

Pivoting in a Pandemic

An Urgent Response to Deaf Students in Crisis

A NATIONAL DEAF CENTER IMPACT REPORT



NDC
National Deaf Center
on Postsecondary Outcomes

Hard times require **hard pivots.**

In early March 2020, the world came to a screeching halt.

At the National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes (NDC), we sped up.

We immediately realized that we needed to address urgent and **unforeseen issues of accessibility, safety, and equity** for deaf people.

NDC is known for evidence-based strategies, deaf-centered resources, and innovative outreach. Could we **pivot** to do it faster than ever? Could we be a base of stability and consistency in the midst of chaos? Could we address short-term fixes and long-term strategies?

The answer: **Yes.**

In the first six months of the COVID-19 pandemic, we showed our stakeholders the best of who we are. And now is a good time to pause and consider our impact.

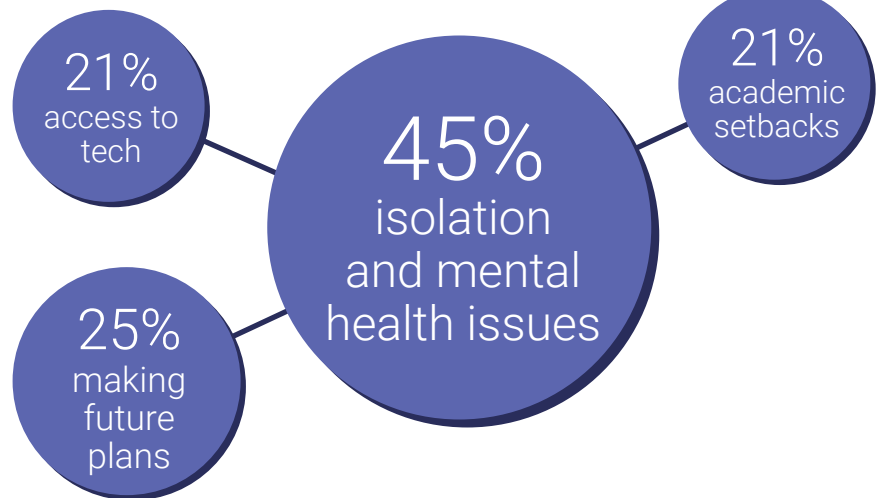
COVID-19 crisis hits.

Pivot: Understand its impact and switch to **rapid remote response**.

Our stakeholders told us repeatedly: **The pandemic is taking a unique toll on deaf students, their families, and the people who educate and serve them.**

In our Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Panel Survey, **isolation and mental health issues** ranked highest for the pandemic's impact on deaf youth, followed by uncertainty and inability to plan for the future, lack of technology and online access, and academic setbacks.

Greatest Impact on Deaf Youth



74% of deaf college students consider **online learning more difficult** than traditional learning.



In response to pandemic-related concerns, **technical assistance requests** from March to June 2020 **skyrocketed** nearly 2 and a half times over the same period in 2019.

+242%



Yet **deaf gain is also on the rise.** The pandemic is spotlighting the strengths of deaf communities to build on their ability to be adaptable and think creatively.



Within three days of our physical office closing March 9, we published our first pandemic-related—and still one of our most popular—tipsheets, *Remember Accessibility in the Rush to Online Instruction: 10 Tips for Educators*.

Within seven days, we debuted our **COVID-19 Information Hub**, a one-stop shop on our website with customized content and updates for every stakeholder.

Reaching **9,269** pageviews (and counting), the Hub has been linked by:

- AMPHL
- Council for Exceptional Children
- Communication Service for the Deaf
- Convo Communications (Convo Relay)
- Hands & Voices
- National Association of the Deaf
- National Black Deaf Advocates
- NCSI
- NTID/RIT DeafTEC
- WINTAC

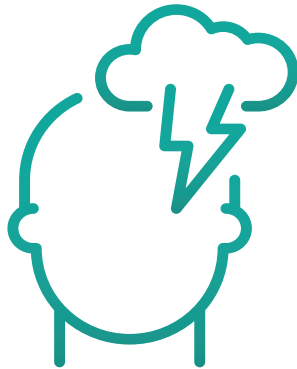
“Every time I open materials you share I’m so impressed with the work of NDC.”
— *Randi Turner, Accessibility and Disability Rights Coordinator, Office of the Texas Governor*

Strengthen state connections.

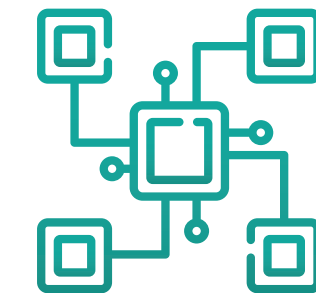
Pivot: *Convene Engage for Change | state leadership online with ongoing regional meetings.*

45 state leaders from 25 states connected and collaborated with NDC and each other, determined to provide vital transition services for deaf youth during the pandemic. **Their top concerns are below.**

Mental health issues are significantly increasing.



Families are moving to the forefront of transition planning.



Technology and access are huge barriers.

“We appreciate NDC’s **pivot** to assisting with critical information during this crisis.”

— *Ohio Engage for Change | state leads*

Supercharge communications.

Pivot: Streamline well-established digital dissemination methods to make content easier to access.

We leveraged our active website. It started with establishing the COVID-19 Information Hub and extended to creating a new FAQ database, using our newsfeed for quick tips, and updating resource landing pages.



+82.5%
FAQ Pageviews



+154.85%
Resource Page Visits



+121.35%
Resource Downloads



31
Newsfeed Posts

Email was a critical contact point. We set aside our monthly email newsletter because it was too little, too late. Instead, we sent weekly emails to announce new tips, events, or toolkits. Listserv emails focused on pandemic-related FAQs. We shared standalone messages of hope and resilience from our director, with higher-than-average open rates and grateful responses of “Appreciate the encouragement!”



29K+
Subscribers



+194.94%
New Email Signups

Social media got the word out fast.



+93.43%
Facebook Followers

“I greatly appreciate the excellent resources NDC has been sharing on a daily basis via social media outlets to help the DSO professionals better support our students.”

— Jason Altmann, Director,
Access and Disability Services,
William Rainey Harper College

“Kudos to NDC. They have been sending out great information and resources throughout the whole transition period due to COVID-19.”

— Jamie Axelrod,
Director of Disability Resources,
Northern Arizona University;
Past President, AHEAD

Focus on stakeholder needs.

Pivot: *Fast-track COVID-19 content to address urgent issues in streamlined formats.*

We published **12 new COVID-19 resources** and detailed weekly FAQs—many with **American Sign Language (ASL) and Spanish translations** for students and families.

Timely Topics

- Communicating With a Face Mask
- Fall 2020 Back-to-School Guides
- How to Host Accessible Meetings Online

For Teachers and Instructors

- Tips for Instructors: Teaching Deaf Students Online
- Checklist for Teaching Deaf Students Online
- Deafverse Can Help Deaf Teens Connect and Learn From Home

For Students and Families

- Take Control of Your Online Learning: Tips for Deaf College Students
- Using Hearing Assistive Devices at Home: 5 Tips for Deaf College Students
- Strategies for Parenting Deaf Teenagers During COVID-19

For Professionals

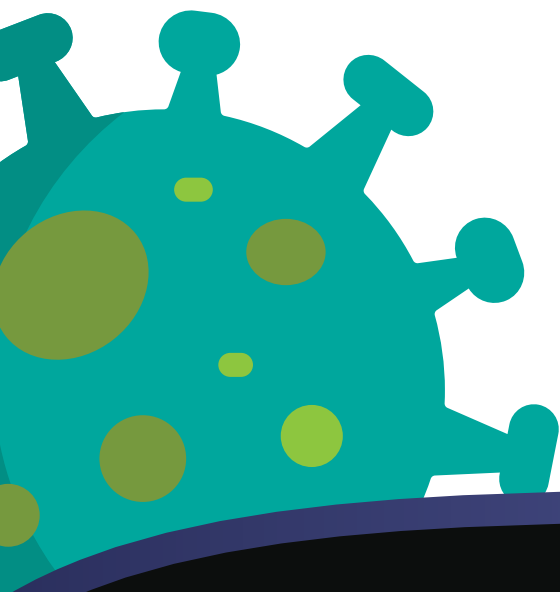
- 5 Tips for Disability Service Professionals to Provide Accessibility in Online Classes
- 8 Essential Resources for VR Success With Deaf Youth During COVID-19
- Professional Development Checklist: Six Ways to Improve Your Skills From Home

NDC is a “wealth of very useful ‘use-right-now’ information.”

— *Online stakeholder*

“Thank you so much for providing invaluable guidance in creating an accessible digital environment for deaf students. NDC is consistently, and now more than ever, an amazing resource to me.”

— *Nadaya Cross,
Deaf/HH Services Coordinator,
Texas Woman’s University*



Gather stakeholders online.

Pivot: *With in-person events canceled, **organize online events** to foster connection, identify needs, and disseminate resources.*

1,647 people registered for eight live panels. The need is clear.

Deaf at Work Panels

87% of deaf professionals working from home need some or a lot of changes in accommodations.

57% of deaf essential or frontline workers are worried about losing their job if they don't keep working onsite.

Deaf College Student Panels

60% of deaf college students report being tired or anxious.

These students also report being denied ASL interpreters, needing expanded tutoring services, and craving social connection with deaf peers.

VR Panels

62% of VR professionals report technology issues at their agencies.

34% of VR professionals experienced budget cuts or freezes.

Inspiration: State leaders from Wyoming are organizing a transition event online with insights they gained from a VR panelist from Washington.

Disability Services Professionals Panels

46% of disability services professionals are concerned about faculty members or instructors captioning their own media.

"We should not have to feel like a burden."

— Deaf student panelist
at live online event

"I am a professor with some deaf students in class every year, so I'm not a newbie, and I really benefited from all the information and experiences all the speakers provided. You are doing a huge service to everyone by sharing and role modeling best practices."

— Stephanie Schwartz,
El Camino College

Amplify our reach.

Pivot: Respond to the public's need to know how the pandemic affects students, families, and educators.

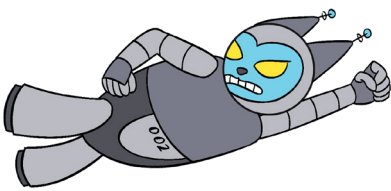
National media contacted us with questions about access in online classrooms, equity in education, face masks on campus, and more.



Maintain momentum.

Pivot: While prioritizing pandemic-oriented resources, continue to meet deliverable deadlines for ongoing projects.

We celebrated commencement with special messaging, debuted a timely new #DeafSuccess video focused on mental health, launched a Self-Determination Inventory in collaboration with the University of Kansas, and expressed our solidarity in the fight against racism and oppression.



769

New Deafverse Players
(March–April 2020)



+35.2%

Online Course Completions
(Effective Communication and Test Equity)

Our online learning library expanded with three new courses:

- Instructional Strategies for Deaf Student Success
- Developing Accessible Work-Based Learning Programs
- Designing Summer Programs for Deaf Youth

“Lots of excellent recommendations packed in a short time commitment and the videos add lived experiences from deaf student perspective.”

– Irene Stewart, St. Clair College,
on *Instructional Strategies for Deaf Student Success*

For deaf people, by deaf people.

It takes an entire team to make this kind of impact. Our team includes more than 30 staff members, contractors, and interpreters working from home across four time zones, exceeding stakeholder expectations while managing the pandemic in our own lives. Some monthly meetings have become weekly. Leadership has adjusted roles, formed new teams, and broken down silos. Zoom and Slack use is on overdrive, yet our spirits stay strong.

This is what we know for sure.

- These **pivots** are now our standard operating procedures, and we're now positioned to have even greater impact.
- Access is more than accommodations—now more than ever.
- We will continue to monitor the most pressing issues and respond quickly to ensure that all deaf youth thrive and succeed through this—and any—hardship.
- People first. Always first.

Toward greater #DeafSuccess,



Stephanie W. Cawthon, PhD
Director



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on Postsecondary Outcomes

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