

Research Summarized! Developing Collaborative and Integrated Systems

Many of the current structures of services for deaf* individuals operate in silos and often lack coordination, which indicates an immediate need for systemic change. Disparate data systems and administrative structures make it difficult to coordinate a timely, effective transition support process. Through the development and implementation of the Results-Driven Accountability framework, the Office of Special Education Programs has positioned itself to support states in driving systems changes that lead to improved outcomes for students with disabilities.²

What can be learned from the existing literature on developing collaborative and integrated systems to improve postsecondary outcomes for deaf individuals?

INTEGRATED DATA SYSTEMS

Disparate education data systems make it challenging to conduct longitudinal analyses that could be used to identify areas of need in educational and employment programs and practices.⁴

Data systems are considered “connected” if the state either has a central data warehouse that contains data from multiple agencies or creates temporary links between data systems. Connections or links can be made through common variables such as student identification number, which often stays consistent throughout a student’s years in the state education system.

Barriers to connecting early-learning, K–12, postsecondary, and workforce data systems include data privacy concerns and political and financial hurdles.

Thirty-seven states and Washington, D.C., currently connect data between at least two of the four core systems (i.e., early learning, K-12, postsecondary, workforce).⁶

States with connected data systems can use data to inform legislation and drive decision-making on education policies and practices.⁷

*In this report, we use the term *deaf* in an all-encompassing manner to include individuals who identify as Deaf, hard of hearing, hearing impaired, late deafened, and deafdisabled.

CHALLENGES TO TRACKING DATA OF DEAF INDIVIDUALS

The deaf population is considered low incidence, and the methods used to collect a complete count of deaf students have been criticized as being biased or inadequate, resulting in inaccurate results.⁵

At the secondary level, students are eligible for services through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) only if their disability negatively affects educational performance. Because deafness does not negatively affect performance for all deaf students, IDEA data alone do not accurately capture education data for this population.

Educational data systems vary in how they house deaf students' data. When a student's home district makes a referral to a school for the deaf, the student's data sometimes are sent back to the home district and other times remain at the school for the deaf. This variation in data management presents a challenge in understanding how educational settings and practices affect achievement.

At the postsecondary level, the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990 requires students to notify their institution's disability office of their disability to request accommodations.³ Many deaf students choose not to disclose their disability,¹ leading to an inability to accurately track postsecondary education data of deaf individuals.

Vocational rehabilitation data do not represent a complete picture of employment data for deaf individuals because only individuals whose disability presents "a substantial barrier to employment" are eligible for vocational rehabilitation services.

COLLABORATIVE ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES

Collaborative structures will be needed to fulfill the new transition services requirements under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

Collaboration between agencies is a predictor of positive postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities.⁹

Special education and vocational rehabilitation collaboration is limited possibly due to a lack of understanding of each other's practices and systems, differences in philosophy, professional biases, and limited collaboration skills in educators and counselors.⁸

Transition teachers and vocational rehabilitation counselors identify joint training as a practice that can improve collaboration.⁸

Models for cross-state collaboration include professional learning communities that allow states to identify issues and opportunities and work together toward common goals while providing feedback and support.¹⁰

Even though deaf individuals are a low-incidence population, they are not evenly distributed throughout geographic areas. Historical factors including current or previous locations of schools for the deaf, a strong network of services, and accessible work environments lead to clusters of high-density populations of deaf individuals and a need for administrative structures that allow for dissemination of information and practices from the clusters to more remote areas.

TAKE-AWAYS

The systems that support deaf individuals currently reside within K–12 education, postsecondary education, and rehabilitative services. Some state agencies have knowledge and awareness of effective programs and policies to improve education and employment outcomes for deaf individuals, but others may not. Improved collaboration and positive working relationships between systems—within institutions, communities, and states—are critical for deaf individuals’ postsecondary attainment.

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