Engage for Change | local

a conversation in Milwaukee, WI

October 3, 2017

NDC
National Deaf Center
on Postsecondary Outcomes

Overview of the National Deaf Center

The National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes (NDC) is a federally funded project that works toward systemic change to increase the quality of services and access to meaningful postsecondary opportunities for all deaf individuals. Meaningful postsecondary experiences contribute greatly to deaf individuals' quality of life. However, deaf individuals face a number of misconceptions and challenges that impede their ability to use their skills and talents in postsecondary settings and beyond.

Purpose of **Engage for Change** | local

For change to be effective, a broad range of stakeholders must be involved in the process. Yet it can be challenging to bridge the gaps between individuals, the community, institutions, and policymakers. NDC is committed to bringing together all parties to create a successful model of how community involvement leads to improved postsecondary outcomes for all deaf individuals.

Conversations led by members of the community explore challenges and solutions on the local level. Discussion questions focus on brainstorming solutions to local-level challenges that community members can implement to strengthen postsecondary opportunities for deaf individuals in their community.

What's Next?

This report summarizes key solutions and strategies that emerged from the discussions during the event, and it is intended to provide guidance for the Milwaukee community to address important challenges. The report concludes with a list of action items for community members to consider as they connect with their networks to continue this important work.

NDC uses the term *deaf* in an all-encompassing manner to include individuals who identify as Deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing, hearing impaired, late deafened, and deafdisabled.

NDC is offering a platform for continued work on Canvas if the Milwaukee community chooses to take that route. Consider forming work groups to implement the strategies proposed at the event, on Canvas or elsewhere.

COMMUNITY

- Increase accessible opportunities for deaf youth to engage with a variety of life experiences outside of home and school.
- Increase opportunities for deaf youth to connect with peers at summer camps.
- Proactively reach out to schools, programs, and event organizers to increase accessibility for deaf individuals.
- Provide anti-bias training to deaf and hearing youth to improve community relations.
- Increase opportunities for deaf youth to connect with deaf role models in rural areas, small mainstream programs, and low-income neighborhoods.

STUDENT SUPPORT

- Support students' soft-skill development, covering items such as interviewing and self-advocacy.
- Engage students earlier in planning for the future, addressing the range of postsecondary options and strategies for accessing services after high school.
- Provide deaf individuals with comprehensive training about accommodations and rights.
- Develop cohort support mechanisms for deaf students in local technical colleges.
- Increase access to a more diverse pool of deaf mentors so that youth can be matched with mentors based on their shared identities and experiences.
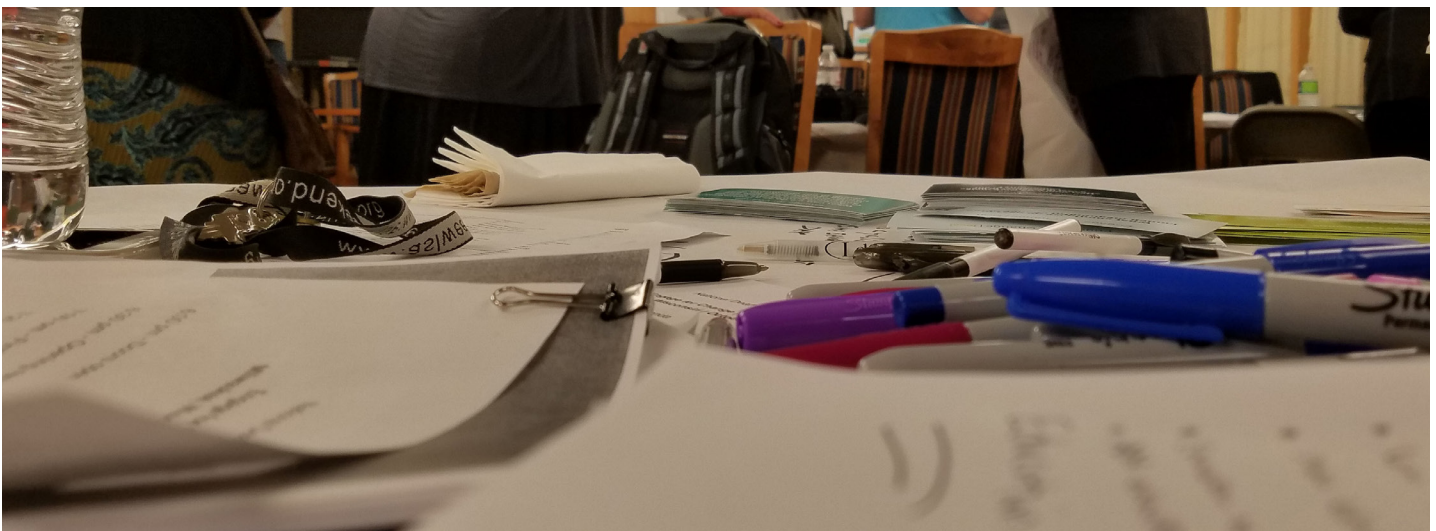
TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Ensure that professional development addresses intersectionality within the deaf population with an anti-bias perspective and strengthens cultural sensitivity.
- Push for more comprehensive training that covers deaf culture in greater depth than a single class or a short stand-alone training.
- Provide American Sign Language classes to the public to increase access across a range of settings.
- Develop training for parents that focuses on (a) strategies to support socioemotional development for deaf youth and (b) how to advocate for access for their deaf child.

COLLABORATION AND RESOURCE SHARING

- Strengthen networking and centralized resource sharing across organizations.
- Collaborate with potential internship sites to increase employability of deaf youth.
- Establish a collaborative or task force to improve relationships between organizations, service agencies, and deaf individuals.
- Collect data to support decision-making about the following:
  - Deaf professionals' employment challenges and successes
  - Vocational rehabilitation outcomes for deaf individuals
  - Benefits of designated interpreters for deaf students and employees

LEGISLATION AND POLICY CHANGE

- Increase legislative support by advocating for public officials who are genuinely interested in funding schools and learning more about deaf students' needs.
- Encourage qualified deaf candidates to become legislators and serve on boards and committees to improve services and programs for deaf individuals.
- Host statewide meetings, in a similar manner to Engage for Change, where hearing professionals and politicians can learn about deaf students and employees' concerns.
- Collaborate with legislators and policymakers to improve continuity of care by extending intervention support to children beyond 5 years old, reviewing the Rehabilitation Act, increasing the presence of deaf professionals in transition, and revisiting out-of-state school policies.
- Advocate for greater continuity of care when direct communication, or readily available accommodations, are available to deaf individuals in that service-provision setting.
- Advocate for signing fluency for professionals working with deaf individuals.
- Review qualifying exam criteria (e.g., Praxis, school psychology exams) to be more culturally inclusive of signing deaf students and bilingual education.
- Strengthen qualification standards for deaf education teachers.

Comments From Community Members Who Attended the Event

"...hoping for changes in the community."

"...very interested in brainstorming and problem-solving what individuals who are deaf need to succeed in a postsecondary setting."

"There was a nice cross-section of people present—school personnel, parents, students, adults, a legislator, an audiologist, interpreters, and nonprofit agencies."

"There was a very good turnout."

Resources

NDC: www.nationaldeafcenter.org

NDC Listerv: https://utlists.utexas.edu/sympa/info/nationaldeafcenter

NDC Help Desk: help@nationaldeafcenter.org

Office of Special Education Programs: www2.ed.gov

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