

Working Together for Transition in Texas

Theresa Johnson,

MEd, is an outreach specialist at the Educational Resource Center on Deafness and director of Summer Programs at the Texas School for the Deaf in Austin. Johnson earned her graduate degree in education from the University of Georgia in Athens.

By Theresa Johnson and John A. Serrano

Perhaps it was when a philosophical shift at the state level resulted in a loss of direct funding for the transition of deaf and hard of hearing students that collaboration—always important—became critical. With the reallocation of funds, our students became part of a general network that addressed the needs of all Texas students. Unfortunately, no one within the network had experience working with deaf or hard of hearing students, and the needs of those students became almost lost in the daily transition shuffle.

Parents and professionals concerned with deaf and hard of hearing students responded. Representatives of the regional day programs, the school for the deaf, deaf and hard of hearing consumers, higher education deaf and hard of hearing services, and others formed a statewide transition committee. This committee, a small group with neither funding nor officially allotted time, began to try to address the transition needs for deaf and hard of hearing students throughout the state.

Fortunately, pepnet 2, funded by the Office of Special Education Programs, was able to assist. With financial support from pepnet 2 and the assistance of pepnet 2 staff, the committee created a rudimentary website to assist students and their families in the transition planning process. The committee also provided assistance to programs for planning transition fairs for deaf and hard of hearing students in different locations across the state. In addition, the committee gave a presentation at the Texas Transition Conference on deaf and hard of hearing issues and offered training to parents and students statewide.

It wasn't easy. The committee faced an extreme lack of resources, experienced a high turnover of participating individuals, and found it difficult to maintain enthusiasm; still, a small group with understanding of the importance of the goals continued working together.

*Photos courtesy of pepnet 2
Illustration courtesy of Theresa Johnson*



John A. Serrano, MA, director of Academic Affairs at the Texas School for the Deaf (TSD), has worked at TSD as a teacher, high school assistant principal, and high school principal.

The authors welcome questions and comments about this article at theresa.johnson@tsd.state.tx.us and john.serrano@tsd.state.tx.us.

Transitioning from high school is always critical, perhaps especially for deaf and hard of hearing students and perhaps especially in Texas. In our state, each teen in transition faces numerous complex options, resources, and decisions—a process made more complex by the layers of supports needed and the specialized services required from an array of agencies and community programs.

Of the 7,306 deaf and hard of hearing students who are served within the K-12 special education system, 2,309 are at the age of transition and an unknown additional number of students are benefiting from 504 services. Further, the Texas Education Agency suspects up to an additional 4,000 students with some degree of hearing loss remain unidentified.

For students who are identified, options include 53 regional day school programs for the deaf, one state school, several private schools,

faith-based and charter schools, and, of course, home schooling. Those choices include a continuum of philosophies, communication modes, curricula, support services, and transition strategies. The Texas Education Agency provides funding and guidance to the regional day programs as well as to 20 Education Service Centers (ESCs) across the state. Within each of these ESCs, at least one staff member is considered the “deaf/hard of hearing contact” who responds to questions from schools, families, and students and assists in providing resources, training, workshops, and other activities, and one representative is responsible for the transition of students with disabilities across the state. At the state school for deaf students, a large career and transition center, a program designed for individuals who are over 18 years old, and a science-technology-engineering-and-math (STEM) program are

available; further, the school sponsors an annual transition fair and hosts the Educational Resource Center on Deafness, which provides a long menu of outreach services, including transition-related trainings, workshops, projects, and student activities.

However, there is more. State vocational rehabilitation plays a large and complex role in the transition of Texas youth. With 250 general transition counselors employed and housed within schools, 63 rehabilitation counselors for the deaf, and 34 resource specialists for deaf or hard of hearing people housed in offices across the state, there is an effort to provide additional transition support.

A Shift in Deaf/Hard of Hearing Transition

Pepnet 2 hosted its first Transition Summit in Austin, Texas, in January 2013, and this became the first of five Summits. Prior to the first Summit, each state was asked by the pepnet 2 leadership team to identify no more than five people to represent the transitional needs for the deaf and hard of hearing students. For Texas, this meant an extremely limited number of people to represent the variety of roles, geographic areas, and systems across our enormous state. When asked for a plan on how we would address the needs of deaf and hard of hearing students in Texas, the new team faced enormous challenges. How do five people determine priorities for transition services for deaf and hard of hearing students throughout a state the size of Texas? How do five people—professionals but not those in top leadership positions—influence systems and create resources? How do we get all of those individuals who need to work together to do so?

The team spent several weeks in discussion. We quickly learned that our attempts at communication via phone or Internet would not be as successful as face-to-face meetings; those were much more effective. Further, we needed to designate a note taker to stay on track.



Left to right: Texas team members Theresa Johnson, K-Leigh Villanueva, John Serrano, Anne Hoscheit, and Ava Robinson.

Ultimately, we decided to keep our goals simple. We would:

- re-design the transition website and add an identical version of the site in Spanish,
- host a statewide meeting to which interested individuals from across the state would come and get to know each other and perhaps develop partnerships or collaborative relationships, and
- develop a directory of representatives and programs for future reference.

While our goals were limited, we felt they were important. We also felt it was important to involve more representatives with the work of our small team. We went back to the original transition committee and explained the new course we were taking in response to the pepnet 2 initiative. We asked members if they wanted to continue on the larger transition committee, noting that their participation would require an increased commitment. Some people chose to withdraw and others wanted to remain. We identified some additional people to serve on the committee and, once we felt

we had a complete group, we called a meeting so everyone could become acquainted. This was a very successful meeting; members of the pepnet 2 team were grateful for the support of this larger group, and it gave us renewed enthusiasm for the work.

Getting the Work Done

The larger transition committee, very supportive of the team's desire to renovate the website and add a Spanish component, made many suggestions for improvements and strategized on how to promote this website across the state. Together, we designed materials and disseminated information statewide.

Last April as we planned for a statewide stakeholders meeting, we created a survey that was disseminated prior to the meeting in which we hoped to identify:

- barriers that had been experienced by our students;
- contributions that people had made as individuals; and
- agencies, positions, and people who were already successfully in place.

The results of the survey were used to determine the agenda for the face-to-face

meeting, which was held at the Texas School for the Deaf. After much discussion in small and large groups, priorities were identified and work groups were established to determine how to proceed. Through this process, stakeholders began to know each other and understand the role each person plays in the big picture of transition for deaf and hard of hearing students in Texas. Strategies of how the work would be done were developed and, after a full day of very focused work, everyone left hopeful and enthusiastic.

Still Ahead: Much Work, Much Hope

There is clearly a lot of work to be done in Texas. We plan to hold a follow-up meeting to review where we are in our progress and determine what to tackle next.

Some work has already been done. As a direct result of the stakeholders' meeting, a directory of key people involved in the transition planning process was developed and disseminated across the state. The website is constantly a work in progress with updates, additions of information, and revisions. The state is slowly beginning to recognize the value of some of the activities designed for deaf and hard of hearing students, which were discontinued when changes occurred a few years ago. Recent discussions about how we might bring some of the activities back have occurred, and we have even agreed to discuss some reallocation of funds. Additional projects are in progress, such as the development of training materials for educators and rehabilitation staff; the coordination of transition fairs; and several presentations at statewide conferences for

educators, rehabilitation staff, and families.

Have all of our efforts made big systemic changes within our state? No. But we have cultivated important relationships and created helpful resources. We have brought parents and professionals, who play important roles across the state, together for a shared

cause. Collaboration was strong and meaningful from the very beginning, and it promises to continue during the work ahead. As we watch deaf and hard of hearing students transition more effectively from school to the workplace or to postsecondary education or training, we know that it has been worth the commitment.

English | Español

Email

Deaf and Hard of Hearing Transition Resources for Texas

Home National Resources Technology Secondary Education Employment Legal Videos Events Calendar

Welcome to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Transition Resources website!

A place where professionals, parents, students and the community can access transition information.

CONTACT US

Parents and Students: New Transition C

There is a wealth of transition information, resources, strategies, and events provided for parents, students, and professionals. There are many resources to help students transition from high school to work, postsecondary education, and life; however, not all are applicable or accessible to students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

A variety of resources are provided via the links under the tabs at the top of the page. You are encouraged to use this site as a supplement to other valuable resources such as the Texas Transition Network, the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center, and the PEPNet websites found below:

Texas Transition Network National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center PEPNet

“Successful transition of youth from secondary school towards life goals requires full commitment and belief in his dreams by educators, family and the community at large. That belief and commitment helps to ensure a meaningful journey.”
-Theresa Johnson

DeafTEC
Technological Education Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students

Transition in Texas: Survey Specifies Needs

By Theresa Johnson and John A. Serrano

The following shows the questions and responses to a survey sent to parents, teachers, vocational rehabilitation staff, administrators, higher education professionals, community representatives, and service providers who are concerned with the transition of Texas students who are deaf or hard of hearing. The survey was sent out prior to a pepnet 2 Summit meeting held in April 2014, and it provided a basis for discussion at the meeting. Results exceeded 100 percent because respondents were invited to offer up to three responses. Only the most frequently selected responses are reflected below.

How do you positively impact the transition process?

- 63 percent through *student advocacy* (i.e., direct assistance to students, including instruction, coaching, goal setting, assistance with employment or admission to college, self-advocacy, responsibility, and independence)
- 50 percent through *parent advocacy* (i.e., direct assistance to parents and families; through training, provision of resources, and other support)
- 42 percent through *school personnel services* (i.e., direct services to educators and counselors; through training, provision of resources, and other support)
- 42 percent through *liaison services* (i.e., working with employers, colleges, and technical schools on behalf of students to facilitate access to higher education, training, and employment)

What transition strategies, resources, and/or experiences are most impactful with regard to student success?

- 42 percent *experiencing experiential learning* (i.e., from fairs, expos, and field trips to colleges and the workplace)
- 29 percent *experiencing one-on-one guidance* (i.e., from counselors, specialists who provide appropriate evaluation and transition guidance, and from those in vocational rehabilitation and the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services)
- 29 percent *gaining early work experience* (i.e., from internships and high school job experiences in order that students develop realistic expectations and gain a sense of belonging on work site)
- 29 percent *learning self-advocacy skills* (i.e., teaching students to speak up for themselves and their needs)
- 21 percent *learning job acquisition skills* (i.e., through vocational education, learning how to write resumes and interview)
- 21 percent *family support* (i.e., through parental and family involvement, advocacy, and experiences in the “independent living skills” building)

What are the most effective transition partnerships (collaborations) already in place?

- Those from the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services.

- Those from Texas School for the Deaf Programs and Grants.
- Those from the Educational Resource Center on Deafness.

What is the biggest barrier to the successful transition of students from high school to college or employment?

- 29 percent *lack of parental involvement*—Parents do not have sufficient access to information.
- 25 percent *insufficiently prepared and fearful employers*—Employers lack knowledge about deaf and hard of hearing individuals and resources for accommodation.
- 21 percent *inadequate joint efforts between resources and school*—Communication and coordination of service delivery starts too late, delivering too little.
- 17 percent *insufficient essential life skills*—Students lack skills with regard to self-advocacy, independence, self-confidence.

What do we need to do to make people more aware of available transition resources?

- 42 percent *increase school outreach*—Equip school personnel with information; improve information through meetings during the admission, review, and dismissal process and during the Individualized Education Program; focus on strategies for reaching parents without Internet access.
- 29 percent *spread the word*—Develop and implement a public relations and marketing initiative; target consistent messages via the press, television, philanthropic, and other agency sites; effectively utilize technology, including Facebook and other social media.
- 25 percent *centralize information*—Create a centralized, master resource list.
- 25 percent *provide staff development*—Develop and host transition training for special education teachers, vocational rehabilitation counselors, and other professionals involved with students’ transition. Use on-site facilities as well as webinars.

What additional transition partnerships (collaborations) should we establish?

- Build partnerships with employers.
- Strengthen collaboration between vocational rehabilitation and schools.