

REPORT FROM THE  
COMMISSIONER'S VISIT TO  
**THE RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL FOR THE  
DEAF**



**Visit Conducted on  
May 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2008**

The purpose of the Commissioner's Visit to the Rhode Island School for the Deaf is to create information about how well the school has implemented its action plans for reading and writing.

This visit focused on the question:

*How well do the students at the Rhode Island School for the Deaf learn to read and write, and how well do they use reading and writing to learn?*

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# REPORT FROM THE COMMISSIONER'S VISIT TO THE RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF

## Background to the Visit

### Visit Particulars

The visit was conducted on May 21st and 22nd, 2008. It focused on the question:

*“How well do the students at the Rhode Island School for the Deaf learn to read and write and how well do they use reading and writing to learn?”*

The pursuit of answers to this question led the team to consider the full range of literacy programming at the Rhode Island School for the Deaf, including the general literacy instruction available for all students across all content areas. As the team conducted the visit, it considered the language development challenges faced by deaf and hard of hearing students. The team recognized that language deficits unique to deafness impact incidental learning, communication at home, and support for school readiness and monitoring of school performance.

The visit team had seven members. Two of these came from the Rhode Island Department of Education, one director and one teacher from the American School for the Deaf in Hartford, CT, one teacher from The Vermont School for the Deaf, one mainstream teacher of the Deaf from the Warwick School Department, and one Special Educator from West Warwick who also has family members who are deaf. Two of the team members are deaf. In addition, 4 interpreters assisted the team in conducting inquiry, debriefing, and coming to consensus on the findings.

The visit was led by Rick Richards, Commissioner's Visit Coordinator from the Office of Progressive Support and Intervention. The visiting team was chaired by Jeannine Magliocco, a SALT Fellow from the Rhode Island Department of Education.

All team members signed and followed a code of professional conduct during the visit.

In order to gather the evidence upon which this report is based, team members:

- Followed a student for half a day (five team members) and
- Observed classrooms for over 8 hours for a team total of over 38 hours (virtually all teachers were observed).

Team members held hour long meetings with:

- The School Improvement Team;
- The School Administration;
- The Board of Directors;
- Teacher Leaders/Coordinators;
- Representatives of the Teachers Alliance (union);
- Members of the School Committee;
- The Superintendent;

- Parents; and
- Teachers

In addition, the team read numerous documents supplied by the school, including the school's reading and writing action plans. These observations, discussions, comments, and documents are the evidence upon which this report is based.

In order to write this report, the team debriefed its findings and deliberated its conclusions for six hours. This was done together with the team as a whole. At the end of this process, the team identified the conclusions that appear next as the most important things for this report to contain. The team then disbanded and the conclusions were drafted by the team facilitators. When the draft was complete, it was distributed for comment and correction to the entire team. Every conclusion that is in this report has been agreed upon by the entire team.

## **Findings of the Visit Team**

In the Commissioner's Visit to the Rhode Island School for the Deaf, the visit team observed classrooms. The literacy practices of students and teachers within these classrooms are described next.

### **Literacy Practices**

#### **Student Learning**

Students at the Rhode Island School for the Deaf read and write with varying degrees of proficiency. Their success with reading and writing is mostly due to the way they access and utilize instruction, visuals and resources in their classrooms. Some students know how to use resources such as sentence strips, computer writing programs and prior journal entries to recall vocabulary words or to learn new words they can use in their writing. They make adequate use of sign language to learn the reading and writing of English. They are learning that a reliance on print and resources is a key to their learning. Some students experience stories that are organized, repetitive, and build on other stories to which they have been exposed. These students are developing a better foundation for understanding story structure, vocabulary and grammar. Inferential thinking is difficult for most of the Rhode Island School for the Deaf students because it heavily relies on prior knowledge and incidental experiences, which deaf students often do not have. Consequently they do not have one of the necessary foundational pieces to think as critically as they need to about what they read or about what they will write. To compensate for this, they need a skillful, sustained, systematic approach to accessing supports in a visual environment. In classrooms where this is provided, students practice the use of critical thinking skills. Unfortunately, some students do not access visuals or print in beneficial ways, either because their classes do not have visual supports or because these students are accustomed to heavily rely on their teachers to write for them.

Students at the Rhode Island School for the Deaf are highly supportive of one another. They are respectful of the differences between each other's learning styles or preferences. For example, students work well together to solve problems that involve reading and writing despite differences in the modes of communication they are using. While some students choose to vocalize, others use sign language. Their ability to work together while "switching codes" is indicative of the way they learn from their teachers as well. The students benefit from using signed supported English to learn new words in English, which helps them to learn to read and write. While most students are engaged in reading and writing, it is concerning that there are a few students at the Rhode Island School for the Deaf who report they don't see the value in learning to read and write, or the importance of these activities to success beyond school.

## **Teaching**

Teachers at the Rhode Island School for the Deaf use a variety of methods to teach reading and writing. Overall, the degree to which teachers emphasize literacy as a way to learn content varies across the school. A highlight of most teachers' practice is their concerted effort to meet the needs of students with varying degrees of language experience and development. Most hearing teachers flexibly "switch codes" back and forth among signing, written English, and oral vocalization in an attempt to meet the needs of their diverse learners. They do well despite the box-like environment of some classrooms, which makes it very difficult for all students to see the teacher and the board work at the same time.

Many teachers cultivate highly visual teaching environments. These teachers also emphasize sign language as a way of teaching written English, developing vocabulary and building background knowledge. However, some are less knowledgeable than they need to be of how to utilize sign language when teaching. Importantly, they are not always correct when they express the meaning of a word or concept with sign language.

Many teachers require their students to think about what they are learning by using writing. For example, they guide their students to write questions about their math, edit their work, and revisit prior written work as a reference for vocabulary and proper word usage. Although these teachers do elicit prior knowledge from their students about the subjects they teach, they seldom explicitly build background understanding beyond the literal and concrete aspects of the content. As a result, their students do not think as critically as they should about difficult content in classes such as Social Studies.

Teachers at the Rhode Island School for the Deaf care about their students' learning. This is reflected in the way they use many methods to accommodate for the varying degrees of deafness their students have. However, the teachers are not as collegial, collaborative or respectful of each other as they need to be to create a cohesive instructional community. Some teachers skillfully make use of highly effective practices such as story-based instruction, team work, and highly effective visual resources. Others, however, are less skillful. They don't reflect regularly on best practices, nor do they participate in the sharing of what works well across the school. This results in a lack of a cohesive approach to the teaching of literacy at the Rhode Island School for the Deaf. Moreover,

teachers seldom monitor the reading and writing progress of their students in a systematic way, weakening important decisions they make about instruction. While the team observed teachers being highly respectful of students, unfortunately, teachers at the Rhode Island School for the Deaf report that some teachers lack respect for one another because of underlying tension and conflict about communication methodologies.

## **School Support**

In general, technology is used too inconsistently at the Rhode Island School for the Deaf to be an effective teaching tool. Yet, there are many teachers who use it effectively. Teachers in the lower grades produce developmentally appropriate books to improve students' reading skills, build background knowledge and experiences, and expose students to text. These students are developing foundational literacy skills and are learning that referencing print is a way to continue the learning process. Some teachers also utilize computer programs to help students write. These programs help students develop and use appropriate vocabulary, and enhance their experience of the writing process. High School students present their Senior Projects using effective Power Point presentations that exhibit their learning about their chosen topics. However, although most teachers use technology like Kidspiration or digital cameras to teach vocabulary, or reinforce sign language and English, the potential technology has for maximizing the literacy of the Rhode Island School for the Deaf students is not recognized. Examples of this are the underutilization of the Smartboard and the lack of film-making and videotaping to build on students' experiences.

Although various options for delivering instruction such as oral and sign language are used at the Rhode Island School for the Deaf, there is inconsistency in the use of a total communication approach. This inconsistency results in a situation in which all methodologies of communication are not utilized appropriately across all classes. Even though some teachers are very open to, and proficient with, "code switching" to meet the needs of their students, others are not. In addition, there is no instructional program for students with Cochlear Implants at the Rhode Island School for the Deaf. Although the students with cochlear implants, or residual hearing, are learning American Sign Language, they are not benefitting from an environment that emphasizes spoken language or an oral-auditory approach. Therefore, their learning, and the learning of other students at the Rhode Island School for the Deaf, is not being maximized.

Communication of goals, events, expectations and best practice among adults is too weak at the Rhode Island School for the Deaf to sustain a unified community. All stakeholders in this learning community are negatively affected by this weakness. Parents and teachers report that school related information is disseminated at the last minute, or not at all. Additionally, the school's existing School Improvement Plan, which includes an action plan for literacy, has not been communicated or implemented. This lack of clear expectations results in an overall lack of consistency across literacy practices in the school. Teachers throughout the building are unaware of a unified approach to improving their students' reading and writing skills because there is not a good process for teachers to talk to each other. Overall, the fractured communication at the Rhode Island School for

the Deaf is both a hindrance to school improvement and a frustration for administrators, teachers and parents—all bearing a direct effect on student learning.

A history of significant changes in Board and School leadership results in a lack of clarity at the levels of policy, procedure and practice. Therefore, expectations for school governance and instructional change are unclear. The Board of Directors and the Director for the Rhode Island School for the Deaf express the need to change this situation. For example, the Board expresses the desire to create an environment that is “100 percent fully accessible”, and makes it possible for both oral and signing children and adults, to learn. However, their intent is not well understood and consequently is not agreed upon by the teachers in the school. Furthermore, the new director has not yet made her vision for the direction of the school well known enough to command the attention of the teachers. This lack of a coherent vision is creating a breakdown of respect, resulting in a loss of learning for both teachers and students.

The director expresses the need to take her time with the teachers and work carefully instituting necessary changes at the school. She is hindered by the lack of an adequate administrative team. However, her efforts to make specific changes are hindered by the lack of an overall vision, resulting in many teachers’ reluctance to accept her leadership. Moreover, last minute or absent communication of school events and goals has compounded this difficulty, and she has not yet gained the trust of the faculty. Finally, neither the Board, nor the director, has created a guiding understanding of the importance of common goals for instruction across or within grades. This further impedes the establishment of a cohesive approach to teaching reading and writing, even though some excellent teaching exists at the Rhode Island School for the Deaf.

There is not a formal, ongoing assessment process at the Rhode Island School for the Deaf that either identifies student progress or informs planning and instruction. Teachers report that they use informal assessments such as grammar assessments, comprehension questions and the Senior Project, which do help them understand their next steps from lesson to lesson or from time to time. Parents report that they are very unsure of how well their children read and write in relation to any norm, whether for deaf or hearing children.

A stifling and contentious culture exists at the Rhode Island School for the Deaf. Teachers’ fear and anxiety of accepting new ideas and change, as well as a major disparity in beliefs about communication (oral vs. sign), both contribute to this. The negativity that accompanies this contentiousness contributes to the lack of acceptance of the new director’s attempts to establish change. The complete absence of a functional teacher evaluation process eliminates a tool the director could use to create a healthier culture, by helping teachers make needed instructional changes.

Although an increasing number of the students at the Rhode Island School for the Deaf have other conditions beyond deafness that handicap their learning, there are not enough teachers on the faculty who are qualified to meet these special needs. There are currently only three teachers at the school with Special Education Certification beyond Teacher of the Deaf Certification. Nor are there currently programs in place designed to meet the

variety of special needs of students in the school. In some cases, the management of students' IEPs is left to teachers who are not certified to meet the needs specified by their IEPs, compounding the inadequacy of assessment and planning that is an issue affecting all students at the Rhode Island School for the Deaf.

**THE COMMISSIONERS VISIT TEAM TO  
RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF  
MAY 6 & 7, 2008**

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APPENDIX I  
THE RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF PROFILE

## RISD School Profile

*We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.*

*-T. S. Eliot*



Sources for this profile include a broad range of formal documents that constitute RI School for the Deaf's continued commitment to monitor student learning and to improve instruction. The school's **Data Analysis Report** from the School Support Team Review, the 2007 **School Improvement Plan**, the High School **Proficiency Based Graduation Requirement Report**, the school's **Consolidated Resource Plans** from 2004-8, and its **Ad Hoc Committee Reports** (2002), have all provided the basis for much of this profile. These documents reflect the collaborative efforts of the entire school community.

## Overview of Instructional Principles at RISD

Since our curriculum's publication more than twenty years ago (AGBell Publishers, 1977), many circumstances have changed. Our population is now more diverse, and includes children with special learning needs, students who arrive late to our program from other countries or schools, and students who learn using diverse communication modes (from picture symbols and gestures to spoken English, sign supported English and American Sign Language). Our staff and its knowledge base are diverse; and new teachers bring new ideas to teaching and curriculum. The educational landscape of general education, including IDEA, NCLB and other accountability efforts, as well as deaf education, has also shaped our thinking and priorities. RI School for the Deaf has always expected critical and conceptually based thinking from its students, so the transition to standards-driven instruction has not been a challenge. Furthermore, given our charge to develop assessment-based individualized education plans, we are deeply focused on gathering evidence of our students' learning and outcomes and are accountable for their progress and growth.

Our goal for the year 2008 has been to ensure that our instructional practices continue to create a population of lifelong self-directed learners, who possess an enduring receptivity to new challenges and growth and a willingness to adapt to the changing needs of the workplace and society at large (2007 School Improvement Plan, PBGR report). For this goal to be met, the process of curriculum growth and change must remain central to the culture of our school.

## Strengths

The primary focus of RISD's efforts to improve student learning continues to be in the areas of language, literacy and communication development **that are unique to Deaf and hard of hearing students**. Our priorities for improvement reflect those of the national positions put forth by the Conference of Executives of Schools for the Deaf, NASDSE's Deaf Education Initiative and the National Agenda for Deaf Children which identify access to full communication (CRP).

Core Principles from our original curriculum that made our approach unique several decades ago continue to be a driving force behind our teaching. These principles include:

- Recognition of the centrality of complex language skills in both written and signed English and ASL, and their role in literacy skills for Deaf learners.
- Use of innovative, research-driven methods for deliberate instruction
- Emphasis on “Big Ideas” and “Enduring Understandings” rather than isolated skills, so Deaf students are motivated by exciting universal themes that underlie Science, math, Social Studies and Literature
- Spiraling Concepts that begin in Preschool and continue through High School that allow Deaf learners to build on what they know
- Setting expectations for integration across subjects to encourage flexible thinking and to allow for rigorous attention to English literacy across all content areas
- Instruction that aligns RI State standards with RISD curriculum frameworks to promote high expectations
- A framework that allows for constant renewal, reflection and creativity, and trusts teachers, parents and students

## Needs

- The process of curriculum review and change needs to be reinstated formally. School-wide discussions, workshops, ongoing reflection by teachers will need to happen frequently so that new ideas can be documented and shared across all levels (School Improvement Plan, Ad Hoc reports).
- Clear documentation through frequent formal and informal testing of students’ curriculum-based language, literacy and conceptual skills will be emphasized (CRP)
- Given the diverse learning styles of our students, formal investigation and documentation of successful curriculum approaches for students with special learning needs must be a priority (CRP, School Improvement Plan, Data Analysis Report, PBGR report)
- Given the diverse communication preferences of our student population, an expansion of our views on language development and communication is critical.

## Comprehensive School Profile

The Rhode Island School for the Deaf serves students birth to 21. It is also a resource for the state and other local educational agencies that are responsible for designing appropriate educational environments for students with hearing loss. Therefore, our profile includes the full range of programs that make up RI School for the Deaf.

As a growing statewide educational center, the RI School for the Deaf coordinates a wide range of direct services for the state’s Deaf and hard of hearing children.

**The Family Guidance Program** begins providing service to families and their infants literally days of age. Rhode Island was the first state in the country to adopt Universal Newborn Hearing Screening. All babies in RI are screened at birth and are referred for services by one month of age. Approximately 15% of these children will enter the RI School for the Deaf preschool or Auditory Oral program (now under the Northern Collaborative). Others transition to their community schools.

- ◆ Our staff works closely with the family and the infant during this very emotional time.

We work to assist the family in developing an understanding of hearing loss and its impact on communication, behavior and school readiness.

- ◆ Services are determined through the development of a Family Service Plan in collaboration with the seven early Intervention Centers in the state.

**The Rhode Island School for the Deaf Academic Program** serves children from Preschool to High School.

- ◆ The school program offers a communication-driven standards-based curriculum to students. The majority of our students reside in Providence, Pawtucket, and East Providence as well as Woonsocket, Central Falls, Cranston and Warwick.
- ◆ We currently have 15 out-of-state students from nearby towns in Massachusetts.
- ◆ Decisions regarding every child's program are determined in Individual Educational Plan meetings by our team of professionals, parents, and representatives from the local community. IEP goals are typically written in the areas of English language development, reading, writing, speech and listening. Additional areas of need may include Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy or Counseling.
- ◆ Mainstream opportunities exist at all levels of the school. We currently have mainstream sites at Community Prep in Providence, the East Providence Career and Technical School, and East Providence High School. A small number of students are also mainstreamed in their local school districts.

**RI Auditory/ Oral Program** (ended September 2008)

- ◆ In collaboration with the RI Department of Education and several local educational agencies, the Rhode Island School for the Deaf established a spoken English learning experience for a small group of Preschool-Kindergarten students.
- ◆ The program is currently housed in an elementary school in Cranston. As well as in an early childhood center in East Providence.

**The Outreach Program** provides services to more than 160 deaf and hard of hearing students in their community schools.

- ◆ These students require specialized support services given the nature of their hearing loss, audiological needs and language learning differences.
- ◆ Requests for outreach services come from special education directors, parents, and speech therapists and case managers.
- ◆ Though our role is primarily as classroom based consultants, we are receiving more and more requests for direct service with students

**The RI State Hearing Center** is housed at the RI School for the Deaf. This state mandated program follows the regulations set forth by the Department of Health and the Department of Education.

- ◆ In Rhode Island all students receive hearing screening yearly from kindergarten to grade 3. In addition, our staff tests Pre-Kindergartens, Head Start Programs, and some private preschools.
- ◆ In 2003 the Hearing Screening Program tested 66,000 children. Of that number approximately 5 percent were referred to the Hearing Center at RISD for complete audiological testing. The RISD Hearing Center tests 2,500-3,000

students each year.

**What makes our school for the Deaf unique:**

- The impact of deafness on **English language development** cannot be overstated. All of our students are life long English language learners. Because English is a spoken language which few Deaf children have full access to, it is learned only through deliberate instruction and specialized methods. This delay in the development of English places the deaf or hard of hearing child at risk for developing English literacy skills. The simultaneous teaching of language and literacy while teaching content is both a challenge and a strength of the RI School for the Deaf. Its curriculum, first published in 1977, was innovative at the time for its developmental approach to English and its emphasis on interdisciplinary essential questions and concepts.
- We have an **ever-changing population of students**. We now have many deaf children with additional disabilities. Several of these children come to school with a personal nurse or require special classroom accommodations including air conditioning.
- With the advent of new technologies, students entering the program with **cochlear implants**. We will need to provide intensive professional development and retrofit our existing facility to maximize the learning and acoustic environments.

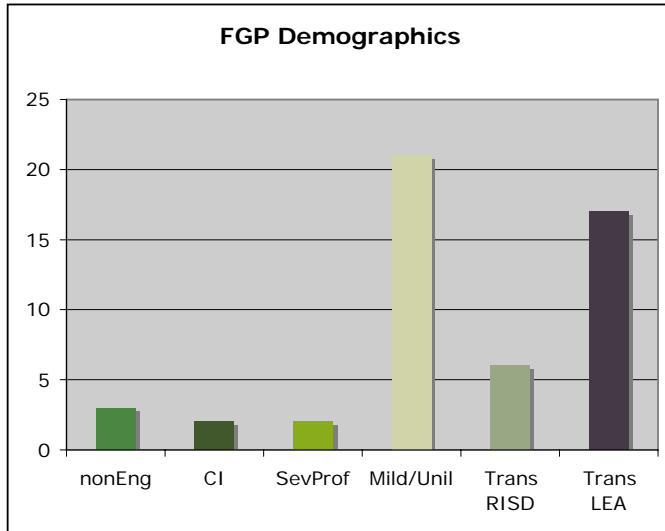
In-Depth Profile of the Family Guidance/Outreach Program

**Program:** Family Guidance: Birth to Three Services  
**Coordinator:** Lena Greene

**Number of children:** 23 families of children with hearing loss.

**Composition:** 3 non-English-speaking families  
2 children with cochlear implants  
2 children with severe to profound hearing losses  
21 children with mild to moderate or unilateral hearing losses

**Transitioning:** 6 children may or may not attend R. I. School for the Deaf  
Preschool  
17 children will not probably attend R. I. School for the Deaf  
Preschool but will enter early childhood programs in their  
communities



**Staff Assignments:** 1 full-time Special Ed teacher (Coordinator for Family Guidance and Preschool Services)

**Other Agency Collaborations:** collaboration with 1 teacher of deaf from Family Services of RI

All infants that are diagnosed with hearing loss are referred by their audiologist to a Deaf Educator at Family Services Early Intervention Center who collaborates with Family Guidance. In Rhode Island, all babies are referred for services as early as one month of age, and home visits are scheduled as soon as the family requires support and chooses to participate. Parents are learning about their baby’s hearing loss during a time of personal upheaval, and accurate and clear information about what lies ahead is critical for both their emotional well-being as well as their baby’s development.

The Family Guidance Program (FGP) is designed specifically for families of children with hearing loss. While in previous years, the program was staffed by a team of family educators, this year it is coordinated by a teacher of the deaf who collaborates with a Deaf Education specialist at Family Services. Staff have specialized knowledge and experience in the field of deafness and hearing loss and its effect on communication. Helping children with hearing loss is often different than helping other children needing special education, The Family Guidance Program understands the emotions of families trying to make difficult adjustments to their child’s communication needs. The mission of the program is to provide families with guidance and information which will support them in making decisions and advocating for their young deaf or hard of hearing child. It emphasizes the importance of helping families in establishing mutual and responsive communication with their infant as soon as possible, and helps parents optimize both visual and/or auditory pathways for learning language.

Family educator offers a range of support and training tailored to the individual needs and choices of families:

- Help for families in understanding the abundance of information and new research on hearing loss and infants, which at times can be confusing and conflicting;
- Help for parents in recognizing the best methods of communicating with their infant
- Intensive instruction for parents in learning effective visual strategies and sign language for communicating with their infant
- Support to parents in evaluating how their child is responding and in making decisions about communication approaches. Not all children with hearing loss learn in the same way;
- Guidance in selecting appropriate amplification and technology to enhance early auditory experiences;
- Training in identifying their child's progress through in depth observations and assessments designed specifically for deaf and hard of hearing children;
- Helping parents connect to other parents of children with hearing loss;
- Assisting families to make decisions about appropriate school placement in community environments or special programs at the age of three.

The Family Guidance program has offered the following services:

- Home visits – family educator observes parents' interactions with their baby, and instructs them in optimal and effective methods for communicating reciprocally with their child.
- Baby Group - Parents have an opportunity to meet other families, share experiences and strategies that were successful for them.
- Parent/Toddler Group Families are offered the opportunity to socially interact with other children who have hearing loss. It is also a time for parents to talk about the next steps in their journey, such as transition to school.
- Parent Library – Books, resources and videotapes about hearing loss, sign language and child development are available for families to check out and discuss with staff.
- Assessment – Methods of assessment specifically designed for deaf and hard of hearing children are used and recommendations are made which apply assessment data to the family's communication plan.

During the present year, the program has provided service to approximately 35 families throughout the state of Rhode Island.

Teaching for Learning: **What does the program look like?**

- Program has been in place for over 30 years
  - Newborn screening motivates very early involvement with families
  - Focus is on developing reciprocal communication between infants and families. And empowering parents to advocate for their child
  - Clearly articulated mission

- Strong collaboration with statewide EI system
- Strong collaboration with national EHDI system
- Model for setting expectations for families and infant/toddlers is based on developmental research in deafness as well as data analysis of family satisfaction
- R. I. communities and Early Intervention agencies are very familiar with the program
- Individualized attention and close working relationships with families has demonstrated strong family satisfaction with service
- Play groups are set up to meet the varied needs of the children
- Advocate for parents and instruction for parents in how to advocate for themselves

**Recent Changes /Improvements over the past 5 years**

- Decrease in staff, despite recommendations and strategic planning
- Weekly ASL classes provided free to parents and families
- Adult Deaf professionals serve as role models
- Formal process has been consolidated for collaborating with community audiologists and Early Intervention personnel
- Participation in CDC research has provided in depth assessment data on families

**Challenges/Priority Goals:**

- **Lack of access to a team of professionals at RISD, decrease in staffing.**
- Development of a variety of printed resource materials and guidebooks that would be helpful to parents and professionals
- An in-house “library” to provide organization for up-to-date research and resources
- Collection of the most up-to-date, research-based information on cochlear implantation
- A speech therapist with a background in auditory-verbal therapy for children with cochlear implants
- Updated mission statement specific to the parent guidance program that is aligned to the mission statement of the R. I. School for the Deaf
- Continued relationship building among the E. I. and other agencies serving children ages 0 to 5 with special needs
- Clarification of role of parent guidance program in transitioning children into a variety of preschool settings
- Regular accessibility to Spanish interpreters and ASL interpreters for IFSP team meetings and transition meetings

## Outreach Services for Children Ages 3 - 5

**Number of children:** 12 children in public school programs to whom RISD provides Outreach Services

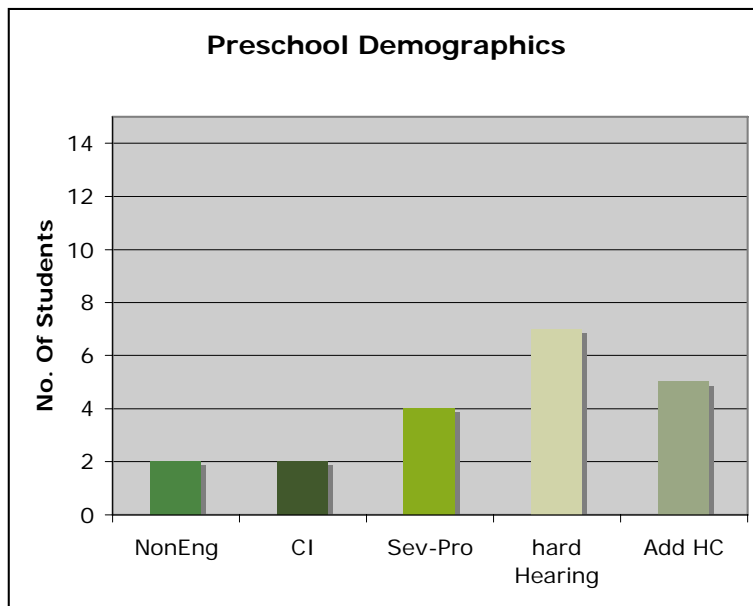
**Staff Assignments:** 1 part-time teacher (Coordinator for Family Guidance and Preschool Services), Teacher of the Deaf currently teaching full-time in RISD preschool and available to Outreach Program 1 hour per week

**NOTE:** The Outreach Services described above have only recently been transferred to the Preschool Department. Therefore, the staff is in the process of determining the strengths and needs of this new program.

## Preschool Program

**Number of children:** 16 children ages 3-4

**Composition:** 2 non-English-speaking families  
2 children with cochlear implants  
4 children with severe to profound hearing losses  
8 children with mild to moderate hearing losses  
5 children with additional disabilities



**Staff Assignments:** 2 teachers of the deaf (all with at least a Master degree in deaf education, certified in deaf education, highly qualified)

1 Personal Care Assistant for 1 child (LEA supported)  
1 classroom aide (1.5 hours daily)  
School Speech Therapist (.5 hours daily)

School Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant (6 hours/week for entire preschool)  
 School Physical Therapist (3 hours per week for entire preschool)

<b>Changes in Learning</b>	<b>Current Changes in Instruction</b>	<b>Assessment</b>
<p><b>All students are developing purposeful communication using their preferred mode: ASL, spoken English, Signed English</b></p> <p><b>All students are developing code switching skills for interactions with both Deaf and hearing teachers</b></p> <p><b>All Students are increasing their engagement in play scripts as a means for understanding patterns and predictability in their experiences</b></p> <p><b>All students are demonstrating understanding of simple signed and written stories</b></p> <p><b>Through play and story time, students are demonstrating beginning appreciation for books and an understanding that all forms of print have a purpose</b></p> <p><b>Students will know that letters of the alphabet are a special category and are different from pictures and shapes.</b></p>	<p>Increased time engaged in symbolic play centers</p> <p>Preschool Language curriculum goals and outcomes are being aligned with RI Early Childhood standards</p> <p>Play center story time and literacy activities adapted for students with special needs</p> <p>Increased direct small group instruction in spoken language and in ASL</p> <p>Match student language learning style and communication mode to method of instruction</p> <p>Increased use of team teaching models: Teacher of the deaf/special ed Hearing/Deaf role models</p>	<p>Creative Curriculum and High Scope Assessments are being implemented using computer technology</p> <p>English language proficiency formally assessed using norm and criterion referenced tests : Reynell, RI Test of Language Structure, language sample analysis</p> <p>Frequent language sample analysis by teachers</p>

## **Early Childhood Curriculum**

The Preschool curriculum continues to be framed by principles of developmental language and learning specific to young deaf and hard of hearing children. It is designed to offer both direct and incidental experiences necessary for the acquisition of the basic building blocks of language, either signed or spoken, while also addressing RI Early Childhood Standards. Teachers use literary theme-based story sets that are developmentally matched to the young child's interests, language and literacy levels and social needs. All activities, play centers, science exploration and number exploration are tied to the story themes so that children can see the connections between the language used in stories and their own lives and interests. We believe that the power of stories, storytelling and personal narratives is central to preschoolers' emerging awareness of people and the world and to their entry into the world of communication and print. The current Preschool Curriculum outlines a core set of stories and underlying themes that appeal to the cognitive and emotional interests of all groups of children, and these stories are organized in clusters that are related to social concepts important to Deaf/hh children. We begin with what are called Additive stories, and then visit themes or structures such as escape-chase, warning stories, and friends helping friends..

By organizing personal experiences into social categories related to children's stories, the curriculum is set up to promote specific early language development goals, not only grammar, but also semantic categories and ideas that emerge from the stories themselves. The curriculum motivates specific universal linguistic concepts, and we have a clear developmental outline that we try to recognize as we deliberately expose children to the language of stories. A reference bibliography of stories organized by theme and by level was compiled a while ago, and is currently in use in our school and in other preschools for both hearing and deaf children.

### **What does Instruction look like?**

- Thematic units based on children's literature which incorporate all Early Learning Standards
- Interdisciplinary team (classroom teachers, O.T., speech therapist) which works together to implement curriculum (planning during common planning periods)
- Implementation of a variety of communication modes necessary to meet the diverse communication needs of the students (i.e. hard-of-hearing, cochlear implants, child of deaf parents, etc.)
- Staff expertise for troubleshooting hearing aids and cochlear implants
- Implementation of a developmental model to teach all students
- Frequent communication with parents
- Parent sign language classes
- Common planning time
- Parents have access to Spanish-speaking teacher
- Adult Deaf professionals serve as role models

### **Recent Improvements/Changes**

### Ongoing Support to Teachers:

These activities are offered through workshops and after school sessions, as well as through job embedded development.

- Expansion of knowledge base and instruction in developmentally appropriate spoken language experiences
- Expansion of knowledge base and instruction in visual/ASL based techniques for presenting stories and concepts
- Formal documentation of weekly unit themes and language outlines now exist in one coherent format. These outlines have begun to be aligned with early childhood standards as well as pre-academic skills into one overview. We currently have daily planning sheets for each literary unit developed by the team. These include specific activities for story presentation and techniques, vocabulary and language structure targets, movement and art project ideas.
- Expansion of bibliography of literature for children and perhaps find new themes that suit the growing range of kids we teach. We will talk to other early educators and identify references on literature-based curriculum to find new titles.
- There are certain transitional readiness skills and preacademic skills (pre-writing, pre-literacy, fine motor and gross motor skills) that are important to parents yet are not a formal part of our curriculum. While the focus of our program is to encourage communication and language, RI Early childhood skills and proficiencies are now easily aligned with the concepts and language goals we work on within each literary theme.
- Add home-school activities to our curriculum and expand our parent training and support.
- We would like to gather more formal data on exit skills of our preschoolers. Typically, children leave the preschool setting when they have acquired a basic linguistic foundation and can express word /sign combinations, when their social needs are not appropriately met in a group with three or four year olds, or when the conceptual and/or linguistic content of the story units is no longer developmentally appropriate.
- Intensive practice and coaching in observational anecdote entries using Creative Curriculum and High Scope
- Training in Creative Curriculum and assessment in early childhood continuous and intensive support in developing a system for integrating IEP, Early Childhood expectations into a growth model profile for all students
- Continuous support and improvement in sign language, both Signed English and ASL, with emphasis on narrative signs and standardization of signs across the curriculum

### Challenges:

- More staff to allow for daily one on one time for each child (i.e. intensive speech therapy, and language development instruction for spoken English and/or ASL, etc.)
- Full-time classroom aide
- Quiet room for one on one instructional/therapy time
- Substitute teachers to provide coverage so teachers and/or related service staff can attend more workshops for professional development

- Additional services from a speech therapist and time for speech therapist to regularly attend instructional planning meetings
- On-site cochlear implant mapping center
- Translation of report cards, assessment results/summaries and IEPs into Spanish

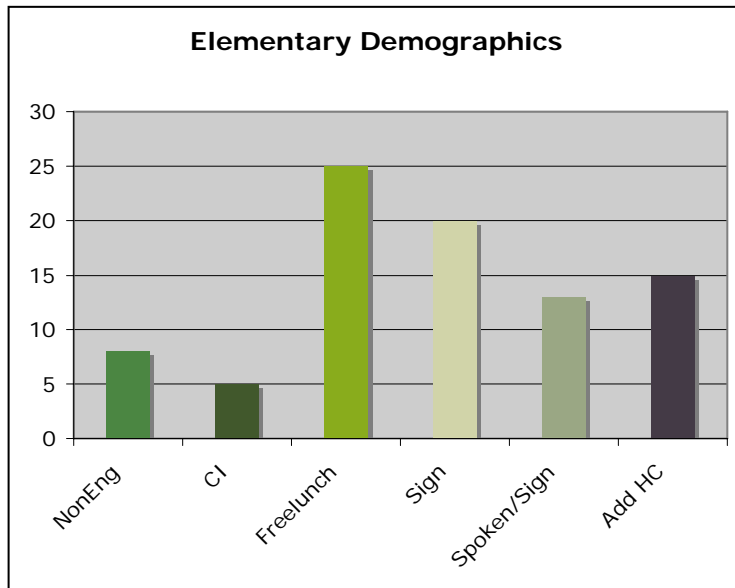
## Elementary Program PROFILE

Coordinator: Helen Litterst

### Demographics

**Number of children:** 33 students (K/1: 8 students; Grade 2/3: 9 students; Grade 4/5: 10 students; Special Needs Classes – Grade 4/5: 7 students in 2 separate classes)

**Composition:** 8 non-English-speaking families  
 5 children with cochlear implants  
 15 children with additional disabilities  
 20 children whose primary mode of communication is through sign/ASL  
 13 children whose primary mode of communication is through spoken English with sign support  
 25 children who receive free or reduced lunch



### Staff Assignments:

- 8 full-time teachers of the Deaf (all with at least masters degrees in deaf education, certified in deaf education, some with certifications in elementary education and/or special education, highly qualified)

1 full-time Teaching Assistant (also ASL consultant/communication facilitator)

5 Personal Care Assistants

1 Speech Therapist (6.5 hours daily)  
 1 Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant  
 Consultation services of Occupational Therapist  
 Consultation services of a Behavior Specialist (1 day per week)  
 Consultation services of School Psychologist  
 On-site audiologist  
 School Counselor (individual and group counseling)  
 1 Physical Therapist (3 hours per week)  
 Coordinator for Elementary Education (highly qualified, certified Teacher of the Deaf, certified in Elementary Education and Special Education, C.A.G.S. in Supervision of Curriculum and Instruction)

**Strengths of Instructional Approaches:**

- A highly-qualified team of certified teachers of the deaf who work well together and have many years of experience working in the elementary department of the RI School for the Deaf
- Most teaching teams work with the same students between two and three years
- Common planning time
- Small learning environments that allow teachers to individualize and personalize instruction in addressing each student’s IEP goals and short term objectives and provide ongoing progress monitoring
- Integrated instruction and unit development: curriculum that is spiraling, thematic and interdisciplinary across all subjects and designed to be accessible to all students: the curriculum includes a focus on cultural diversity, emphasizes active, "Hands-on" learning experiences, flexible, block scheduling
- Integration of math, reading and writing instruction throughout curriculum
- Use of exhibitions of student work as part of instruction and assessment procedures
- The Elementary Team has worked together over the last 2 years to align the state’s Grade Level Expectations and Alternate Assessment Grade Span Expectations to each grade level curriculum strand and develop user-friendly forms to document student progress in attaining the GLEs
- Heterogeneous ability grouping for all subject areas except literacy and math
- Frequent communication with parents
- Teams organize instruction around a clear, shared set of agreed upon themes or essential questions
- Teachers regularly use student assessment as a feedback tool in instruction
- Teachers act as coaches/facilitators to promote active involvement of students in learning activities
- Upper elementary teaching team has begun to develop plans to involve students in community service projects (i.e. students made and delivered 60 sandwiches to Amos House)
- A mentoring program for new teachers (less than 3 years experience) teachers’ contract provides for formal orientation/training for new teachers
- A Student Support Team that includes teachers, social worker, psychologist, counselor, occupational therapist

**Challenges for Instruction:**

- Ways to support ongoing parent involvement in student school work
- Cooperative learning based instruction
- Strategies for teaching broad range ability levels in same class and ways to include all students of varying abilities across grades in group activities on a more regular basis
- Introducing technology into classroom including assistive technology
- Multiple modes of communication including ASL to help meet diverse student communication needs
- Ways to include community-based and service learning in academic program
- Newest, research-based information on reading, writing, and math skills development
- Two-way communication between home and school when home language is not English as a regular part of program

**Support to Teachers**

- Intensive practice and coaching in analysis of student work
- Classroom embedded support for behavioral interventions
- Continuous support and improvement in sign language, with emphasis on standardization of signs across the curriculum
- Develop expertise in teaching children with cochlear implants
- Develop expertise in assessment of learning disabilities in Deaf/hh learners
- Workshops on Reading Strategies
- Training in differentiated instruction;
- Training in accommodations for Deaf/HH learners with special needs. These activities will be offered through workshops and after school sessions, as well as through job embedded development

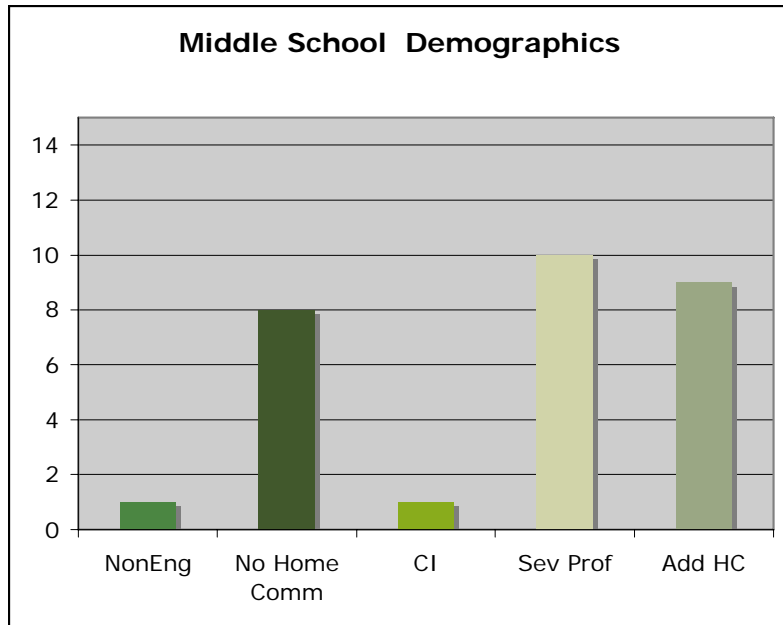
**Middle School Program Profile**

Coordinator: Dinaz Adenwalla

**Number of students:** 15

**Composition:**

- 1 student with a non-English-speaking family
- 8 students who have no or limited communication access at home
- 1 student who uses cochlear implants
- 10 students with severe to profound hearing losses
- 9 students with additional disabilities



#### **Staff Assignments:**

- 1 Coordinator (shared with High School)(Certified Teacher of the Deaf)
- 4 full-time Certified Teachers of the Deaf
- 1 part-time Certified Art teacher of the Deaf (shared with Elementary and High School)
- 1 part-time Certified Health teacher (shared with Elementary and High School)
- 1 part-time Certified Physical Education teacher (shared with Elementary & High School)
- 1 part-time Certified Speech Therapist (shared with High School)
- 1 part-time Certified Occupational Therapist (shared with all levels of school)
- 1 part-time Certified Physical Therapist
- 1 part-time Certified School Counselor (shared with Elementary and High School)

**Other Agency Collaborations:** Students' home district schools LEAs.

#### **What does Instruction Look like?**

- Team teaching for Literacy and Social Studies
- Counseling Program to meet individual needs of students
- Recognition and embracing different styles of teaching and communication skills.
- Flexibility in grouping students based on their strengths rather than their grade levels.
- School Play where there is 100% involvement by teachers and students
- One block dedicated to Physical Education for students
- Faculty team meeting once a week
- One to one reading specialist
- Homogenous Literacy groups
- Small classes (1:5)
- Community time, Homeroom time and snack time are appreciated deeply by students

- Teachers teaming effectively to address middle school behaviors/discipline with heavy support from Dinaz Adenwalla and Bruce Bucci.
- Point system reinforcement and rewards smashingly successful
- Vocabulary building and sentence writing emphasized across the subjects
- Modified reading books for independent reading allowed students to read more on their own.
- Physical space (layout design) excellent for easy communication between teachers.
- Camping trip as the end of the school year to appreciate the hard work that teachers and students have put in.
- Field trips such as Woonsocket plays and Christmas Carol.

### **Recent Improvements/Changes**

- Full participation in RIAA, with most students reaching proficiency with distinction
- Writing and Reading analyses using common rubrics
- Extensive use of exhibitions and presentation
- Integration of technology into teaching literacy through ASL stories
- Intensive practice and coaching in analysis of student work and portfolio design
- Intensive scaffolded literacy instruction and assessment across content areas a broad range of level-appropriate, accessible and motivating reading materials for students who are struggling with English language acquisition
- Broad range of level-appropriate, accessible and motivating reading materials for students who are struggling with English language acquisition

### **Challenges to Instruction and Learning**

- After school activities apart from sports to enhance social emotional interactions.
- Block time with alternating days/classes.
- Full time coordinator for Middle school.
- Include enrichment teachers into the common planning time and meetings.
- Guest speakers and workshops relevant to adolescent needs such as time management, organization skills,
- Involvement of Athletic Director or coach in discipline.
- Exploration into the field of Bilingual Education
- Allow for more one to one instruction without impacting the other programs.
- Professional Development workshops such as social studies conference
- Workshop for parents to learn about current technology that benefit deaf and hard of hearing students
- Update text books
- A coordinator to coordinate the summer camps
- Theatre course to give deaf and hard of hearing student intensive experience in acting, signing, joking, mimicking etc.
- Consistent support from Student Support team with follow up
- Curriculum consultant to connect with state requirements; NECAP to produce some concrete curriculum from which to guide our instruction

- Time to come together from preschool to high school to develop continuum of teaching.
- One more enrichment i.e. Computer literacy; yearbook club.

*Professional Development for Elementary and Middle School Teachers Focusing on Literacy: 2005 — 2008*

- Support to All Students: Diversified Learning Strategies (10 week course that a number of Middle School and Elementary teachers took during the 2006 school year)
- Lesley University Literacy Institute — Fall, 2006
- Literacy Development for Deaf Students with Cochlear Implants: Role of ASL (Nancy Maguire, Director of the Randolph Campus of The Framingham Learning Center for Deaf Children) Spring, 2006
- Gallaudet University Regional Center Workshop on Balanced Literacy Program for Deaf Students (full day workshop at regional center, follow-up workshop at RI School for the Deaf, Spring, 2006)
- Departmental and Interdepartmental (elementary and middle school teachers working together) collaborations to align curricula to ELA and Writing NECAP Standards (2006 to present)

*Professional Development Identified as a Need for Elementary and Middle School Teachers Focusing on Literacy: 2007 (CRP and School Improvement Plan)*

- Collaborate with other regional schools for the deaf to share best practices
- Professional development dedicated to choosing assessment tools, looking at student work and monitoring student progress
- Training in the use of SMART Board technology as it relates to supporting teaching and learning: reading and writing

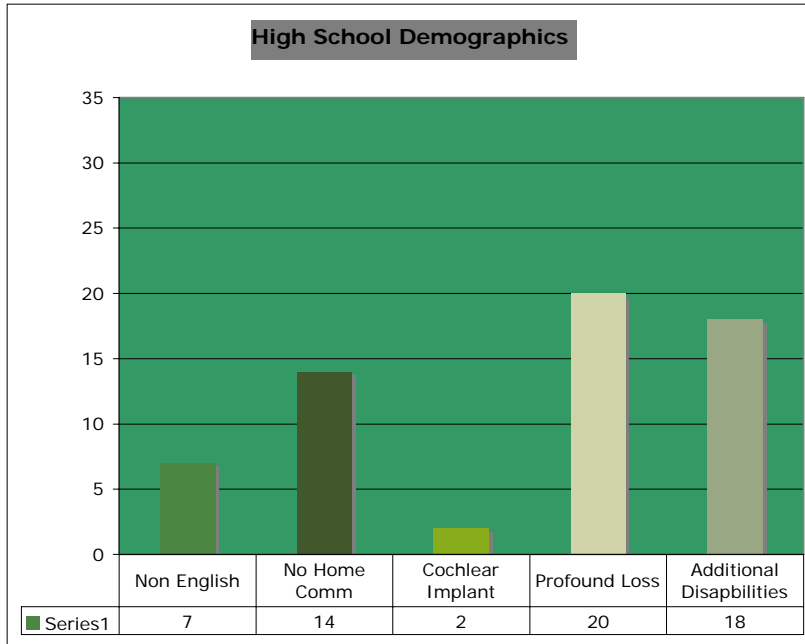
## High School Program Profile

Coordinator: Dinaz Adenwalla

**Number of students:** 35

**Composition:**

- 7 students with non-English-speaking families
- 14 students who have no or limited communication access at home.
- 2 students who are using cochlear implants
- 20 students with severe to profound hearing losses
- 18 students with additional disabilities



**Staff Assignments:**

- 1 Coordinator for Secondary Programs (Certified Teacher of the Deaf)
- 1 Coordinator for Transition Programs
- 6 full-time certified teachers of the Deaf
- 1 full-time certified teacher assistant.
- 1 part-time media specialist/ASL/communication facilitator
- 1 part-time certified teacher of the Deaf (Individualized instruction and Evaluation)
- 1 part-time certified teacher of the Deaf (shared with Elementary and Middle School)
- 1 part-time certified Health teacher (shared with Elementary and Middle School)
- 1 part-time certified Physical Education teacher(shared with Elementary&Middle School)
- 1 part-time certified Speech Therapist (shared with Middle School)
- 1 part-time certified Occupational Therapist
- 1 part-time certified school counselor

**Other Agency Collaborations:** collaboration with East Providence Career and Technical Center and East Providence High School and students’ home district schools LEAs.

**Strengths of RISD High School Level Instruction**

**Class Size/Groupings**

- Personalization of course content to the strengths, needs and interests of each student; hands-on learning
- Small classes with students at similar linguistic levels enables teacher to so necessary one-on-one work

### **Instructional Approach**

- Methods used by teachers are specialized for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing population
- Teachers of the Deaf have a firm grounding in linguistic principles and methods to promote communicative competence and literacy in a developmental framework
- Dedicated, experienced and highly qualified coordinator, teachers and paraprofessionals with years of experience and willingness to learn new curriculum and methodology

**Counseling:** Group counseling for all students; individual counseling as needed by an experienced counselor of Deaf and Hard-of Hearing students

**Mainstream Option:** Option of academic and vocational mainstreaming at EPHS with support

### **Additional Quality Experiences**

- Development of graduation project as of 2008
- Annual School Play
- Science Fair
- Active athletic programs involved with other schools for the deaf
- Close-up program in Washington, D.C.
- Jr. NAD
- Option for Deaf leadership camps

## **Challenges RISD High School Level Program**

### **Curriculum**

- Curriculum that meets students needs developmentally and linguistically and aligns with state standards
- Focus on personalized learning including tutoring, Preschool through High school
- phasis on social cognition, metacognitive skills and social emotional learning themes.
- Staff person whose role can be dedicated to coordinating the high school reform effort or qualified experienced person to develop curriculum and align with state standards
- Time for teachers to meet to make decisions in regard to evolving curriculum, the portfolio system, standards setting for our population and evaluating student work
- Departmental and interdepartmental teacher planning time
- Updated text books

### **Student Assessment and IEPs**

- Thorough, consistent and objective assessment of reading, language, math ability and differential diagnosis of cognitive problems which affect memory and language and adversely impact learning and reading comprehension

- Systematic process for documenting individual learning needs, accommodations and modifications in the IEP that reflects the student's unique learning needs as well as the difficulty that pre-lingual deafness poses to language development and reading
- Person that keeps IEP's up to date
- Staff person who is qualified to assess students communicative competence in ASL or other visual communication modes
- Exit skills criteria and real world knowledge exit exam for graduating classes

### **Faculty Needs**

- **Time** for teachers to meet to make decisions in regard to documentation of student work, the portfolio system and evaluation of student work, standard setting for **our** population and shared information on course content throughout the high school
- Staff person who is qualified to assess teacher communicative competence in ASL or other visual communication modes
- Teacher training in visual language programs such as FYT or other workshops in latest methodology in Deaf education
- Professional development and training for teachers of special needs students
- Focus on personalized learning including tutoring, Preschool through High school
- phasis on social cognition, metacognitive skills and social emotional learning themes.

### **Transition**

- Expand transition department
- Job coaches to assist those students who will not be attending college or post-secondary schools

### **Hardware, Software and Teaching Materials**

- Updated DVD players, color printers and computers
- More expedient system to buy books
- Easy to access budget to buy classroom materials

**Environmental:** Heating system that provides a comfortable teaching/learning environment

**Parent Communication:** Outreach to parents to keep them informed of changes in the high school and provide workshops of interest to them i.e. safety on the internet or adolescent concerns

**Board of Trustees:** Members should have strong education background and deep understanding of issues pertaining to Deaf culture

**Program:** Transition  
Coordinator, Cheryl Hollingworth

**Number of students:** 35 high school students

**Composition:** same as high school

**Strengths of the Transition Program:**

- Staff person is very knowledgeable about systems: SSI, Office of Rehabilitation, Division of Developmental Disability, Department of Labor
- Staff person is very knowledgeable of community based organizations: Independent Living centers, Corliss Center, Goodwill
- Staff person has 25 years experience working with Deaf students and adults in career and employment programming
- Program is individualized
- Work sites are developed as needed
- Office of Rehabilitation funds SY Co-ops
- Office of Rehabilitation funds Summer Work Experience Program for any student however it is limited to one summer
- Continuum of work experiences allows for students to identify interests, develop soft skills transferable to any work setting and gain confidence working in the hearing community becoming independent workers

**Weakness of Program:**

- No additional staff
- No funding for staff
- No driver for off campus programming
- Limited vehicle use
- No supportive curriculum (employment related issues)
- Schedule does not allow all students to have work experiences
- No Independent Living and Community Participation curriculum
- No funds for providing additional summer programming to special needs students

The following information is provided by John Carty, Coordinator Outreach Services. It is a snapshot of the present status of programs and services for students served by the RI School for the Deaf **Outreach**.

**Program:** Outreach Services  
John Carty, Coordinator

**Number of children:** 198 (154 Active, 44 Inactive)

This program receives new referrals almost weekly

Direct Services provided to 25 students

Consultation/Monitor for 173 students

**Composition:** Type of Hearing Loss (25 are deaf, 173 are hard of hearing)  
Number with Cochlear Implants (12)

**Staff and Assignment:**

John Carty	92 ( 56 Active, 36 Inactive)
Andrew Knight	30 ( 25 Active, 5 Inactive) New to outreach
*Donna Mignella	60 (57 Active, 3 Inactive) *Recently retired
Lena Greene	16 (3 & 4 year olds) Family Guidance Program

**Strengths of the Program**

- Strong relationships with Local Educational Agencies
- (Special Ed Directors, Principals, Speech Pathologists and Teachers)
- Work closely with RI School for the Deaf Hearing Center, RI Hospital, the Family Guidance Program and ORS.
- Assist teachers with technology (training and troubleshooting)
- Assist teachers with IEP Development
- Serve as a liaison between schools and RISD resources
- Assist families (parents & students) with advocacy
- Help students transition to new teachers and new schools
- Train Teachers, Speech Pathologist, support staff and peers on the issues and challenges faced by deaf and hard of hearing students in schools.

**Needs of the Program**

- Increase staff (current levels make it difficult to offer direct services and provide appropriate level of consultation) 35 to 1 ratio
- Improve Data Collection/Records
- We need a new data base accessible from the internet (at schools and at home).
- Access to clerical staff would be helpful
- Expand our resource library for materials to share with teachers
- Continued Training on technology and latest teaching best practices
- Offer regional trainings to teachers with new deaf / hard of hearing students
- Offer after school & evening support groups for various age groups
- Improve communication ability among staff (e.g. Blackberrys)
- Laptop computers with wireless technology

**Student Breakdown**

Ages:	Number of Students
3	13
4	9
5	7
6	18
7	19

8	8
9	16
10	17
11	12
12	12
13	11
14	8
15	11
16	12
17	17
18	7
19	<u>1</u>
TOTAL:	198

<u>Communities</u>	<u>Number of Students</u>
Barrington	4
Bristol / Warren	1
Burrillville	4
Central Falls	3
Chariho	2
Coventry	10
Cranston	5
Cumberland	3
East Greenwich	4
East Providence	17
Exeter / W. Greenwich	13
Fall River, MA	1
Jamestown	1
Johnston	1
Lincoln	3
N. Kingstown	4
N. Providence	9
N. Smithfield	3
Newport	4
Newport County	8
Northwest	7
Pawtucket	10
Providence	31
S. Kingstown	9
Smithfield	4
Uxbridge, MA	1
Warwick	7
West Warwick	11
Westerly	1
Woonsocket	14