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Job Satisfaction: Perceptions of a National Sample of  
Teachers of Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

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American Annals of the Deaf, Volume 148, Number 1, Spring 2003, pp. 5-17  
(Article)

Published by Gallaudet University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/aad.2003.0006>



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# *JOB SATISFACTION: PERCEPTIONS OF A NATIONAL SAMPLE OF TEACHERS OF STUDENTS WHO ARE DEAF OR HARD OF HEARING*

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he study examined the perceptions of a national sample of teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing to assess their level of job satisfaction. A questionnaire was developed and distributed; 610 completed surveys were analyzed. Overall, respondents appeared satisfied with their jobs. Of the 59 items in the survey, 51 were scored as positive for the group as a whole. Participants reported that their relationships with colleagues were the most enjoyable aspect of the job. Paperwork, state assessment tests, and lack of family involvement were identified as the least satisfying aspects. Data were also analyzed by comparing the responses of teachers across groups—*itinerant, elementary, secondary, and resource room*. Generally, this group-by-group analysis produced findings similar to those for the overall sample. Recommendations on addressing the specific factors that teachers responded to negatively are provided.

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Teaching is one of society's most important occupations. It is the one profession that focuses energy and attention on our most precious resources—children and youth. Teachers have the opportunity to influence the lives of individuals regardless of their ethnicity, cultural background, socioeconomic status, or ability level. As such, teaching is the one profession that makes all other professions possible. The essential role of teachers has been summarized by Kozleski, Mainzer, and Deschler (2000): "Whether in special education or general education, there is growing evidence that the single most important influence in a student's education is a well-prepared, caring, and qualified teacher" (p. 1).

While teaching is an essential profession, it is also one that is currently experiencing a great deal of external pressure.

There seems to be a general perception that there are serious problems with public education and that major structural changes are needed to fix these problems. Particularly since 1983, when the National Commission on Excellence in Education issued *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, the effectiveness of public education programs has been challenged by policymakers, business leaders, education professionals, and the public. The report featured data showing that American students were falling behind students from other nations on a variety of educational measures. Since then, there has been a strong education reform movement focusing on more academically challenging standards for graduation, new curriculum frameworks to guide instruction, and new assessments for testing students' knowledge as well as for making school

administrators and teachers accountable for student success or failure.

Concurrently, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 (popularly known as IDEA '97) have mandated that all students with disabilities are to participate in the general education curriculum, that they must be included in state and districtwide educational assessments, and that their scores must be reported as part of the educational results for all students. States must document the number of students participating in the tests, report on their performance, and develop alternate assessments for students unable to participate in existing state or district tests. These increased societal pressures, along with the requirement to educate more students, with more challenges, to higher levels of learning than at any time in the past century (Reeves, 2000), are significantly changing the working conditions of teachers.

Working conditions can seriously affect teachers' morale, level of effort, and quality of work. Negative responses to day-to-day work may lead teachers to leave the profession, or to remain but simply reduce their overall involvement and effort while lowering their expectations for students (Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001). Yee (1990) refers to this as "retiring on the job" (p. 120). This problem was recently summarized in a document issued by the Council for Exceptional Children: "Poor teacher working conditions contribute to the high rate of special educators leaving the field, teacher burnout, and substandard quality of education for students with special needs" ("CEC Launches Initiative," 1998, p. 2).

### Teacher Shortages

Another factor that is affecting the working conditions of teachers and the quality of education is the shortage of qualified teachers. Currently, properly trained and licensed teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hear-

ing are in short supply in every region of the United States (American Association for Employment in Education, 2002). Simultaneously, many school districts face the prospect of a wave of retirements as large numbers of teachers who were hired during the "baby boom" enrollment years approach retirement age. Increasing the challenges that accompany the effort to replace retiring teachers is the fact that elementary and secondary schools are projected to set enrollment records each year for at least the next 7 years. Consequently, projections for the number of newly hired public school teachers who will be needed by 2008 range from 1.7 million to 2.7 million (National Center for Education Statistics, 1998).

Adding to the concerns that the supply of qualified teachers is shrinking and that the population of school-aged children is increasing is the high rate of attrition—the number of professionals who leave the field of special education. Special educators continue to leave the field in greater numbers than their general education counterparts (Billingsley & Cross, 1992). The impact on students is summarized by Yee (1990), who has noted, "What is known is that high rates of turnover carry serious implications for the quality of education" (p. 1).

### Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction has been defined as "an affective response to one's job as a whole or to particular facets of it" (Cooley & Yovanoff, 1996, p. 341). Individuals who have a favorable attitude toward their job are more highly motivated to remain in and perform their job (Katzell & Thompson, 1990). Previously, researchers in special education have found that job dissatisfaction and teacher stress are correlated with each other and with special educator attrition (Billingsley & Cross, 1992; Culver, Wolfe, & Cross, 1990; Platt & Olson, 1990; Singh & Billingsley, 1996).

### Literature Review: Deaf Education

In special education there is considerable information on the reasons teachers decide to leave the field. Specifically, it is known that certain kinds of working conditions are stressful and over time may cause job dissatisfaction and attrition. Examples of stressful conditions include excessive paperwork, large caseloads, low salaries, lack of administrative support, lack of collegial support, challenging student behaviors, and lack of visible student progress (Billingsley, 1993; Brownell & Smith, 1992; Cooley & Yovanoff, 1996; Sweeney & McCabe, 1992). In the area of education of students who are deaf or hard of hearing, several studies have examined the variables of teacher morale, teacher stress, teacher burnout, and job satisfaction.

Meadow (1981) surveyed teachers and other professionals working with students who are deaf or hard of hearing in Pennsylvania and Washington, DC, using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996). She reported that teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing scored significantly higher than teachers of hearing students on the scale reflecting "Emotional Exhaustion." She attributed the results to the fact that the "well-known and often-cited slowness of growth in educational achievement in deaf students can discourage their teachers and lead to the frustration and self-doubt that may well be reflected in high rates of burnout or emotional exhaustion" (p. 16). In the same study, Meadow also reported that 80% of her sample ( $N = 240$ ) indicated that they were to some extent satisfied with their job.

J. L. Johnson (1983) examined the job stress of teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Her sample ( $N = 377$ ) represented a mix of preschool, elementary, and secondary teachers from residential, day, and special schools in urban, suburban, and rural settings. She reported that 27% rated teaching as very stressful or ex-

tremely stressful, 45% perceived teaching to be moderately stressful, and 27% perceived teaching as not stressful or only mildly stressful. The 10 primary sources of stress reported by teachers were:

1. paperwork
2. developing individualized education programs (IEPs)
3. planning and preparing materials for a wide ranges of abilities
4. inappropriate and/or disruptive behavior of students
5. inadequate time for planning
6. inadequate salary
7. attitude and behavior of some teachers
8. uncooperative parents
9. inadequate financial support for school programs
10. inadequate communication among school personnel

Stedt and Palermo (1983) used the Purdue Teacher Opinionaire (Bentley & Rempel, 1968) to examine the morale of teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing at the California School for the Deaf at Riverside. They compared a group of teachers of deaf students with a group of teachers of deaf students with additional disabilities. They reported that the teachers of students with additional disabilities had higher morale than the teachers of students without additional disabilities and higher morale than the norms for general education teachers. Stedt and Palermo summarized their results by suggesting that an important factor in the high morale of teachers in their sample was the administrative support these teachers received.

Moore (1991) reported the results of a study involving 231 teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing working in residential programs as well as in large, center-based programs throughout the United States. He found that teachers were experiencing low morale because of heavy workload and pressure caused by community expectations.

More recently, McNeill and Jordan (1993) surveyed 31 teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing using an oral approach to teaching and compared them with 93 teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing who used a Total Communication approach to teaching to assess these teachers' stress and job satisfaction. Results indicated that the two groups did not differ significantly in their overall responses. In addition, neither group reported high stress on the two survey instruments used.

### Method

The purpose of the present study was to examine the perceptions of a national sample of teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing to assess how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with their jobs. The study seemed particularly timely because where teachers work, how they work, and who and what they teach have all undergone so much change since implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in the early 1970s and the move toward inclusive classrooms and greater collaborative efforts between general education and special education teachers. As such, researchers such as Singer (1993) caution that teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing who work with large numbers of students in relatively brief, intermittent sessions may be especially susceptible to stress and burnout.

### Participants

We were interested in obtaining a broad-based sample of teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing. We used the list of schools and programs printed in the 2000 reference issue of the *American Annals of the Deaf* ("Schools and Programs in the United States," 2000). A total of 998 questionnaires were mailed to supervisors of programs for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Questionnaires were mailed with a cover letter re-

questing that supervisors give the survey to a teacher they considered likely to complete it. Additionally, supervisors were given permission to make copies of the survey to distribute to other teachers they thought would be interested in participating in the study. Profiling of a certain type of teacher was deliberately avoided so that we could garner a large sample that would more likely be representative of the population as a whole.

A total of 702 surveys were returned. Forty-seven were eliminated because they were not completely filled out. An additional 45 surveys were not included because respondents reported their job responsibility as an administrator, speech-language pathologist, audiologist, or counselor. A total of 610 surveys were analyzed.

Of the 608 respondents who indicated gender, 571 (94%) were female and 37 (6%) were male. On average, the respondents had 15.9 years of experience as teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing; more than two thirds had a master's degree or higher. Respondents were more likely to work in itinerant or elementary school positions than in other job settings. Further demographic information is provided in Table 1.

In the category "type of program," blank space was provided under the heading "other" for respondents to fill in if the other labels did not apply. Answers given for this item included "cooperative program" and "nonprofit school."

### Questionnaire

The questionnaire had three parts. In the first part, respondents provided basic demographic and professional information. Items in this area included years of teaching experience, gender, highest degree earned, job responsibilities, and type of program one worked in.

The second part of the survey contained items that had been developed to focus on the many dimensions of the

**Table 1**  
Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Respondents	
<b>Highest degree</b>	<b>N = 607</b>
Bachelor's	156 (25.7%)
Master's	421 (69.4%)
Specialist	19 (3.1%)
Doctoral	5 (0.8%)
Other	6 (1.0%)
<b>Job responsibilities</b>	<b>N = 564</b>
Itinerant	197 (34.9%)
Elementary	153 (27.1%)
Secondary	83 (14.7%)
Resource room	36 (6.4%)
Home intervention	6 (1.1%)
Administration	3 (0.5%)
Other	86 (15.2%)
<b>Type of program</b>	<b>N = 591</b>
Local program	328 (55.5%)
Special school	105 (17.8%)
Other	158 (26.7%)

*Note.* Percentages may not total 100.0 because of rounding.

research question. Reviewing a variety of related studies (e.g., Cross & Billingsley, 1994; McNeill & Jordan, 1993; Westling & Whitten, 1996) helped us develop this portion of the questionnaire. To address possible threats to reliability and to enhance reliability and the potential for replication of the research findings, we followed survey data collection procedures closely (Fink, 1995). In addition, a reliability check was conducted on 10% of the surveys to assess researcher fidelity with data entry. A 100% reliability rate was determined. To further establish reliability, Cronbach's coefficient alpha was calculated to determine the internal consistency of items addressing teacher job satisfaction ( $\alpha = .934$ ).

Threats to validity were addressed to maximize the quality of the survey and improve the generalizability of findings. To address construct validity, we asked university professors and doctoral stu-

dents in deaf education to review initial drafts of the questionnaire. Modifications were made as a result of their suggestions. The final version, titled "Job Satisfaction of Teachers of Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing," consisted of 59 statements, which were scored on a 4-point Likert scale (1, *very dissatisfied*, 2, *dissatisfied*, 3, *satisfied*, 4, *very satisfied*).

Respondents were instructed to "consider how satisfied you are with various aspects of your job." Appendix A shows, items on the survey addressed topics such as satisfaction with salary, job security, available technology, and amplification systems. In addition, items covered areas such as relationships, pride, support, and opportunities for leadership.

The third section contained open-ended questions asking respondents to comment on challenging and enjoyable aspects of their job. Also, respondents were asked to predict how long they thought they would continue working in the field. Finally, the teachers were asked to add additional comments if they desired.

## Results

### Scaled Items

As we have noted, 59 items were scored on a 4-point scale representing a continuum from *very dissatisfied* to

*very satisfied*. *Very dissatisfied* and *dissatisfied* were combined, as were *satisfied* and *very satisfied*, so that we might examine positive and negative trends.

Initially, total group trends were examined. Overall, respondents were satisfied with their jobs. Of the 59 items in the survey, 51 were scored as positive for the group as a whole. The eight items that were scored *dissatisfied* or *very dissatisfied* are listed in Table 2. As can be seen, the items causing the greatest dissatisfaction concerned issues outside the direct teaching of students. Table 3 is a list of the 10 items the respondents rated the highest.

Data were also examined by comparing the responses of teachers across groups. The four categories *itinerant*, *elementary*, *secondary*, and *resource room* were used because together they represented the overwhelming majority of respondents. Overall, as Table 4 shows, the findings for these four groups were similar to those for the group as a whole.

### Open-Ended Questions and Comments

All responses to the open-ended questions and comments were transcribed and grouped according to the individual items "What are the most challenging aspects of your job?" "What are the most enjoyable aspects of your job?" and "Additional comments."

**Table 2**

Survey Items Scored "Dissatisfied" or "Very Dissatisfied" by At Least Half of Respondents

Survey item	Responses (%)
Amount of paperwork required	68
State assessment tests for students	62
Family involvement	60
Time for nonteaching responsibilities	58
Providing students with deaf adult role models	56
Availability of appropriate tests for students	55
Professional development related to deaf education	52
Amount of planning time provided	50



**Table 3**

Ten Most Frequently Cited Sources of Job Satisfaction by Survey Respondents

Survey item	Responses (%)
1. Relationships with colleagues	94
2. Opportunity to use past training and education	93
3. Importance and challenge	93
4. Structuring lessons and exercises that promote learning	92
5. Job as a whole	91
6. Explaining important vocabulary and concepts	91
7. Professional qualifications of colleagues	90
8. Security and permanence	90
9. Pride and respect felt from being in this profession	88
10. Working with a wide age range of students	85

When we reviewed the corpus of responses to the question related to enjoyable aspects of the job, two clear themes emerged. The dominant theme related to the gratification that comes from working with students. This was represented by comments relating to watching their growth, being excited for their success, and seeing their self-esteem increase. Representative comments by teachers in this regard included “The children!!! Our activities, our explorations, our growth together is a blast”; “When the light bulb comes on and everything fits”; and “Knowing that I make a difference.” The sec-

ond theme in the section on enjoyable aspects focused on the concept of teamwork. Many respondents made a comment similar to that by a teacher who wrote, “I like being part of a team—working together and learning from them” [i.e., colleagues].

Responses to the open-ended question about job challenges were more diverse than the responses to the question about enjoyable aspects of the job. For the most part, the challenges were the same as those identified as causes of dissatisfaction in the scaled section. Specific challenges included “Keeping focus on students—not paperwork”;

“Breaking through the barriers of communication between students, parents, and school”; and “Trying to make the parents understand I can’t do it alone and that they are very important to the child’s learning process.”

Responses to the open-ended question that asked for additional comments were similar to those provided to the questions about challenges and enjoyable aspects of the job. Teachers identified the students as being a positive aspect of their job along with the support of the staff with whom they worked. Interestingly, lack of staff support was identified as a negative aspect of the profession, along with the amount of paperwork. Shortages of money and time were also mentioned as frustrating issues.

### Predicting Years in the Field

The final item on the survey asked respondents “Do you see yourself in this field in: 5, 10, 15, or more years?” The number of respondents and percentages for each group are summarized in Table 5. When groups are compared on the basis of percentages, some variety is seen. While 31% of the respondents said they planned to leave the field in 5 years, a number of them commented that this was due

**Table 4**

Survey Items Scored “Dissatisfied” or “Very Dissatisfied,” by Group

Survey item	All respondents	Itinerant	Elementary	Secondary	Resource room
Amount of paperwork required	68%	65%	70%	75%	81%
State assessment tests for students	62%	56%	68%	72%	67%
Family involvement	60%	51%	71%	75%	58%
Time for nonteaching responsibilities	58%	53%	68%	63%	58%
Providing students with deaf adult role models	56%	Positive <sup>a</sup>	54%	52%	60%
Availability of appropriate tests for students	55%	Positive <sup>a</sup>	59%	75%	56%
Professional development related to deaf education	52%	55%	Neutral <sup>b</sup>	Neutral <sup>b</sup>	53%
Amount of planning time provided	50%	Positive <sup>a</sup>	60%	Positive <sup>a</sup>	52%
Time to collaborate with professionals	40%	63%	63%	60%	56%
Time to collaborate with families	48%	45%	46%	59%	39%

<sup>a</sup> Most respondents gave this item a satisfactory rating.  
<sup>b</sup> Respondents were about evenly divided between positive and negative responses.

**Table 5**

Number of Years Survey Respondents Said They Planned to Stay in Deaf Education, by Group

	All respondents (N = 552)	Itinerant (N = 177)	Elementary (N = 135)	Secondary (N = 74)	Resource room (N = 34)
5 yrs.	169 (31%)	63 (36%)	40 (30%)	17 (23%)	9 (26%)
10 yrs.	175 (32%)	45 (25%)	40 (30%)	27 (36%)	15 (44%)
15 yrs.	78 (14%)	26 (15%)	24 (18%)	13 (18%)	3 (9%)
>15 yrs.	130 (24%)	43 (24%)	31 (23%)	17 (23%)	7 (21%)

*Notes.* Responses from teachers in the "other" job category are included in the "all respondents" category. Percentages may exceed 100 because of rounding.

to retirement. Unfortunately, this option was not presented on the questionnaire. Therefore, it is difficult to determine the percentage of respondents who were planning to retire as compared to those who planned to change fields.

### Discussion

Teaching is a dynamic, enjoyable, and challenging profession. It is the only profession dedicated to making the world a better place for future generations. While schools are the second most important place for helping children and youth reach their potential (the home is the first), it is really the teachers who are the core of the educational experience. As noted by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996), "What teachers know and do is the most important influence on what students learn" (p. 6). Quite simply, the quality of life that individuals enjoy and their contributions to society are directly related to their educational experience. If individuals do not acquire the necessary attitudes, knowledge, and skills during their years in school, they often experience a life of underachievement, dependency, and discouragement (Kozleski et al., 2000).

The purpose of the present study was to examine the perceptions of a large national sample of teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing

to determine how satisfied or dissatisfied these teachers were with their jobs. Responses were analyzed from 610 teachers from across the United States. Overall, the teachers indicated that they felt strongly positive toward their work—expressing satisfaction in 51 out of a possible 59 areas. In addition, on the item asking about their opinion of the "job as a whole," almost 91% reported that they were pleased with their job.

While the results of the present study may have immediate applications to teacher preparation programs, teachers in the field, and administrators, a few limitations need to be mentioned. First, the sample was voluntary. Consequently, there could be a self-selection bias. Individuals who were not satisfied with their job may not have taken the time to fill out and return the questionnaire. Second, program supervisors were asked to give the questionnaire to a teacher he or she worked with. The supervisor may have either consciously or unconsciously selected a teacher with a positive attitude toward his or her job. Third, the survey was sent out in November. Different results may have been obtained had the study been conducted later in the school year.

Teaching has always been a demanding profession. However, teaching today is a much more challenging occupation than in the past. Teachers are expected to comply with legal mandates, respond to public demands and criticism, and teach more complex con-

tent to a higher level of mastery. At the same time, the student population is becoming more diverse across a host of variables such as linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic factors. As a result, schools and the teachers who work in them currently face a set of pressures unlike those confronting any other organization or profession. Senge, Cambrom-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, and Kleiner (2000) have noted:

Schools are increasingly expected to compensate for the shifts in society and family that affect children: changes in family structure, rapidly shifting trends in television and popular culture, commercialism without end, poverty, inadequate nutrition and health care, violence, child abuse, teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, and incessant social upheaval. (pp. 9–10)

Unfortunately, more than any time in the history of the United States, a quality education—one that helps students acquire the skills, knowledge, and values necessary to be a success in tomorrow's world—is essential. Education is important for economic success as well as basic survival for two primary reasons: First, the economy is no longer willing to pay unskilled workers decent wages. Second, lack of education is increasingly linked to crime and welfare dependency (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

Teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing face many of the same challenges that other general education and special education teachers confront. However, in addition they must be experts in communication and language development. They must also be knowledgeable of the linguistics of English and American Sign Language, the general education curriculum, specialized curricula, informal and formal assessment procedures, and appropriate adaptations and modifications, as well as how to teach reading and vocabulary and how to fix hearing aids and FM systems. Finally, they have to be able to consult and collaborate with families and other professionals. The remainder of this section of the present article includes information about some of the specific factors that respondents indicated had a negative effect on their appreciation of their job. Included are recommendations for addressing these teachers' concerns.

### **Paperwork**

In 1983, J. L. Johnson reported that teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing were dissatisfied with the amount of paperwork they were required to complete. Twenty years after that study, teachers continue to identify paperwork as a primary problem. This problem needs to be addressed at the school district level as well as within teacher preparation programs.

Interestingly, while one of the goals during reauthorization of IDEA '97 was to decrease paperwork, it seems that this has not occurred. Paperwork issues appear to exist for two particular reasons. First, most teachers report that they do not see the value of the paperwork they are required to complete. Kozleski et al. (2000) reported that many teachers have the sense that much of the paperwork is designed to "keep the school system out of a lawsuit rather than to improve the quality of the student's education" (p. 10). Second, most teachers receive minimal support for completing paperwork.

While professionals outside education routinely have clerical support for paperwork tasks, most teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing are expected to complete their paperwork without clerical or technological support. The problem with this arrangement is that too often the most highly trained teachers spend many hours dealing with paperwork, while well-meaning but undertrained paraprofessionals are providing direct services to students (Marlowe, 2001). Or, teachers who do not have access to paraprofessional assistance are required to complete the paperwork at home during the evening.

Educational administrators should consider hiring paralegals to take care of large volumes of state- and federally mandated paperwork so that teachers have the time to teach students and collaborate with professionals and families. The National Education Association (NEA) has suggested that school districts have standardized IEPs as well as release time and compensation for additional work. It has also advocated the employment of full-time substitutes to cover classrooms for teachers in IEP meetings and the acquisition of Internet-based systems that help teachers write IEPs and track work flow. In addition, the NEA suggests that teachers share IEP drafts with parents before IEP meetings, so that family members can come to the meetings prepared to discuss options (Green, 2000).

Teacher preparation programs need to provide training in how to make templates for frequently created documents, in order to streamline teachers' nonteaching, nonconsulting duties. For example, since teachers are in constant communication with their students, the families of students, their colleagues, and administration, they need to learn how to develop sample forms and letters that can be word processed, saved, accessed, and changed to meet the needs of current situations. Examples of such notes and forms include checkmark or fill-in-the-blank notes to colleagues, responses to parent's notes, let-

ters to convey good news—or unpleasant news—to parents, classroom incident reports, itineraries for field trips, records of telephone conversations, e-mail correspondence, student participation and homework logs, and upcoming event and meetings notes. As form letters are created, stored on the hard drive, and backed up on disks, teachers can insert the information that applies to the particular situation, print it out, and send it, saving considerable time over the course of the school year. Another valuable resource is carbonless copy paper. It can be used for handwritten notes to students, families, colleagues, or administrators. The primary advantage of carbonless copy paper is that it gives teachers some freedom from being tied to the computer while simultaneously enabling them to retain a file copy without having to make time to run to the copy machine.

### **State Assessment Tests**

Currently there is a national movement for higher educational standards and greater accountability for all students. The new standards are stimulated by public dissatisfaction, poor performance by students, and the growing evidence that students will not succeed in meeting the demands of a knowledge-based society and economy if they do not encounter and master much more challenging work in school (Darling-Hammond, 1997). The mandates by state and federal governments have been supported by recent legislation (i.e., Goals 2000; the Improving America's Schools Act; the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997) assuring that students with disabilities are to be included to the maximum extent possible by being exposed to rigorous standards, expectations of improved academic achievement, and statewide assessments. Central to this notion is the assertion that all students are "entitled to instruction that is grounded in a common set of challenging standards" (McLaughlin, 1999, p. 10).



There is nothing inherently wrong with high standards and tests of performance. Standards communicate what students are expected to know and should be able to do. Benchmarks identify the expectations for specific grade levels, and rubrics—or scoring guides—identify what students are expected to accomplish on individual assignments and assessments (Reeves, 2000). The potential damage lies in the fact that standardized tests are becoming the ultimate measure of educational productivity. In some states, students' scores on these tests determine the rating their school receives when school report cards are issued. Financial awards are presented to the highest-performing public schools, and schools rated "unsatisfactory" must develop an improvement plan. In many states, a school that has been rated "unsatisfactory" that does not improve by the following year will be recommended by the state board of education for conversion to an independent charter school. Furthermore, in some states the tests are being used to determine which students will earn a high school diploma (R. C. Johnson, 2001). As a result, some students are choosing to drop out of school because they feel that they will never be able to pass the tests (National Center for Fair and Open Testing, 2000–2001), which hurts their chances of getting into postsecondary programs and limits their career choices (Moore, 2000).

Specific concerns of educators of students who are deaf or hard of hearing about state assessment tests can be grouped into five themes.

*First*, many students who are deaf or hard of hearing traditionally have not performed well on standardized tests that use a multiple-choice format. Most multiple-choice tests include items with limited context, ambiguously written items, and items that contain idiomatic expressions—all factors that negatively affect students' performance (R. C. Johnson, 2001).

*Second*, many educators and families are concerned that multiple-choice

questions fail to assess students' capacity to think. Most of these tests fail to offer students the opportunity to carry out extended analyses, to solve open-ended problems, or to display command of complex relationships, although these abilities are at the heart of higher-order competence (Resnick, 1987).

*Third*, standardized tests in general are unable to measure key personal and professional qualities such as initiative, creativity, imagination, conceptual thinking, curiosity, effort, judgment, commitment, and ethical reflection, as well as a host of other valuable dispositions and attributes (Ayers, 1993).

*Fourth*, in previous studies, teachers have reported spending substantial time preparing for the tests and giving students worksheet exercises as a form of test-taking practice, while simultaneously being forced to "narrow and fragment" the curriculum in order to prepare students for the tests (Madaus, West, Harmon, Lomax, & Viator, 1992). Practicing for the state assessment exams is by itself not necessarily a bad thing, especially if teachers carefully deconstruct the tasks by explaining what is expected and giving guidance on how to accomplish it. However, one has to ask if the time spent on extensive practice for test taking might be time better spent on involving students in more authentic and meaningful experiences with reading and writing, mathematical problem solving, laboratory activities, and research (Alvermann & Phelps, 2002).

*Fifth*, standardized tests are often culturally biased, and may be inadequate for evaluating the knowledge, achievement, and ability of students from certain cultures (Garcia & Pearson, 1994).

Regardless of the arguments over standards and assessments, the reality is that they pose both challenges and opportunities for teachers. The concerns of teachers as well as the potential impact of standardized tests are issues that will need to be closely monitored by families and professionals over the next few years.

## Family Involvement

As most experienced educators know, "a teacher's work is half done when students arrive at school healthy, secure, and eager to learn" (Gardner, 1999, p. 134). Most of the individual primary needs of students are met through their families. As a result, "one of the most important goals that schools can undertake is to develop healthy partnerships with families" (Pugach & L. J. Johnson, 2002, p. 203). Teachers who are positive and approach building family-school relationships with caring and sincerity are more likely to engage in interactions with families that lead to collaborative planning and decision making (Bodner-Johnson & Sass-Lehrer, 1999).

Partnerships between school and home enhance educational outcomes for students and provide opportunities to generalize learning beyond the 6 hours of the school day. According to the National Parent-Teacher Association (1998), the most accurate predictor of a student's achievement is the extent that the student's family is able to (a) create a home environment that encourages learning; (b) communicate high, yet reasonable, expectations for their child's achievement and future careers; and (c) become involved in their child's education at school and in the community.

Survey participants in the present study reported being dissatisfied with the amount of involvement families have in their child's education. There may be multiple reasons, as well as two divergent perspectives (families vs. professionals), on why families are not as involved as professionals would like. *First*, what professionals perceive as apathy or indifference may have more to do with the fact that families may be (a) exhausted from the multiple demands of providing for the family; (b) unable to coordinate the logistics of work schedules, transportation, and child care; (c) uncomfortable interacting with educational professionals because of previous negative experiences with other professionals; (d) experi-

encing feelings of disempowerment due to the lack of input they have had in the past regarding the quantity and quality of services provided for their child; or (e) from cultures that believe that teachers are to be respected above all and that teachers know what is best (Pugach & L. J. Johnson, 2002; A. Turnbull, & R. Turnbull, 2001). *Second*, professionals have specific challenges that make it difficult for them to be as available and inviting as they may want to be with families. Examples of limitations that may hinder professionals' performance in this area include (a) limited time to meet with family members during the school day, (b) pressure to ensure that students pass state standards examinations, (c) the expectations of school system administrators that teachers advocate on behalf of the school district, and (d) the lack of training that professionals have received in how to support and work with families (Pugach & L. J. Johnson, 2002; Thomas, Correa, & Morsink, 2001).

While there are numerous barriers that can hinder the development of school-home partnerships, teachers need to find ways to keep families informed and to feel like they are invited to be decision makers in the education of their child. "Positive communication is the single most important key in developing a partnership between families and professionals" (A. Turnbull & R. Turnbull, 2001, p. 202). It is best if the flow of communication starts as soon as the school year begins. Teachers can telephone primary caregivers at the start of the school year to introduce themselves and to communicate their desire to have ongoing communication throughout the year. If families do not have a telephone, then a postcard or a personal letter can be sent. Simultaneously, the translation of all communication for non-English-speaking families is critical. Once contact has been established, a variety of ways can be used to ensure ongoing communication, for example, home visits, conferences, handbooks, occasional notes, home-school notebooks, announce-

ments for specific events, videotaping of classroom activities, newsletters, regular progress messages, telephone calls, and e-mails (Hallau, 2002; Pugach & L. J. Johnson, 2002; A. Turnbull, & R. Turnbull, 2001).

Numerous additional actions can be undertaken by school personnel to establish positive partnerships with families. Hallau (2002) suggests

1. including information from the parents and caregivers as part of the assessment and goal development processes
2. developing lending libraries composed of sign books and videotapes in different languages that families can use in the home
3. hiring home sign-language tutors
4. scheduling afternoon parenting and sign language classes
5. sponsoring picnics with children and adults who are deaf or hard of hearing
6. organizing fathers-only events
7. establishing panels with adults who are deaf or hard of hearing
8. setting up panels with parents and caregivers of deaf and hard of hearing children
9. coordinating workshops to address access to community social services and health care

### **Time for Nonteaching Responsibilities and Planning**

Teachers surveyed for the present study noted the lack of time for nonteaching responsibilities and for planning as critical concerns. This is not surprising in today's world, where the majority of us operate under intense time constraints. Each of us seems to have an abundance of things to do and insufficient time in which to do them.

Teachers need to address the problem of insufficient time from two directions—professionally, by obtaining the help of administration, and personally, by learning to manage time better. Professionally, teachers need to help administrators understand that

teaching, planning, and collaborating are all time-consuming activities. Opportunities must be created for teachers to interact, and structures must be made available to sustain those interactions. To provide these blocks of time, many school district administrators are developing schedules under which students either arrive late or are dismissed early on a regular basis. In some schools, these shortened days occur each week. In others, they happen once a month. Professionals use the time to confer, attend professional development activities, visit with families, or plan or develop IEPs. A second alternative is to employ substitute teachers. When funding for substitutes is a problem, some districts rely on volunteers from parent-teacher organizations or disability advocacy groups, or education students from local universities (Friend & Cook, 2000).

On a personal level, it is always difficult to distinguish between the lack of time and the poor use of time. Consequently, given the pace of contemporary society, it is important that teachers try to identify ways to be more efficient. If teachers put a high value on their time and learn to use it more effectively, they will be able to accomplish more as well as lead more fulfilling lives. They need to learn to be on guard against time leaks such as overly frequent or poorly run meetings, repeated interruptions, resistance to asking for help, or the inability to end conversations in a sensitive way.

### **Adult Role Models**

All children benefit from interaction with role models. Role models provide positive images of adult behavior. Every child who is deaf or hard of hearing should have the opportunity to meet and interact with adults who are deaf or hard of hearing (Rosen, 1992; Stewart & Kluwin, 2001). Yet, because deafness is an uncommon disability, most students will not incidentally come in contact with adults who are deaf or hard of hearing. In addi-

tion, there is a shortage of teachers who themselves are deaf or hard of hearing. Research reported by Andrews and Jordan (1993) suggests that approximately 15% of teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing are themselves deaf or hard of hearing. Accordingly, more adults who are deaf or hard of hearing should be encouraged to participate in the lives of children who are deaf or hard of hearing. Schools should hire teachers, counselors, sign language instructors, and paraprofessionals who are deaf or hard of hearing. Such actions will help students who are deaf or hard of hearing develop the desire and expectation to become competent professionals when they grow up. In addition, schools can structure events that involve deaf adults from the community or from around the state. For example, schools can

1. organize a Deaf awareness week
2. invite adults who are deaf or hard of hearing to come to school to tell stories or read children's literature
3. invite adults who are deaf or hard of hearing to share information about their careers
4. introduce both hearing students and students who are deaf or hard of hearing to books and videos about deafness, Deaf culture, and successful deaf individuals
5. invite college students who are deaf or hard of hearing to share their experiences after high school

#### Availability of Appropriate Tests

Say the word *assessment* to educators and you often receive a mixed reaction. On the one hand, they view assessment as a critical aspect of the educational process. On the other hand, they perceive it as a necessary evil.

For too many professionals, the terms *assessment* and *test* are synonyms. This should not be the case. Assessment has been defined as "a process of collecting data for the purposes of making decisions about in-

dividuals and groups" (Salvia & Ysseldyke, 2001, p. 5). In truth, tests are not the most meaningful way to measure a person's growth; they are just convenient. Simultaneously, the best assessments take place over time rather than in the space of a single day. Consequently, informal approaches that use rating scales, checklists, or observation provide valuable sources of information. In actuality, the exact procedures for assessing students should vary according to the purpose. What is important is that the assessment provide useful information, that students understand what they are being asked to do, that the assessment is done by appropriately trained individuals, and that the instruments and procedures are free of cultural bias.

Language delays and the lack of mediated experiences that occur for many students who are deaf or hard of hearing affect the assessment process. In addition, relatively few instruments have been developed specifically for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. And many of the measures used are adaptations of measures used with normally hearing students. These adaptations often include changes in instructions, test items, and test procedures, which, in turn, likely affect the assessment results (Bradley-Johnson & Evans, 1991).

As we have already noted, there is growing demand that students who are deaf or hard of hearing be held to the same standards as their hearing peers. Given the paucity of assessment instruments that have been standardized on students who are deaf or hard of hearing, it seems appropriate to use available tools and procedures and make proper adaptations and modifications in the assessment process. Adaptations can be made before, as well as during, testing. Pretest adaptations include additional practice with similar test items, study guides, practice tests, instruction in test-taking skills and strategies, and modifications to test construction. During the test, it is appropriate to allow test items to be read

or signed to the student, permit alternative forms of response, conduct the assessment in alternative testing sites, use alternative forms of the test, or extend the time limits.

In light of the problems with traditional testing, IDEA '97 supports the use of informal assessment procedures and performance-based assessments. Performance-based assessments require students to work on meaningful tasks and to produce authentic products. For example, a student may be required to make a presentation, develop a videotape, or produce a book for younger students that summarizes the content of a unit. Another type of assessment currently in use is portfolio assessment. Portfolios emphasize student products rather than tests and test scores. Stockhouse and Luckner (1996) suggested that portfolios are beneficial to use with students who are deaf or hard of hearing because they

1. show the connections between learning objectives, student efforts, and accomplishments
2. allow assessment of student learning to be viewed as a multidimensional process
3. permit continuous and systematic assessment
4. give students an opportunity to reflect on their work and to share in the process of assessment with their teachers.

An important component of performance-based assessments and portfolios is the use of rubrics to facilitate evaluation of student products. Rubrics specify the criteria for evaluating student performance. The benefits of using rubrics is that they help teachers clarify and communicate their expectations, make grading more objective and consistent, and provide avenues for giving specific feedback to students. Regardless of the form of assessment, it is important to keep in mind that "the primary purpose of assessment is to improve student learning" (National Forum on Assessment, 1995, p. 6).

## Professional Development

Like all occupations, teaching requires continuous professional growth. Given the changes in the student population as well as the push for higher standards, a reasonable response to the demands being placed on teachers would be to provide intense and ongoing professional development opportunities to help them keep pace with new, emerging knowledge and skills required by their new roles. Yet the results of the present study suggest that such opportunities are not being provided. This finding supports the concerns of Kozleski et al. (2000), who reported that “most professional development is uncoordinated, fragmented, and unrelated to the classroom realities faced by teachers” (p. 11).

Professional development is essential for two additional reasons. The first is the effect it has on student achievement. Joyce and Showers (1995) have succinctly stated, “The key to student growth is educator growth” (p. 214). Quite simply, the more knowledge and skills teachers have, the more likely they are to increase their repertoire of teaching and collaborating strategies, which in turn will help them to teach challenging subject matter and to use emerging methods, forms of assessment, and technologies.

The second reason for structuring professional development is the fact that it is a proactive method of countering teacher stress. Joyce and Showers (1995) have noted, “Much of the stress felt by educators is traceable to the lack of a solid staff development system” (p. 3). To address this concern, Cooley and Yovanoff (1996) taught special education teachers and related-service providers stress management skills such as changing destructive thinking associated with situations. They also taught a four-step collegial dialogue process to improve the ability to identify and solve problems collaboratively. Teachers and service providers in both treatment groups outperformed control groups on measures of job satisfaction, burnout, and organizational

commitment. Yee (1990) had emphasized the benefits of such programs: “Workplaces providing opportunities for growth tend to produce effective, highly involved teachers” (p. 5). Similar professional development programs need to be implemented with deaf education personnel so that they have the opportunity to regularly gain new knowledge and skills while simultaneously reminding themselves and their colleagues of the positive influences they have on the lives of the students, families, and professionals they work with.

## Summary

Deaf students arguably present the most complex challenge for teachers of any group of students in both the general and special education populations. Every corner of their educational experience is multidimensional and each dimension has the potential to significantly impact their academic achievement. (Stewart and Kluwin, 2001, p. 14)

The results of the present study suggest that teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing are in general satisfied with their jobs. This is wonderful news. It is great to see that, overall, professionals in deaf education are fulfilled by the work they do with students and families and their relationships with colleagues, and are generally accepting of the challenges they encounter on a daily basis. Hopefully, these positive feelings lead to improved services. As Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2002) have suggested, “When people feel good, they work at their best. Feeling good lubricates mental efficiency, making people better at understanding information and using decision rules in complex judgments, as well as more flexible in their thinking” (p. 16).

As we look to the future, however, it is obvious that the need to reduce attrition and increase retention of teach-

ers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing is a serious concern, particularly in light of current and projected personnel shortages (Kozleski et al., 2000; Riley, 2000). Attention by teacher preparation programs as well as school districts to the areas of dissatisfaction identified by teachers in the present study may prove equally beneficial. Dozier has noted, “The highest standards in the world, the best facilities, and the strongest accountability measures will do little good if we do not have talented, dedicated, and well-prepared teachers in every classroom” (*Statement by Terry Dozier*, 1997, p. 1). Consequently, everyone in teacher preparation and school administration needs to do everything in their power to assist professionals in the field of deaf education to find ways of maximizing their achievements, to feel pride in past successes, and to know that other colleagues share their feelings of frustration and discouragement. In addition, deaf education professionals need to find positive ways of dealing effectively with the changing demands of the job, as well as to identify ways to protect and take care of themselves so that they can meet future challenges effectively and productively.

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## APPENDIX A

### Items Included in the Questionnaire “Job Satisfaction of Teachers of Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing”

Salary and fringe benefits	Adapting the curriculum to meet the needs of students	Working with students from diverse cultures
Importance and challenge	Opportunities to improve sign communication skills	Helping students develop essential life skills
Opportunity for promotion and advancement	Assessment of students for placement and IEP [individualized education program] planning	Opportunity for leadership
Security and permanence	Time to collaborate with professionals	Working with a wide age range of students
Opportunity to use past training and education	Time to collaborate with families	Support from professional organization(s)
Physical work environment	Managing student behavior	Structuring lessons and experiences that promote learning
Pride and respect felt from being in this profession	Availability of appropriate tests for students	Helping students make successful transitions
Relationships with colleagues	Professional development related to deaf education	Teaching complex subject matter
Amount of paperwork required	The daily schedule	Camaraderie and optimism among people you work with
Number of students on caseload	Providing students with deaf adult role models	Explaining important vocabulary and concepts
Availability of support staff	Family involvement	Help in establishing professional goals
Supervision of interpreters/note takers/paraprofessionals	Developing IFSPs [individualized family service plans], IEPs, and communication plans	Amount of planning time provided
State licensure requirements for teachers	Communication philosophy of program	Time for nonteaching responsibilities (e.g., IEP conferences)
State assessment tests for students	Providing staff development	Celebrating holidays and important events with students
Availability of resources (e.g., supplies, textbooks)	Teaching students how to manage their behavior	Being part of an educational team
The due process system	Amplification systems used by students	Dealing with crisis situations
Amount of time spent with students	Application of the inclusion philosophy	Opportunities to discuss problems related to teaching
Professional qualifications of colleagues	Helping students with additional disabilities	Job as a whole
Support from immediate supervisor		
Interpreting for students		
Teaching sign classes		
Use and availability of technology		
Quantity and quality of feedback from supervisors		