
**MAINE EDUCATIONAL CENTER FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING
THE GOVERNOR BAXTER SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF**

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

MONTHLY REPORT TO THE SCHOOL BOARD

TO: THE SCHOOL BOARD
FROM: DAVID SHERRY
SUBJECT: MONTHLY REPORT – JANUARY, 2015

Academic Department

Believe it or not, 2015 is quickly coming to a close and, at this time of year, it is good to take stock of some of the accomplishments thus far in the school year and also look ahead to upcoming events.

Academic Department staff members have been working very hard to meet the needs of our students, improve teaching and support skills and learn how to work together in new teams. It is very satisfying to see the focused work of our staff as the operations of a school require a great deal of collective effort to provide meaningful learning experiences each day.

We have successfully completed 8 hours of SafetyCare training with the help of our own “trainers,” Jenn McCann and Shana Kelley-Cohen. This training will assist everyone to more effectively and proactively plan interventions and strategies to support student self-management and controls to enable more attention to learning activities. The additional training periods will be scheduled for January.

Teachers have been developing units of study and lessons that are better targeted to learning standards such as the Common Core and individual student learning needs. Additionally, working with E-Backpack to assist with data storage and resource organization has continued this fall and will progress throughout the year as we learn how to fully utilize its capabilities.

It is also worth noting that the Academic Department and the school as a whole is looking more closely at how we can improve our instruction of ASL in a more systematic fashion. This is a challenge for many schools for students who are deaf or hard of hearing and we are optimistic that we will be better able to provide this language instruction and assess student skills and achievement more accurately. Nationally, work is in progress to develop a comprehensive curriculum and assessment system that can be universally accessed and implemented. Our ASL committee, recently formed, will be exploring how we can deliver more effective ASL instruction and also provide instruction in self-advocacy skills.

At our LMMS program, we are excited to be able to access an online math program

known as ALEKS that provides support and supplemental math practice for students needing an extra boost.

The Islanders basketball team has been practicing hard in preparation for upcoming games. On December 19th and 20th the team travels to the American School for the Deaf (ASD) in West Hartford, CT for the annual Tip-Off Tournament which provides a rich social experience as well as great competition. In January, the team will be playing the Rhode Island School for the Deaf here at GBSD followed by away games on the 14th vs. ASD and on the 21st of January the team will travel to the Horace Mann School for the Deaf in Massachusetts. Best of luck to everyone and many thanks to our coach Matt Welch and assistant coach Mark Grant.

The K-3 program has been very busy here at GBSD with a number of units of study that have been very exciting for our students and in some cases led to very interesting field trips that enhance these learning experiences. Trips to apple orchards, PumpkinLand, the Post Office, and other locales have helped connect learning in the classroom with the greater community.

Our partnership with the Museum of American Art in Ogunquit continues to be strengthened with art activities as well as a field trip to investigate the work of artists studied in class. We are in the process of planning an Art Show in February which will be very exciting so stay tuned for announcements for dates and other details.

The Academic Department also welcomes Nicholas Duval and Mary Sloan to our staff at LMMS and PHS. Both Nick and Mary have served as substitute teachers and now are getting acclimated to more consistent schedules.

Finally, we wish everyone a safe and enjoyable holiday season and thank the entire staff of MECDHH for making good things happen!

From Our Portland Programs

Two very exciting updates: we are now in compliance with ADA for lockdowns at Lyman Moore and Portland High. We have pagers for all Deaf staff at both schools. We have been working diligently with our Tech Support Rich Foisy and Portland to integrate the systems(pagers) we have used on island with Portland's school messenger system to alert our Deaf staff in the event of a lockdown. This will replace Deaf staff being dependent on the intercom or the phone system used in the past.

Second, we have met with IT support at Portland to integrate ASL interpreter requests into the ticket system used at Portland Schools. The ticket system is used to request computer needs or multicultural interpreter requests. We will be adding ASL to the request section so teachers in our public schools can request ASL interpreters in the same way they are familiar with requesting spoken language interpreters. This should be available after the holidays.

Business Operations

Bridge Update

As you are aware, the bridge on the causeway has been posted at a 10 ton weight limit. This has caused us to do some creative maneuvering for deliveries of products

such as oil and food, plus a different solution was achieved for trash removal. Although this has caused more work for the operations staff, they have handled it very well and continue to have things on island running smoothly. Thank you Operations Staff for all your extra efforts regarding the bridge constraints! There are still many details to be worked out once a vendor is chosen to complete the work. Another meeting will be held in mid-January with the State of Maine from which we will have more information to share that will probably answer many questions. Thank you for your understanding and cooperation as we go through this process.

Maintenance/Custodial Update

Maintenance is working with Mechanical Services to upgrade our heating and electrical systems. Other tasks include: keeping the roads free of ice and snow, clearing downed branches, working with oil deliveries and trash removal. Custodians are keeping buildings clean, sanding and shoveling walkways, setting up for various events, conducting inventory control of cleaning supplies and upgrading our SDS sheet. Transportation is providing safe transport for students to and from school for extracurricular activities.

Public School Outreach

Public School Outreach and Community Programs

PSO has 160+ requests for services from districts all over the state of Maine. This year we are being asked to support many students with dual sensory and multiple needs, most of which have significant communication needs. We are finding that, as Teachers of the Deaf, we view all students through a communication lens. The National Joint Committee for the Communication Needs of Persons With Severe Disabilities issued the “Communication Bill of Rights”. We found it to be very sensitive and clear about the communication rights of these students. It can be found at www.asha.org/uploadedFiles/NJC-Communication-Bill-Rights.pdf . You may find it very interesting! Thanks Donna for sharing!

Also this year Linda Koehler has been working with a cluster of students in the Bangor region who are using ASL. On December 11th she held the first meeting of the “Flying Finger’s Club”. Once per month these students will come together at a centralized location to enjoy meeting new friends and share some time in an environment where everyone speaks their language. They will be enjoying activities where they can demonstrate creativity in their beautiful visual language, read stories and engage in open communication without the support of an interpreter. We will let you know how it works out!

Kids Like Me Update

The **Kids Like Me** 6th -12th grade overnight program is heading north for the winter session. On February 6-7, 2015 students from southern Maine will be meeting at MECDHH and driving to Bangor to join students from the north/north-central areas of Maine. Our staff had been working hard to find a location in the Bangor area that would allow us to “take over” their sight for the night with up to 25 teenagers. Thanks to the generosity of Unitarian Universalist Society of Bangor this will become a reality. Northern Maine students will be so happy when they find out we have cut off 2 hours from their commute! More details of the program will be coming out soon.

Webinar Update

Our last webinar entitled, ***Can you hear me now? An “Ears-On” Demonstration of FM System Use and Misuse*** which aired on November 17th was viewed by over 40 people all over the state. There were even a few folks from outside of Maine. The evaluations were excellent!

Mindy Myers and Pam Doig were on the agenda to continue with ECFS’s communication options series on December 16th. This was our first webinar totally in ASL with voice and CART access options available for people not skilled in reading ASL.

During ***“A Continuum of Communication: American Sign Language”*** participants will be provided with information related to American Sign Language (ASL). Answers to questions related to: what ASL is, what is needed for effective outcomes using ASL, who uses this type of communication and what are some of the best ways to support children and families choosing this type of communication.

About the Presenters

Melinda Smith Meyers received her Bachelor of Social Work from Gallaudet University, Washington, D.C. Melinda worked as home-based developmental therapist and ASL family trainer under Child Development Services for 15 years and family case-manager for Maine DHHS and Community Counseling Center for 6 years. She currently works as an ASL Family Trainer and Deaf Mentor under Early Childhood and Family Services at MECDDH. She has recently received Parent Advisor and Deaf Mentor certification from the SKI-HI Institute of Utah State University.

Pamela Doig received her Master's degree in Deaf Education and Early Childhood Education and a Graduate Certificate in Deaf and Hard of Hearing Infants, Toddlers and Families from Gallaudet University. Pam was introduced to the Deaf community 9 years ago when she took her first course in American Sign Language. When she began her teaching career she discovered her passion for working with families. She then worked as a Home Visitor for Early Head Start. Pam is excited to have recently joined the team of Early Childhood and Family Services Consultants at MECDDH.

Who Should Attend?

The target audience for this webinar includes: parents, families, caregivers, Child Development Services (CDS) staff, early interventionists, audiologists, pediatricians, speech-language pathologists, Deaf mentors, ASL family trainers, teachers and anyone else working with families or caregivers of a child who is deaf or hard of hearing.

Early Childhood Programs

Early Childhood Team /ECFS

ECFS is working with the Part C (0-2) teams in Maine to increase access to accurate information about infants and toddlers throughout the state of Maine who are deaf and hard of hearing. This includes improving our communication exploration process and getting feedback from various stakeholders (parents, Deaf adults, professionals) to

ensure that the information we share with families is well received and consistent statewide.

ECFS is also working with the new Guide By Your Side program to connect parents with other parents who have children who are deaf or hard of hearing for information and support. The next step to this program is to add the Deaf/hard of hearing Guide program. We are excited about this addition and continue to look at ways to include all perspectives to our work.

Preschool

Since our last sharing, we have been busy working on Progress Reports for the end of the first quarter. With this, teachers and therapists completed baseline data collection for each child in the program to add to E-Backpack.

We have had 4 annual IEP meetings in the last month and plan on two more before the end of the year. This has been cause for multiple levels of collaboration between team members, families and CDS staff. Home visits continue from which we have received positive feedback from families and teachers. Because the O.W.L curriculum does not provide enough units for the whole year, the team has been developing curriculum plans based on the components of O.W.L. Beginning in January, we will be starting Unit 3 in O.W.L. again. Unit 3 "Wind and Water" will run for 4 weeks.

Karen Hopkins participated in a Part B (for ages 3-5) steering committee with Child Development Services and various early childhood professionals from around the state to look at the program approval process for CDS in Maine. We are looking at improving this process to ensure that children have strong early childhood programs to participate in!

Administrative Updates

A lot has been happening over the last month for all of us. This tends to be quite a busy time of year. It always amazes me to see how hard everyone continues to work. This organization has sustained many changes over the past several years. Change is challenging for most of us. What I see is a staff that continues to adjust and adapt to meet an ever-changing student population. Our resources are tight and our workload large. You, however, continue to stay focused on the needs of our students and what is best for each of them educationally, developmentally and socially/emotionally. Thank you!

Recently, Angie Bruno and I met with Jan Breton, State Director of Special Services and three Directors of Special Services (two from Hancock County and one from Oxford County). Our meeting goal was to identify the county or counties that would be targeted for regionally-based itinerant, Teacher of the Deaf services. What this means is that we would employ a Teacher of the Deaf and a half-time Speech/Language Pathologist who will be based, solely, in one county. Working with the Directors of Special Services in that county, we will design a program that will prioritize and meet the needs of students. After a review of the data and associated student numbers and needs, it was determined that we would work with the

Department of Education to provide regionally-based itinerant services in both Hancock and Oxford Counties. D.O.E. will increase our budget to include the two Teacher of the Deaf positions and two half-time speech therapists needed to staff these “programs”. The programs will be part of the Public School Outreach Department and overseen by Angie Bruno. This is a very exciting first step toward increasing our statewide presence!

I want to congratulate our Academic Bowl Team, Courtney Camire, Taylor Gagnon and Emma Foster (one of our Public School Outreach students) and their Coach, Lenore Boerner and Assistant Coach, Shannon Winter for their excellent success at the Regional Academic Bowl competition at Rome School for the Deaf over the weekend. Our team took second place within competition group and 4th place overall. This guaranteed them a spot in the National Academic Bowl Competition at Gallaudet University this coming spring! This shows hard work and great skill on the part of our students and staff!

This is a very busy time of year both professionally and personally for most of us. It’s important that you maintain a strong awareness of what is “driving” you each day; is it getting through the “to do” list? Is it getting through the day? Or, is it doing the best you can each moment and in each situation to bring your best self “to the table”? I see how hard you all work and it is important that you pause, at least a few times throughout the day, take a deep breath and appreciate all that you have, all that you have accomplished and the professional and personal gifts that allow you to impact our students and your colleagues. We don’t take nearly enough time to appreciate these things! Typically, we focus on the “to do” list even though we all know that we live much of our life in “plan B”. We all know that the day rarely goes as we planned. One mind shift that might help is to get rid of the “to do” list and begin referring to it as your “next” list. This puts a different spin on the work that you need to do or the things you feel you must accomplish. It allows you to work on a task fully, without being distracted by the list of tasks below it. It’s just a small shift in perspective, yet it can be very helpful.

Many of us will soon have the opportunity for a break from our daily pace and many of us will be celebrating the holiday in some way with family and friends. My wish for you is that you find time to relax, to count your blessings, reflect on the gifts you bring to the world and to soak up the love of family and friends.

