

**North Carolina Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
Quarterly Meeting Minutes
August 6, 2021
9:00 am – 12:00 Noon
Virtual Meeting**

Members Present:

Linda Amato
Craig Blevins
Antwan Campbell
Rep. Carla Cunningham
Meredith DeNaples
Dr. Kathy Dowd
Kevin Earp
Michael Evola
Rebecca Freeman
Dr. Erika Gagnon
Pattie Griffin
Betty Kelly
Mike Lupo
Denise Nelson
Dr. Claudia Pagliaro
Daphne Peacock
Laurie Ann Rook
David Rosenthal
Elizabeth Strachan
Donald Tinsley Sr.
Rep Diane Wheatley

Ex Officio:

Jan Withers (Present)

Liaison:

Kimberly Harrell (Present)

Members Absent:

Megan Pender
Brad Trotter
Judy Stout Cummings
Lorita Xavier Moore
Dr. Robert Nutt
Senator Bill Rabon

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by David Rosenthal, Chair

Welcome; Introductions; Ethics Reminder; Approve Minutes from May 7, 2021

Motion: Donald Tinsley (Michael Evola) moved to approve the minutes from the May 7, 2021 Council meeting. **Motion passed.**

None of the members acknowledged having a conflict of interest or appearance thereof on matters listed on this agenda

David Rosenthal, Chair

Welcomed 3 members to the Council: Elizabeth Strachan, Rep Diane Wheatley, and Michael Evola

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at NC Department of Health and Human Services

Tara Myers, Deputy Secretary for Employment, Inclusion and Economic Stability, DHHS

DHHS DEI mission is to grow a high performing diverse workforce and cultivate an inclusive workplace where employees are fully engaged to deliver exceptional services and programs.

- Diversity, equity, and inclusion can represent a wide range of thoughts, concepts, and visions:
 - Diversity is a collection of similarities and differences that people bring to the workplace. There is inclusiveness not limited to national origin, race, color, disability, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, or sexual orientation.
 - Equity is the process of ensuring equity, equality, and equally high outcomes for all. It challenges the department to ensure that individuals and groups have the same resources and opportunities to succeed.
 - Inclusion is the process of putting diversity into action by creating an environment of involvement, belonging, respect and connection where the ideas, backgrounds and perspectives are harnessed to create value.
- DEI Council is comprised of employees throughout the entire department, and they're charged to change the culture and policies that lead to more diverse workplaces:
 - Our goal is to interweave DEI in all facets of our work and that includes contracting opportunities and engagement with internal and external customers among other considerations.

NCCDHH Committee Reports

Disability/ Diversity by Donald Tinsley

Disability and Diversity Committee goal:

- Hire more people of color within the teaching profession in North Carolina.
 - Metric is PRAXIS core whereas teachers must pass to become licensed to teach in North Carolina.

- Previous metrics as of 2008 showed 22% of teachers in the field are deaf. Out of the 22%, only 2.5% are deaf teachers of color.
- PRAXIS core is equivalent to high school skills in math, reading and writing. Statistics show the contrast between how many hearing, hard of hearing and deaf individuals and success rate at those Praxis cores. Individuals of color, diversity of ethnicity and race shows the issues that we're having with teacher licensing for individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing who end up teaching our children.
- Potential Solution:
 - UNC Greensboro has a deaf education program and working to remove that practice requirement or modify it to be able to recruit more practitioners who can become teachers and find a way for them to be licensed and certified.
 - An alternative could be ACT composite score of 20 or SAT verbal and math score of 960 but would still have to complete the practice writing component.
 - Work with the state licensing body to figure out licensure pathways, and to develop better training, mentorship programs within the schools.
 - Invest in early intervention to minimize language deprivation in deaf children.

Audiology by Erika Gagnon

The audiology committee is focused on learning more about the Over-the Counter- Hearing Aids. The other thing discussed was an update on the Diversity and Disability committee regarding the potential for a survey aimed at aged persons and social isolation. The audiology committee is curious to learn more and work across committees as we can be supportive.

Education by Mike Lupo

The education committee met in June, and we discussed several different topics covering a few different areas. The meeting focused primarily on preschool education for deaf children birth to 5 years old. During this meeting, several concerns came up:

- Quality of teachers working with this age group.
 - What are their qualifications?
 - Who are these teachers?
 - Biggest concern there are not enough of these teachers who specialize in working with children in this age group.

Other things discussed were deaf parents need access to services and to programs from the public schools. Many deaf parents with hearing and/or deaf children in public schools need access to meetings and communication with the public school system. Their access is connected to the Americans with Disabilities Act. For the parents and children there are different laws that apply to education and provide access to deaf children.

Safely Returning to School – NC Department of Public Instruction Perspective

Sherry Thomas, Director, Exceptional Children, Office of Educational Equity, DPI

Some of the lessons learned over the past 18 months and successes:

- There have been some overall successes for education such as the quick pivoting of districts and teachers to remote learning. In the beginning resources were limited, but

teachers and administrators were able to identify and develop other resources needed to support remote learning.

- DPI and EC began to support districts through a daily update because guidance was changing overnight.
- For students with disabilities, remote learning brought a great deal of attention to accessibility of instructional content. For some disabled students remote learning helped to have less distractions, anxiety, and less background noises.
- There were challenges that affected all students. Most important was the equitable access to education in a remote learning environment.

For Pre-k through grade 12 there are always position vacancies particularly for students who are deaf and hard of hearing and their service providers. Across the state there are about 8 vacancies for deaf teachers and 11 vacancies for educational interpreters.

The early learning sensory support program serves our youngest children, approximately 800 children statewide. Provides services to children ages 3-5 and to children and families birth to 3.

Legislative update around the 2021-22 school year. Bipartisan legislation passed:

- Allowing elementary schools to move back to plan A – All in Person
- Middle and high schools can choose either plan A or B
- Many districts have created a virtual academy

We are always thinking about student safety, the strong school, and the public health toolkit. A change in the toolkit:

- Masks must be worn
- Minimum distancing

The impact of COVID has proven to be hard on educators, families, and students. Even though kids were locked down for months, we found out how resilient they are. Districts should be providing access for mental health to keep kids safe and healthy as they return to school.

How can the council help support DPI and the exceptional children's division?

- Help secure more funding to hire additional teachers and services and ensuring that we are delivering this to districts without a cost to them.

Public Schools – Welcome to the new normal school year!

Denise Nelson, M. Ed., NBCT, Lead for Deaf/Hard of Hearing Services, Durham

What we learned from last year is access and access barriers.

- Deaf students struggled with access to devices and its features
 - Availability, capacity, lack of internet access
- Access features online platforms were complicated:
 - Students had to learn how to activate and use features
 - Online platforms evolved and varied by device
 - Offered face to face to enhance tech skills

- Visual attention to screens was tiring and difficult to maintain especially for younger deaf students
- Signing on a 2D device is more difficult to comprehend than real in-person signing
We needed more accommodations when it came to online instructions. Many needed some type of hearing assistive devices and captioning to have best access to instructions. Needs varied from child to child and student to student.
- Online instructional challenges for spoken language students and signing students:
 - Variable quality of auditory output
 - Speechreading challenges with small 2D image, multiple speakers.
 - Ability to manipulate virtual platform access features
 - Increased fatigue
 - Access to interpreted message
 - Size of image of interpreter
 - Comprehension of 2D image versus in-person
- Online instruction present many barriers for Deaf/Hard of Hearing students, but it has its benefits and will be a tool that teachers will continue to use. We need to continue to work on improving our tech skills and assisting our students those online instructional options.
- Impact on learning during the pandemic:
 - Attendance and participation difficult for many families
 - Quality and quantity of direct instruction was reduced
 - Everyone worked hard but the opportunity for learning was reduced and lost.
- Challenges in returning to in-person instructions:
 - Masks, which are a main access barrier
 - Social distancing
 - Sanitizing
 - Limiting contacts
 - Online instructions which is also a barrier
- Other important considerations:
 - Teacher shortage at a crisis level for teachers of the deaf
 - Teacher/student ratios is especially an issue for itinerant teachers of the deaf
 - Support staff recruitment remains difficult to get qualified sign language interpreters and spoken language facilitators
 - Academic losses, the lack of academic progress by all students during COVID
 - Education for DHH children ages 3-5

Safely Returning to School – NCSD Perspective

Mark Patrick, Director, North Carolina School for the Deaf

NCSD mission is to provide student centered, standards-based instruction to Deaf and Hard of Hearing students in a multicultural and multilingual environment. Our vision is for students to thrive in an accessible, positive learning environment in which they will achieve proficiency in American Sign Language and English as well as achieve individual academic potential to become leaders in their communities.

Just to highlight some of things that we at the NCSD have done over the past year and a half. Shortly after starting as school Director, COVID hit. During this time nothing has been normal.

Lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic:

- COVID-19 created a myriad of stressors and challenges for people personally, professionally, and completely as a society. What do we do and how do we make sense of the most challenging and adverse experiences in our lives right? Life has become the classroom and there are lessons we have learned from the pandemic. I will share 3 lessons with you.
 - Necessity is the mother of reinvention. Every day we have reinvented the wheel. There were virtual classrooms, educational support as well as traditional classrooms. When something didn't work, we tried again.
 - Education is Holistic. Education is the whole student. Deaf and Hard of hearing students who are in their homes oftentimes are incredibly isolated because they're the individuals that can use the language they're learning in school. We made sure to communicate with them daily to ensure social and emotional needs were being met.
 - Capacity for Resilience. That we have the capacity for resilience is the most important lesson learned not just for the students but for the staff as well. Accept that change is inevitable, take decisive actions and move toward your goal.
- NCSD took the lessons learned on how we can improve in any situation and move forward:
 - In educational settings, flexibility has been a requirement to be successful
 - Embrace the change implies that you don't see change as adversity but as an opportunity to improve yourself and try new things
 - We must reflect, learn, improve, and repeat. We must do it again, again and again

What will 2021-2022 School year look like for us? We're going to start the school year off wearing masks. Seeing what we can do with as far as appropriate social distancing and then recommit to the students and we're going to have a traditional start. We are really excited about what the school year looks for us this year.

Safely Returning to School – ENCSD Perspective

Dr. Michele Handley, Director, Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf

We had 23 vacant positions in our school system. They are broke down by academic and then those that apply to the rest of the school. We put a lot of focus on this at the beginning of the summer and had several of our academic positions filled. We were happy that we finally had found some great teachers for these positions. Unfortunately, they backed out of the positions, citing difficulties in finding affordable housing.

There is a lot of competition out there but unfortunately, we are not equipped to compete with teachers' pay scale. We are not setup to be able to compete with what other surrounding states can do. We tried aggressive recruiting through NeoGov, DeafWizard and job fairs. Two years ago, we implemented a \$7500 sign-on bonus for those who met the qualifications. There has been great success with promoting from within.

In terms of working with students to address academic losses, we developed a model of providing one on one with almost every student. Teachers would split class time to help students individually to help them get meaning from training. Another thing we did was start a summer program called Operation Accelerate. Due to a shortage of staff, the program was only two weeks long. We had 80% participation. The program was a success. We plan to do it again next summer.

COVID Precautions: Masks required for everyone, 3 feet distancing which is new, Visitor symptoms screening, daily sanitizing, and will give each student their own material, no sharing.

In 2018, ENCSD completed the inspections to reestablish the preschool program on campus. They have been recruiting for teachers for almost 4 years. Just hired one teacher but due to vacancies, had to use her in another position. The major obstacle has been certification. They all require course work and/or a terminal degree and that has been extremely difficult to find.

These have been some ongoing challenges with recruitment and retention of teachers and teacher burnout. And then adding to that, issues with the students and Internet access and connectivity. It is just so many problems and issues to deal with.

Wrapping Up

David Rosenthal, Chair

Summarizing what we heard today: we heard from DEI about their efforts to grow a diverse workforce and cultivate an engaging and inclusive workplace where diversity is a positive. How can we take this information and use it as a lens to focus on the deaf community? How can we promote diversity, equity, and inclusion within the deaf community? I want to thank all presenters that talked about education. They have provided an eye-opening picture of what is going on with schools and how COVID has impacted them. It's really a challenge to try to adjust to the new normal in the schools. We received a lot of great information today, so I appreciate everyone for being here. Our next meeting will be November 5th.

There being no further business and announcements, the Council meeting was adjourned at 12:05 p.m.

Future 2022 Meetings: February 4, May 6, August 5, November 4

<https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/dsdhh/councils-commissions>