about measuring student outcomes as well as the impact that NMSD outreach services has on improving program quality. Part of the strategic planning for the department includes the development of a mechanism to measure outcomes for students whose educational team is receiving outreach support.

One of the challenges we face in expanding the pre-IEP dialogue is the high turnover of special education directors in districts around the state. This high turnover often translates into “starting from scratch” in terms of helping newly designated directors understand that the CC addendum isn’t just another piece of paper to fill out at the IEP. Another challenge we face is reaching parents in the more isolated parts of the state to participate in the pre-IEP dialogue. New Mexico is a very rural state with a number of students who reside in extremely isolated areas. Many of their families do not have working telephones or access to the Internet, and reaching them in person can require a four-hour drive. The department is exploring ways to try to reach these families and to expand their participation in the pre-IEP dialogue.

Finally, the NMSD Outreach Department is hoping to share with other outreach departments what they have learned about using the CC addendum as a tool to guide quality programming. We hope the knowledge and experiences we share will help to expand the use of the CC addendum and, ultimately, improve educational outcomes and access for students who are deaf or hard of hearing through a team approach to quality programming.

### NMSD Outreach

The Outreach Department at NMSD provides various forms of support for IEP teams in regard to considering student ability to communicate in academic environments and whether students are ready to use interpreters in a mainstream classroom. Cindy Huff, from NMSD’s Outreach Department, wrote an article for the 2010 issue of *Odyssey* entitled “Determining a Student’s Readiness to Successfully Use Interpreting Services.” This article is available online at [http://clerccenter.gallaudet.edu/Clerc\\_Center/Information\\_and\\_Resources/Publications\\_and\\_Products/Odyssey.html](http://clerccenter.gallaudet.edu/Clerc_Center/Information_and_Resources/Publications_and_Products/Odyssey.html).

NMSD also maintains a website where you may view the Communication Considerations addendum and several technical assistance documents that support its use. Please visit [www.nmsd.k12.nm.us/publications/index.php](http://www.nmsd.k12.nm.us/publications/index.php).