

CEASD National Conference

No child left behind: What will it take?

by **Duane Hanson**
CSD Publications Specialist



The educational system in America is in the midst of a revolution. Federal legislation called No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has mandated steep measures of assessment and accountability for all public and charter schools in the country which receive federal Title I assistance. Educators everywhere are attempting to understand the implications of this legislation and how it will affect their schools and their students. Educational administrators at schools for the deaf are no exception.

“No Child Left Behind: What Will it Take?” was the theme of the national conference of the Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf (CEASD), held April 4–7 in Sioux Falls, S.D. and hosted by CSD. The conference drew 115 administrators and educators from across the United States for four days of intense programming aimed at helping them develop strategies to ensure compliance with NCLB requirements.

Keynote presentations and breakout sessions during the conference covered a variety of current education topics, including reading programs, assessment, literacy, qualified staff, technology in the classroom and research. No matter the topic, every session tied directly into NCLB and the impact it is having on all phases of education.

NCLB demands that all schools

show constant improvement in their student’s scores on a series of standardized tests. Schools that fail to show steady progress every year face strict penalties. By 2014, each school will be required to verify that 100 percent of their students are proficient at reading, math and science.

NCLB also applies stricter definitions of qualified teaching staff, requiring a bachelor’s degree, full state certification and demonstrated competency in subject areas taught. State standards for teacher certification and evaluation of subject matter competence must meet strict federal requirements.

“In deaf education, we are already facing a severe shortage of qualified teachers,” said Claire Bugen, CEASD president-elect and superintendent of the Texas School for the Deaf. “These new standards will make it even more challenging to recruit and retain talented teachers.”

In addition to these challenges to implementing NCLB, schools for the deaf must also deal with the differences between English and ASL. NCLB requires proficiency in reading and comprehension in English and makes no provision for students whose first language is ASL.

The fundamental differences between English and ASL were clearly illustrated in several conference presentations. Wendy Jensen, deaf education consultant with the Missouri School

No Child Left Behind



for the Deaf, used a simple example: “Put out the fire,” in English means to extinguish the fire, but to a deaf child the sentence may be understood as “carry the fire outside.” English words like “can,” “look,” “call” or “make” have multiple meanings in English and may prove confusing to a beginning reader accustomed to ASL.

Existing reading programs, adapted to the needs of ASL users, are being tested as tools to help bridge this gap between ASL and English. Several presenters spoke about the strengths of specific reading programs and strategies for engaging deaf readers. While methods and curriculum varied, the presenters agreed that creating good readers takes a strong commitment from both teacher and student.

As Sandy Huston, reading consultant at the Atlanta Area Day School said during her presentation, “Not reading causes reading failure.”

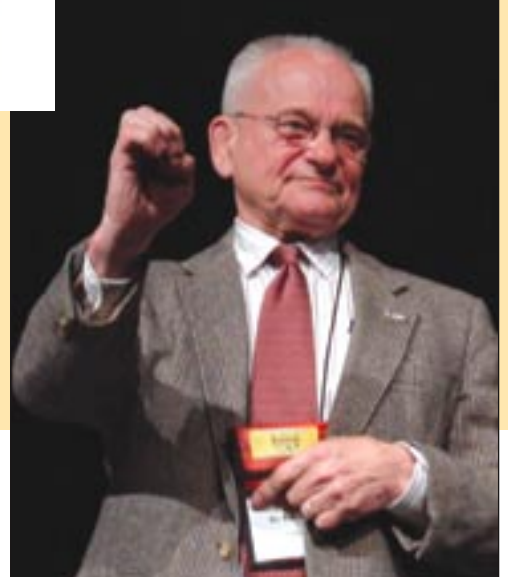
The need for effective reading programs in deaf education was apparent well before NCLB. Galludet University research shows that only three percent of 18-year-old deaf children read at the same level as their hearing peers. Additional research on deaf education that reached similar conclusions provided the impetus for the formation of the National Agenda. The National Agenda is a coalition of parents, consumers, advocacy

organizations and educators organized to improve educational opportunities for deaf and hard of hearing children.

Educators involved with the National Agenda see their work over the past few years as a valuable foundation for schools to use in NCLB planning. The National Agenda has pinpointed problems in the educational system and begun to develop potential solutions to those problems. A common focus on accountability and assessment, as well as similarities in many processes and goals, may help schools already invested in the National Agenda meet NCLB requirements.

On Saturday night, the conference attendees got a break from the complex issues surrounding NCLB when they attended a reception and dinner theatre performance of the play “A Taste of Sunrise” at Augustana College. “A Taste of Sunrise” depicts the experiences of Tucker, a deaf boy who struggles with communication between the deaf and hearing worlds. Dialogue throughout the play was simultaneously signed in ASL and spoken in English. The play is set in the 1920s, but its depiction of deaf experience and deaf culture resonated with the 21st century audience.

Their evening of relaxation and entertainment behind them, conference attendees dove back into consideration of critical education issues again early Sunday morning.



**Opposite Page, Top: Claire Bugen
Bottom: John T. Tiffany
with Robert Davila**

**This Page, Top: Steve Nover
Middle: Frank Turk
Bottom: William Johnson**

“... (T)hese are massive changes. The challenges cannot be underestimated, and it will take all our skill to make sure our children benefit.”

— Rachel Quenemoen
National Center on
Educational Outcomes
University of Minnesota



Top: Marilyn Farmer
Bottom: Luther Prickett



The morning keynote address tackled some of the most controversial issues surrounding NCLB: standardized testing, accommodations and equitable assessment for all students.

Rachel Quenemoen of the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) at the University of Minnesota spoke about the need for fair assessment tools and the challenges of creating them. If children are to be assessed fairly, the structure of the assessment tools must be equal for all students. If it is not, entire groups of students will fail.

Sometimes in the past, standards were simply lowered when students didn't meet set standards, rather than addressing the reason for failure. Because of this, NCLB requires that the same assessments — in alignment with challenging state standards — be used to measure the achievement of all children. Accommodations for children with special needs, alternative styles of learning or specialized curriculum will be very limited. Immigrant children learning English as a second language will be required to take the tests in English after three years of English language classes. A minimum of 95 percent of children with learning disabilities will be required to take the standardized tests. There are no specific provisions in the legislation for children whose

first language is ASL.

Universally designed instruction and assessments are created from the beginning to be accessible and valid for the widest range of students. According to Quenemoen, the NCEO is currently involved with three projects intent on developing a universal design assessment, which is intended to offer equal access to all students without lowering standards.

Standardized tests in some states take the special needs of students into account, but tests in other states do not. Quenemoen cited Florida, where testing legislation requires children to read off a printed page as an example. There is no accommodation in the Florida legislation for blind children who require Braille or any other special circumstance. NCEO research found that most states had never considered students with disabilities when devising tests and assessment systems.

Accommodations are changes in instructional and assessment materials or procedures that allow the student's knowledge and skills to be developed and assessed. Accommodations are based on the idea that all students can learn, but that not all students can show their knowledge and skills in the same way. Alternative assessments used to provide accommodation are important but must be used carefully.

“Accommodations should help them



**Top: Sioux Falls Mayor
Dave Munson
Bottom: Harold Mowl Jr. listening
to Alan Hurwitz**

learn the content, not just get through the day,” said Quenemoen.

Despite the obstacles educators face in meeting the requirements of NCLB, the mood of presenters and attendees remained upbeat. Presenters acknowledged that NCLB presents problems, but it also may push legislatures to provide more adequate funding and provide incentive for schools to improve their practices. Although 100 percent proficiency in reading, math and science may be a utopian goal, opportunities NCLB provides were embraced at the conference.

“NCLB challenges us all to become more accountable. We want to know if schools are doing their jobs and children are learning, said Bugen. “I think this will push us harder in deaf education to ensure that our students reach proficiency in reading and math by the 2013–14 school year.”

NCLB will continue to be significant to education in the United States for a long time to come. As at this conference, the implications of NCLB will need to be considered whenever the fundamental issues in education are discussed. The foundations needed to meet NCLB requirements will be built through the exchange of observations and ideas at this conference and others like it in the months and years to come.



“... one of the more critical issues in implementing NCLB is the requirement to utilize scientifically based learning with a proven record of success.

It is critical that we in education of the deaf support a research agenda that helps provide this information.

We need hard data on such issues as cochlear implants, phonetic based reading approaches versus comprehension based, bilingual education, etc.”

**— Harold Mowl Jr.
President of CEASD
and Superintendent,
Rochester School
for the Deaf**





CSD C.E.O. Ben Soukup presents a check to Claire Bugen, CEASD president-elect.

Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf

Since its founding in 1868, the Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf (CEASD) has offered professional educators the opportunity to work together to improve schools and enhance educational programs for deaf and hard of hearing individuals. CEASD provides a liaison between educators and government, serving as an advocate for the deaf and hard of hearing with governmental regulators and educational policy makers.

CEASD is dedicated to equitable educational opportunities for deaf and hard of hearing individuals and to the effective management of schools and educational programs for the deaf and hard of hearing. CEASD monitors federal legislative developments and represents the interests of deaf and hard of hearing students in matters of educational policy. Regional and national conferences sponsored by CEASD provide a forum for members to exchange ideas, share information and develop solutions to common problems. Through CEASD, expertise and resources are made available for the enrichment of educational programs for the deaf and hard of hearing.

What is No Child Left Behind?

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation flew through Capitol Hill with nearly universal bipartisan support. The legislation requires states to implement steep standards for assessment and accountability for public and charter schools. NCLB establishes requirements for proficiency in reading, math and — beginning in 2007 — science. Schools are responsible for moving every child enrolled toward proficiency in the target areas. Schools that fail to make steady progress every year face consequences. Schools that don't meet proficiency standards may need to provide supplemental instruction opportunities to students, provide transportation and pay expenses for students wishing to transfer to better performing schools and may face loss of federal funding. In extreme cases, the entire teaching and administrative staff would be fired, or the schools would be shut down entirely. Under NCLB, all children will complete a series of standardized tests every year from third to eighth grade and once in high school. Testing in reading and math will begin in 2005. Testing to measure science achievement will start in 2007.

Details of standardized testing are left to the states, but the tests must be built upon approved research based instruction. The state standards will determine what every child should know in math, reading and science. Each state is responsible for developing and administering the tests which will assess every child's progress toward predetermined NCLB standards.

School and district performance will be publicly reported in district and state report cards. A district or school that continually fails to make adequate progress will be held accountable and face penalties. NCLB delivers high expectations for teaching and learning, with greater levels of assessment and accountability for schools. NCLB mandates that by 2014, all schools must verify that 100 percent of their students are proficient in reading, math and science.

