

# Partnering, Collaborating, and Moving Ahead:

## TRANSITION FOR DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING STUDENTS IN MINNESOTA

*By Elise Knopf and Mary Cashman-Bakken*

Minnesota leaders have worked hard to provide educational opportunities and employment services for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. The timely formation of pepnet 2 helped shape Minnesota's State Transition Team to "better prepare teachers, families, and students for transition from high school to independent living, employment, and/or postsecondary education."

Professionals from many different service agencies participated in this work, including the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) and its many school districts; the Department of Employment and Economic Development; Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS); the Commission of Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Minnesotans; and the University of Minnesota.

Each agency was working individually, but when we were provided time during a pepnet 2 Summit conference, we identified areas in which we could collaborate—and we started collaborating.

In 2008, the focus within MDE's Deaf and Hard of Hearing Advisory Committee shifted to transition, and the team looked for additional leadership from agencies such as VRS in the area of transition. In 2009, the Commission of Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Minnesotans

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*Photos courtesy of Elise Knopf, Mary Cashman-Bakken, and pepnet 2*

**HEARING LOSS ADVOCACY TEACHER RESOURCES:**

1. **Hearing Loss Competency Skills Checklist (PDF)**
2. **About My Hearing (PDF)**
3. **411 on Disability Disclosure(PDF)**

Student Experiences with Self Advocacy & Hearing Loss



Amy Vue

**MINNESOTA TRANSITION GUIDE FOR TEACHERS OF DEAF/HARD OF HEARING**

Independent Living

**Community Participation**

- \* Transportation
- \* Community Resources
- \* Citizenship



**INDEPENDENT LIVING TEACHER RESOURCES (PDF):**

1. **Independent Living Competency Skills Checklist**
2. **DHHS Resource Guide**

Journey to Independent Living



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**Above and at left:** The *Minnesota Transition Guide for Teachers of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing* includes information and resources on self-advocacy and hearing loss, employment, postsecondary education and training, independent living, a transition timeline, records to keep, and additional considerations.

successfully lobbied for passage of legislation requiring data to identify schools and regions meeting state performance standards to determine gaps and achievements. In 2013-2014, Minnesota passed “Planning for Students’ Successful Transition to Postsecondary Education and Employment; Personal Learning Plans.” This legislation requires school districts to assist all students by grade nine in exploring educational, college, and career interests, aptitudes, and aspirations and in developing a plan for successful

transition to postsecondary education and employment. With nine individual components and a mandate that general and special educators work together, the plan was a huge leap for transition services in our state and helping students move from high school to postsecondary training, university, or the workplace.

### The Teacher’s Resource Guide

We—those of us on the MDE Deaf and Hard of Hearing Advisory Committee—felt that the teachers in Minnesota could benefit from a standardized transition guide. After discussion, we launched an extensive literature review of existing guides. We looked at a variety of materials and settled on the format of a checklist; we believed a checklist would be most beneficial for busy itinerant teachers who have to serve students from birth through age 21.

We also wanted everything to be in one place so teachers would have an easier time finding what they needed. Workgroups focused on writing with teachers of deaf and hard of hearing students and representatives from agencies such as VRS were held for a year. The biggest struggle was making sure the document was accessible for people in large print. In 2012, we were able to issue the *Minnesota Transition Guide for Teachers of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing* as a pilot.

Teachers of deaf and hard of hearing students used the guide and provided written feedback. The MDE Deaf and Hard of Hearing Advisory Committee reviewed and incorporated the feedback, revising the document before distribution. Team members worked with teachers at the district, regional, and state levels, helping them to implement the guide into their work. Near the end of the writing of the final document, the team composition changed. Instead of mostly educators, a

variety of professionals from pepnet 2 and representatives of diverse communities and agencies became involved. Together we expanded the guide to include companion webinars with continuing education credits. The team strengthened its ties with the University of Minnesota, and the university’s website became the platform where the guide and accompanying webinars would be posted. Some of the webinars include student stories, which are powerful and show the level of commitment of all the involved professionals in our students’ success.

At the 2013 Summit, the team presented the pilot guide to participants from 25 states. The response was overwhelming and positive, with educators from many states requesting the



**Above:** Minnesota Transition Team: (back row, left to right) Elise Knopf from VRS, Mary Cashman-Bakken from MDE, and Cheryl DeConde Johnson (pepnet 2 champion); (front row, left to right): Jay Fehrman and Greta Palmberg from the independent school districts, and Anna Paulson from the Commission Serving Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Minnesotans.

link. The group realized it had something important on its hands and agreed to go back to Minnesota and continue its work to expand the guide.

### Reaching Out Goals of the Transition Team

At the Summit, the Minnesota Transition Team—Mary Cashman-Bakken from MDE; Dr. Sue Rose from the University of Minnesota; Greta Palmberg and Jay Fehrman, each from a Minnesota school district; and Elise Knopf from VRS—established three goals. We discussed the projects we were

working on and agreed to move ahead with our work. While agreement was almost immediate, it did require thought and discussion as we respected the individuals and agencies involved. The goals we formed were:

1. *We would train teachers.* We wanted teachers to be able to use the guide more effectively. We also wanted information about transition to be given to students directly through their teachers.
2. *We would reach out to parents.* We wanted to make sure parents and families were aware of the importance of transition and the structures and agencies that are available to help their children.
3. *We would work on assembling and understanding data.* MDE conducts statewide assessments on all students beginning in third grade, showing how deaf and hard of hearing students compare in reading and math to their peers who are hearing and their peers who have other disabilities. MDE reports general demographic data as well, including numbers, gender, race, and postsecondary outcomes for each child.

## Reaching Out Pursuing Goals

To reach out to teachers, we began a series of webinars. To reach out to parents, we headed to Mankato, Minnesota, to do the first of what we hoped would be a series of intimate conversations with parents and families of deaf and hard of hearing students about transition.

MDE presented at a regional parent meeting designed by teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing. The individuals involved in organizing the event worked all year to get donations and support. Families were invited to a kick-off event; the following day, a variety of age-appropriate activities, staffed by teachers, occurred. The parents were expected to participate in carefully designed workshops to increase their understanding of transition planning.

We talked to about 30 parents—and we were surprised to find that some career expectations for their children were so low. In fact, some parents stated that they expected their children to become janitors or dishwashers. The team stressed understanding the importance of having access to quality education and parents being diligent at home about checking their child's comprehension of the world around them. The *Transition Skills Guidelines*, developed by the Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center at Gallaudet University, was distributed, and many parents were surprised at how much was expected of them.

We shared that the *Minnesota Transition Guide* was being developed and explained where to look for the site once it was completed. Several parents remarked that they appreciated this information and changes would be made in their homes. The team divided parents into groups by the ages of their children,

discussed appropriate transition activities, and answered questions. A deaf individual presented, and parents had many questions for the deaf presenter about how she grew up (e.g., her struggles and joys); several parents remain in contact with the speaker today. Partly as a result of our meeting, parents developed their own independent support group and they continue to meet independently.

We also pursued our goal of looking more closely at data. The MDE's transition specialist assisted us in understanding the ramifications of the Post-Secondary Outcome Survey for Minnesota. For example, it took us time to realize that data for what is known as Indicator 14 in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is not really helpful to us due to its small sample size. In fact, the state asks only one-fifth of the districts in any given year to survey students who graduated and determine if those former students are working part time, full time, or continuing their education. For students who are deaf or hard of hearing—and for other students whose status is classified as “low incidence”—the numbers are too small to be able to generalize or make inferences for the rest of the population.

MDE asked VRS to share its data on transition-aged students, and we realized that these two agencies aggregate data differently. While VRS data covered students who were 16 to 24 years old, MDE data covered students who were 14 to 21 years old. Further, differences in terminology and categories needed to be clarified.

Using VR data, both VRS and MDE noted a geographical area in which only a few students were receiving VR services. The result was an educational workshop held by both MDE and VRS for teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing and VR counselors. The goal of the workshop: to establish communications and build relationships. The data showed which school districts had students identified as deaf or hard of hearing and allowed us to connect professionals from classrooms, schools, and the VR office and encourage them to dialogue about service needs for our students.

## A Newly Designed Survey The Work Continues

The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 was conducted beginning in 2000 and completed in 2009 for all students with disabilities. Pepnet 2 did a secondary analysis on students with hearing loss, and results showed that students with hearing loss had more chance for success if parents had high expectations for education and had postsecondary experience themselves. That was vital for us, and we wanted to see where Minnesota stood, but there was no research. We would have to do it ourselves.

We began in the summer of 2015. After working together to produce the guide, we found ourselves working on a different level; we had earned each other's trust, relationships had developed, and communication flowed. We applied for and were awarded “state exemplar status” from pepnet 2 to receive



### FOR MORE INFORMATION

The following websites provide more information about transition in Minnesota.

**Minnesota’s early transition mandates—**  
[www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=125A.63](http://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=125A.63)

**Minnesota’s more recent legislation, marking a “huge leap” for transition training—**  
<https://revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=120B.125>

**The National Longitudinal Transition Survey-2 (2000-2009)—**[www.nlts2.org/fact\\_sheets/nlts2\\_fact\\_sheet\\_2011\\_02.pdf](http://www.nlts2.org/fact_sheets/nlts2_fact_sheet_2011_02.pdf)

**Pepnet 2’s secondary analysis of NLTS2 and parental expectations—**[www.pepnet.org/resources/effects-parent-expectations-and-parent-involvement-postschool-outcomes-individuals-who-are](http://www.pepnet.org/resources/effects-parent-expectations-and-parent-involvement-postschool-outcomes-individuals-who-are)

**Minnesota Transition Guide for Teachers of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing—**[www.cebd.umn.edu/DHH-Resources/Transition-Guide/default.html](http://www.cebd.umn.edu/DHH-Resources/Transition-Guide/default.html)

**Transition Skills Guidelines—**This document has been posted on various websites on the Internet. It may be downloaded free from the Clerc Center’s website at <http://clerccenter2.gallaudet.edu/products/?id=216>.

technical assistance with data collection. Technical assistance was provided to redesign an existing MDE transition survey for a pilot survey of the deaf and hard of hearing population.

This survey is now underway. A back-to-school letter from MDE informed teachers of deaf and hard of hearing students about the survey in the fall of 2015. The Minnesota Transition Team attended the pepnet 2 Summit in Atlanta in February 2016, and dissemination of the survey began in March. Results of the survey will be collected in May and included in the 2016 *MDE Legislative Report* in June.

Working together has led to deeper relationships, a greater understanding of our respective agency goals, better communication, and finding common ties. The Minnesota Transition Team still has much to do. We are determined to find the best ways to assist deaf and hard of hearing students in their transition from high school to independent living, employment, and/or postsecondary education. We are grateful for the assistance of pepnet 2 in being able to do that with increasing effectiveness, and we are grateful for each other. None of us could have accomplished this alone.

