

RESEARCH AT GALLAUDET

A Publication of the Gallaudet Research Institute at Gallaudet University



Fall 2003

High Stakes Testing Conference Held at Gallaudet

By Robert Clover Johnson

On November 15-16, 2002, the GRI-sponsored national conference "High Stakes Testing: Are Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children Being Left Behind?" was held at the Gallaudet University Kellogg Conference Center. Three hundred people from 42 states participated, including teachers and counselors of deaf students, school administrators, teacher educators, experts on educational testing, educational researchers, test designers, members of deaf advocacy associations, parents of deaf children, and representatives of various governmental agencies.

The conference was a major event featuring introductory remarks by I. King Jordan (President of Gallaudet University) and Stephanie Lee (Director, Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education), a keynote address by James Popham (author of *The Truth About Testing: An Educator's Call to Action* and many books on testing and evaluation), and presentations by other nationally-known experts on testing and testing-related issues, including Jay Heubert (co-editor of the National Research Council's *High Stakes: Testing for Tracking, Promotion, and Graduation*), Carolyn Massad (National Consultant for English Language Arts, Harcourt Educational Measurement), Neal Kingston (Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, Measured Progress), Martha Thurlow (Director, National Center on Educational Outcomes), and Shalia Cowan (Director, Division of Services for the Deaf, Texas Education Agency). Also featured were many presentations from the "front lines" by educators of deaf and hard of hearing students.

GRI Director and conference co-chair Michael Karchmer said at the opening of the conference that presenters had been selected to represent a broad range of opinion. He predicted that all in attendance would have much to learn and that consensus was unlikely. He advised attendees to keep their minds open as they weighed one

perspective against another and to be prepared to change their minds.

The scope of the conference presentations was too broad to summarize adequately in a single issue of this newsletter. This issue of *Research at Gallaudet*, therefore, pursues a limited range of important recurring themes of the conference. Other planned materials, including a book, a videotape, and another newsletter issue, will encompass these and other conference themes.

Testing and Deaf Students' Difficulties with English

Midway through a series of panel presentations by educators of deaf students on the first day of the conference (November 15, 2002), Michael (Mickey) Jones, director of the Evaluation Center at the Illinois School for the Deaf, told a story that evoked many nods of recognition. In 1992, he said, he'd participated in a task force set up in Illinois to make decisions about the appropriateness of the Illinois Goal Assessment Program (IGAP) for use with special education students. His role had been to examine the test, then inform the task force about difficulties deaf and hard of hearing students might have taking it. He had told the task force that deafness can have a severe impact on reading and writing ability and that results on the IGAP—a challenging paper and pencil test—might misrepresent the true capabilities of most deaf students. To illustrate, he had described a bright fifteen-year-old deaf boy whose performance IQ was 133 and whose math computation skills were above grade level. The boy was fluent in American Sign Language and could demonstrate a broad range of knowledge in ASL. On standardized tests, however, his reading level had been measured at six grades below the average for his hearing peers. After seeing a sample of this boy's writing, the task



Michael (Mickey) Jones

force had decided that deaf students in Illinois should be waived from taking the IGAP.

But that was 1992, ten years before the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) was signed into law. Everyone in Jones's audience got the point: Things are different now.

"High stakes testing" is about to become a reality for deaf as well as hearing students in a growing number of states across the country. In the near future failing these tests will have serious consequences in state after state. Many deaf and hard of hearing students, because of their difficulties with these tests, may be held back in school or may not receive a standard high school diploma.

Jones was making his remarks as part of a panel of educators representing schools in four states—Massachusetts, New York, Illinois, and California—that have been striving to prepare deaf students for these tests. Many

"High Stakes" Resources Being Developed

Editors are currently developing a book based on conference presentations. The creation of a videotape of conference highlights is also underway. When such materials become available, announcements will appear in this newsletter and on the website: <http://gri.gallaudet.edu/HighStakes/>.

Individuals interested in reading or participating in ongoing listserv discussions about high stakes testing and deaf and hard of hearing students are urged to subscribe (at no charge) to a GRI-supported listserv called "High-stakes – High Stakes Testing of Deaf Children." You may subscribe by filling out an online subscription form at <http://gri.gallaudet.edu/mailman/listinfo/high-stakes>.

As a subscriber, you may read archival e-mails, share insights, call attention to important links, and ask for help with test-related situations or problems affecting deaf test-takers. Also, you can select the option of getting a daily digest in lieu of individual e-mails, in case you're concerned about getting too many messages. It is also possible to request "no mail" and participate in the listserv by reading its archival material. You may unsubscribe at any time.

Another GRI website you might wish to explore concerns the broader problem of equity in testing deaf and hard of hearing individuals regardless of age: <http://gri.gallaudet.edu/TestEquity/>. This website provides numerous links pertinent to the topics discussed in this issue of *Research at Gallaudet*.



A serious mood prevailed at high stakes testing conference

statewide assessments are administered as early as the third grade, and tests are given thereafter on schedules that vary from state to state all the way through high school, the process sometimes ending with a make-or-break high school exit exam. In elementary and middle school grades, annual tests are becoming increasingly common as states endeavor to comply with the educational accountability requirements of NCLB.

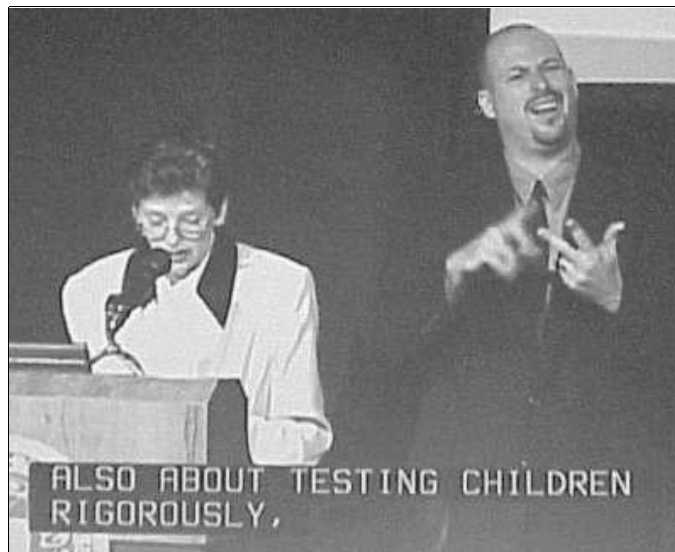
Jones said that "even though some of the same task force members that waived deaf students from IGAP in 1992 think the current Illinois Standards of Achievement Test (ISAT) is equally inappropriate for deaf students," these students are now required to take the test. More appropriate and equitable assessments for deaf students, in Jones's opinion, would use sign language for many of their questions and answers, giving students like the 15-year-old boy a better chance to pass. But the complex issues associated with using sign language as a medium for conveying questions and answers are far from resolved and the ability to understand written English is one of the skills achievement tests are generally designed to measure. (Signing of test-taking instructions is already permitted as an accommodation in most states when recommended by a student's individualized education program.)

The Current Wave of Educational Reform

Setting the stage for later presentations, educational consultant Jo Thomason of Albuquerque, New Mexico attempted to summarize the historical significance, requirements, and implications of NCLB, which she called "Nickleby" (as in the Dickens novel). Thomason said that "the current frenzy to test children rigorously and frequently is based on a widespread perception that our public schools are failing." She emphasized the word "perception," saying that in her opinion the findings that the achievement levels of American students are falling

behind those of other nations—one of the assertions of the influential 1983 publication *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*—is at least partly a result of the fact that "the U.S. is still one of the only countries committed to educating *all* of our children to their absolutely maximum potential." Comparing average achievement levels of U.S. students to averages of more select populations in other countries, she said, is at best misleading.

Thomason added that test scores and graduation rates would ideally be just two of many measures of school accountability. Other measures might include student



Jo Thomason in video simulcast with interpreter Bruce Riley and real time captioning

employability, evidence of responsible citizenship, and the tendency to pursue lifelong learning. In reality, though, graduation rates and test results are the only measures consistently relied on by those writing for a general audience.

According to Thomason, NCLB is requiring that all states develop high standards of learning measurable in different grade-level tests in English, math, and other academic areas. Once these standards are developed, each state has twelve years to improve the effectiveness of teaching to such an extent that "all students—*all*—will meet or exceed the proficiency levels of academic achievement standards developed by each state."

Thomason said that the framers of NCLB understood that schools are likely to have difficulty, at first, ensuring that all their students meet the standards. There may be individual students for whom the tests will be inappropriate temporarily, but schools are obliged to administer the tests to at least 95% of students from any of four subgroups, including students with disabilities, English language learners, ethnic and racial minorities,

and students who are economically disadvantaged. Depending on how students in schools perform at the beginning of the twelve-year period, schools must then make "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) toward the goal of having all students ultimately meet or exceed the standards. These standards vary greatly from state to state, but many states are developing rigorous standards designed to measure students' preparedness for the demands of higher education and a complex information age. Virtually all state tests require a high degree of reading proficiency for most parts of their tests, unless special accommodations are offered for aspects not intended to measure proficiency in reading English.

Research at Gallaudet is available free of charge. Address inquiries to *Research at Gallaudet*, Gallaudet Research Institute, Gallaudet University, 800 Florida Ave., NE, Washington, DC 20002-3660. Phone: (202) 651-5995 (V/TTY). Special thanks are due to Michael Karchmer, Ross Mitchell, Carol Traxler, and Sue Hotto for their abundant and extremely helpful editorial suggestions. Thanks also to Mickey Jones, Jon Levy, Pat Moore, Adrienne Robins, Ruth Loew, Kenneth Darensbourg, and Jerry Jatho for their helpful reviews and comments. Thanks also are due to Michael Karchmer and Judy Mounty for their pivotal roles as co-chairs of the conference "High Stakes Testing: Are Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children Being Left Behind?," plus Thomas Baldrige, David Martin, Robert Weinstock, Susan Medina, Nan Truitt, and the many other individuals who helped plan the event which provided the material for this issue. Thanks to James Dellon and staff from Gallaudet's TV Department for providing videotapes of the conference and to the 2003 Walter Ross Fellow, Sera Stanis, for her careful transcription of the videotaped material. Thanks to Peck Choo for many of the photos used in this issue. Comments related to high stakes testing and deaf students as discussed in this issue are welcomed by the editor and may be sent by e-mail to Robert.C.Johnson@gallaudet.edu.

Disclaimer: This newsletter reports on a broad range of opinion. The views presented do not represent an official position of Gallaudet University or the Gallaudet Research Institute.

Michael A. Karchmer, Director
Gallaudet Research Institute

Robert Clover Johnson
Senior Research Editor

Copyright ©August 2003
Gallaudet Research Institute
Gallaudet University, Washington, D.C.

Another presenter, Barbara Raimondo, a member of a federally appointed Commission of Experts in Special Education and the mother of two deaf children, later explained that NCLB requires that schools and school districts produce annual report cards on how well individual schools are progressing. She said that the Commission had advised the U.S. Department of Education that parents of children with disabilities should be given annual report cards on how well disabled children in individual schools and school districts are performing.

Both Thomason and Raimondo described three phases of sanctions that will result if schools have difficulty reaching these goals. If a school is falling behind the expected AYP at the end of the first two years of testing, technical assistance will be offered—perhaps through teacher training programs—that are intended to help a school catch up. If results are still inadequate after four

"No Child Left Behind really isn't about high stakes testing of students. It's not about graduation tests, and it's not about promotion tests. It's about school accountability, and it's important to keep that distinction clear."

Martha Thurlow

years, however, "corrective action" will be taken, usually in the form of a school district taking over the school. If a school district takeover fails to solve the problem, the school, or possibly a whole district, may be restructured, meaning personnel at the appropriate level may be replaced and a different approach attempted.

Martha Thurlow, Director of the National Center on Educational Outcomes, emphasized in her presentation that the system described above is designed to ensure that schools and teachers are effectively educating students in accord with state standards. *"No Child Left Behind* really isn't about high stakes testing of students," Thurlow said.



Jay Heubert

"It's not about the graduation tests, and it's not about promotion tests. It's about school accountability and it's important to keep that distinction clear." Jay Heubert, associate professor of Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, suggested in his presentation that high stakes

penalties for students are being imposed by some states largely as a way of motivating students to do their part to help school systems meet accountability goals. He characterized such state tactics as "demoralizing" and "immoral."

Achievement Data on Deaf Students

In the view of many, the entire system of NCLB—including its emphasis on meeting or exceeding state standards and adequate yearly progress—was created without enough thought about the challenges faced by deaf or hard of hearing students whose access to spoken language—through no fault of their own—is limited or indirect. There are undoubtedly some deaf students who will be able to attain the required educational levels, but most educators of deaf students would probably agree with Mickey Jones that deafness can have a "severe impact on reading and writing ability" and that this, in turn, is likely to prevent the majority of deaf students from performing as well on standards-based tests as their states suggest they should.

Elizabeth (Betsy) Case, Director of Research on Special Populations for Harcourt Educational Measurement, which produces the Stanford Achievement Test, presented achievement data on deaf students; the data go a long way toward explaining much of the tension felt by participants at the conference when learning about the high expectation levels of NCLB.

Case reported that Stanford Achievement Tests have been administered to deaf and hard of hearing students nationwide for decades now. The tests have been normed and the results analyzed by researchers in the Gallaudet Research Institute.



Elizabeth (Betsy) Case and Martha Thurlow

In 1982, the average reading comprehension score of 18-year-old deaf and hard of hearing students in the U.S. was about a third grade equivalent. By the 1995-1996 academic year, this age group's reading comprehension scores still averaged at slightly below a fourth grade level.

Case said that these Stanford Achievement Test results suggest that "deaf and hard of hearing students are still functioning on high stakes tests six grades below grade level." (See Karchmer and Mitchell, 2003.) She said that these students are "clearly experiencing *extra, extra* difficulties trying to pass high stakes testing."

Case indicated that test designers are aware of these difficulties and are increasingly trying to create tests with "universal design" considerations, eliminating items that discriminate needlessly against specific subpopulations. She added that the challenges presented by high stakes tests may have long-range benefits for deaf and hard of hearing students as teachers and researchers seek better ways to instruct deaf students. Jo Thomason similarly concluded her talk by urging all who are personally or professionally involved in deaf students' lives to search for ways to lift deaf students' achievement levels higher. "This law," she said, referring to NCLB, "is a vital piece of legislation that can enhance the education of all our children. There are great challenges for parents, teachers, teacher-trainers, researchers, to bring our best thinking together in the effort to meet those challenges. We have no other choice."

Thomason's last words are important. Many people involved in deaf education may be hoping that the high stakes testing movement is a misguided fad that will go away once harmful consequences for students become clear. Thomason doesn't think this will happen. Her view that educational reform is creating unavoidable challenges for deaf students and their teachers was reinforced by the keynote address of James Popham, UCLA professor emeritus and noted expert on educational testing. Popham's talk was entitled "High Stakes Tests: Harmful, Permanent, Fixable." Popham stated that some high stakes tests are going to harm many children, including deaf

children and that tests—in various ways—will become a permanent part of American life. He said that the tests can be made fairer by focusing on a more limited set of important and teachable skills, but that they will continue to be very challenging, especially for marginalized populations. The key elements of the solution to the problem advocated by Popham, called "instructionally supportive assessment," relate to the specification of curriculum standards; they must pertain to skills and knowledge that are: 1) of unarguable importance, 2) described with teachers and teaching in mind, 3) measurable and accurately reportable, and 4) truly teachable by ordinary classroom teachers. (Popham's views, which had considerable impact on the conference, will be presented more fully in a forthcoming book, a videotape, and an additional newsletter issue.)

Is an irresistible force meeting an immovable object?

Considering the low average achievement levels that have been seen for deaf and hard of hearing students over the years, it appears that the high expectations of NCLB are on the verge of a collision with the experiences of many educators of deaf students. The rationale that motivated the *No Child Left Behind Act* was a belief that high standards are attainable by all children. NCLB was written and passed by Congress and signed into law largely because a broad cross-section of the American public clearly supports greater school accountability and high standards for students. It would appear that many policymakers on both the state and national levels are willing to believe that teachers who have come to regard lower achievement as inevitable among any group of high school students are guilty of low expectations and may in some way be holding the students back.



Claire Ramsey

Claire Ramsey challenged this view. The author of *Deaf Children in Public Schools* and a teacher trainer at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Ramsey conveyed how teachers of deaf and hard of hearing students react to the notion that policymakers are qualified to pass judgment on their teaching capabilities:

"... no one likes to be accused of doing a bad job. And few of us like to be punished. But the larger forces at work in *No Child Left Behind* are very American. And one way to make sense of this law is



James (Jim) Popham and interpreter Mary Thumann in high impact presentation

to view it as an instance of a phenomenon familiar in American civil life: the trespassing of 'lay people,' in this case politicians, on professional territory, here the expertise of teachers of the deaf."

Alluding to U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige's widely reported disapproval of the sort of "excuses" teachers often provide concerning low achievement levels among their students, Ramsey said,

"Currently, although we might understand that schools should be prepared to provide support for children who are not completely ready to learn, we are also told that we can no longer accept excuses for poor outcomes. So, even though teachers who say things like 'Well, you don't see what comes in my classroom door' know that children's schooling outcomes are not all related to school, suddenly all of us are supposed to ignore the other factors in children's lives that might make it hard for all of them to get above average scores on their standardized tests."

If such disputes were purely rhetorical, that would be one thing, but this clash of perceptions may lead to real consequences for deaf students and their teachers if schools withhold diplomas from students who fail tests and if their teachers are blamed for those students' failures. In some states, like California, funds are being withheld from schools that have an unacceptable proportion of test failures, so teachers are now under pressure to do everything possible to bring low-scoring students up to speed.

In fact, in the states where testing is an intense enterprise and where the high expectations of NCLB are operationalized, schools have little choice but to take some sort of stand on testing issues. Partly for that reason, one of the highlights of the November conference was the school panel that occurred in the early afternoon of November 15 on which representatives of schools in four states—California, Illinois, New York, and Massachusetts—described how they are coping with the challenges.

The Diploma Issue

The representatives from California and Illinois, all of whom identified themselves as supporters of educational reform and high standards, spoke candidly about the harms likely to occur to deaf and hard of hearing children as a result of high stakes testing.

Jon Levy, president of California Administrators of the Deaf and principal of University High School, Orange County, California, began his presentation by saying,



Jon Levy

"I am definitely a proponent of high expectations, raising the proverbial bar, standards-based education, and school accountability. However, I feel strongly that utilizing one test solely to decide whether a deaf

student will be able to graduate from high school with a diploma is not educationally sound, nor inherently fair. Multiple measures, including passing core curriculum components, performance based assessments, and portfolios would illustrate what deaf students *can* do, and are more in alignment with the spirit of an individualized educational plan."

Levy then described the many assessments California offers, culminating in the California High School Exit Exam.

"This [exit exam] is the newest addition and it will have the greatest impact on deaf students in our state. Beginning next year, all students will have to pass both the English and math sections to receive high school diplomas. As of today, no differential standards or alternative assessments can result in a high school diploma. Again, this test will be looking at reading, English, and math. The exams are administered three times a year, starting in the tenth grade. The reading and English portion contains elements based on tenth grade standards. And the math section includes computation and operations through Algebra 1. . . . Sign language or audio or oral presentations are not allowed on the English language portions"

Levy pointed out that in 2000-2001, 52 percent of *all* students in California did *not* pass the exam, remarking that "when the legislators that mandate this test find out that their own children may not be getting diplomas, we may be expecting some major changes." He said that special education students had the lowest passing rates, only 13 percent of this group. He concluded as follows:

"What was probably most hurtful of all was when I attended a State Department of Education workshop. I told them that currently students who pass state-required classes and meet the minimum requirements through a parallel curriculum are awarded diplomas. I pointed out that these current mandates—tenth grade

English and algebra and math may preclude 80 to 85 percent of California's deaf students from receiving a high school diploma. The response was clear, stark, and very upsetting. They said to me that it is you administrators and your teachers of the deaf that are at fault. *If you simply raised your standards and had higher expectations for these deaf children, they would be reading at the twelfth grade level and passing the High School Exit Exam."*



Pat Moore

The next presenter, also from California, was Pat Moore, Director of Instruction at the California School for the Deaf in Fremont. Moore's presentation was based on the premise that employability should be as important a part of accountability as test

scores. By this measure, the decision of the California legislature to deny high school diplomas to students who fail the High School Exit Exam, beginning in 2003-2004, will make deaf students in California considerably less employable than in the past. Her comments deserve to be quoted at some length:

"Preparing students for postsecondary education and employment is the heart of our program for deaf and hard of hearing students at the California School for the Deaf in Fremont. Our school has instituted many activities to prepare our students for the High School Exit Exam. Our teachers are working fast and furiously to get our students to master grade level concepts, but the reality is that no matter how hard we push these students, the majority arrive at our school in the ninth grade with a first or second grade reading level. We have to be honest with the parents and tell them that their children are significantly delayed and will probably not pass the High School Exit Exam by the time they leave our program.

We have to serve all students. We don't get to pick who we want to serve. We serve students from dysfunctional families, students with drug and alcohol abuse problems, mental health problems. Even with these enormous challenges, we have made a commitment as a school that we will provide a quality academic program and a quality tech ed program to get our students ready for employment—especially students who cannot pass the High School Exit Exam and for students who have different interests, aptitudes, and skills as individuals. We can't

lump all of our students into just one group and say 'We want you all to go to college.' That's not reality.

At the present time, as in the past, the unemployment and underemployment rate for deaf adults is already staggering in the United States. The reality of high stakes testing and high school exit exams is that there will be even fewer employment opportunities. I asked our Career Center to call a variety of companies that had hired Fremont graduates over the years. We called Alaska Airlines, Federal Express, UPS, Kaiser, the Post Office, the Waste Management trash company, Sears, Pepsi-Cola and they *all* require a high school diploma.

Federal Express is a wonderful company. Many deaf people work there. They have communication access with interpreters around the clock. They have good wages and benefits. Many of our students could do that job without a diploma, but the corporate office says they must have a diploma to even go in the front door and fill out an application. We called the corporate headquarters and asked if they would be willing to reduce that requirement and they said *no*, they were not interested in reducing that requirement.

So, we are very concerned about the future of our deaf students who are going to fall through the cracks because of this one test."

Moore expressed concern that deaf students, facing closed doors in the world of work, will be all the more tempted to be dependent on Supplemental Security Income (SSI) checks, because "What's the point?"

Working Within the System and Pushing the Envelope

The presentations by educators at the Lexington School for the Deaf in New York and The Learning Center for Deaf Children in Framingham, Massachusetts differed from the California and Illinois presentations primarily in emphasis, preferring to underscore the potential benefits to deaf students of participating in their states' testing program. This notwithstanding, they indicated concerns about potential diploma penalties.

Michael Bello, Executive Director of The Learning Center for Deaf Children, for instance, in discussing the situation in Massachusetts, said that starting in the 2002-2003 academic year, high school seniors must pass all parts of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) and get a "diploma or nothing." Emphasizing this, he said, "If you don't pass the test, there is *nothing else*. We were faced with this long before students began to face the general curriculum." At the end of his presentation, Bello repeated, "There's *no diploma* if

students don't pass." Then he added, "There is still argument going on with politicians in Massachusetts about the diploma issue."



Kevin Keane

Kevin Keane, Superintendent of Lexington School for the Deaf, pointed out that ninth graders who entered Lexington in 2001 will be deprived of the currently available option of getting a "local diploma" in lieu of the extremely rigorous Regents Diploma. Beginning in the 2004-2005 academic year, he said, profoundly deaf students at Lexington, like all other high

school seniors in New York, must pass five Regents exams in the state's general curriculum and get "the Regents Diploma or nothing." He pointed out that if a student passes four of the five tests but fails another, the student does not get a diploma. Keane predicted that once many middle class parents in New York realize their children will not be getting diplomas "there will be a great outcry."

Both Keane and Bello have concluded that, in light of the current emphasis on high standards for all students, schools serving deaf and hard of hearing students would be best advised to devote as much energy and creativity as possible to helping their students actually pass the tests. As Keane put it, "the all or nothing issue [of having to pass the Regents exams] is a critical issue, but people at the state level are expressing a desire to push an envelope for schools to kind of move forward in some ways." Bello amplified this view: "I agree with Kevin that there is a strong political strategy that you plow ahead and you go through all this controversy and just fend off whatever lawsuits come because the bottom line is schools are going to become accountable."

The question is: How will schools with deaf students become accountable?

Adrianne Robins, Reading Specialist at Lexington, described that school's approach to accountability. She said that the testing in New York, at all grade levels, is "complex, varied, and rigorous in all subjects." The tests involve extensive reading and writing, requiring application of concepts and information. Multiple choice questions make up only one-third of each test, and those require application of skills and strategies. Only a few questions on a given test involve simple recall of facts. "At present," she said, "the results are *not* for promotion or graduation. Rather, they're used as ways to measure how the students are doing relative to the standards. I wish I could tell you that our students are doing better than they are on the tests right now. But they're not."

Robins offered a positive way of regarding even the difficulties deaf students experience with state tests:



Adrianne Robins and interpreter Mary Thumann in video simulcast with realtime captions

"There are learning opportunities and challenges as people have mentioned this morning. Many of these tests match our existing curriculum. We've learned to place greater emphasis on aspects of curriculum from test results, not just teaching to tests. . . . Tests are another filter through which we can examine and reexamine our teaching and curriculum. We've learned how to help students get skills and strategies to become efficient learners, not just test performers. We've learned, for instance, to ask kids for extended responses in class, since they're expected to provide these on tests."

Robins ended with an expression of concern about the impact of high stakes tests on school programs:

"If we want to connect assessment to school improvement and improve student performance in meaningful ways, then clearly once-a-year tests won't do it. High stakes assessments cannot be the only way decisions are made about accountability. They're just simply snapshots in time that do not give us a full picture of school programs or school performance. They do not give us the day-to-day information about our students that we need to make ongoing instructional decisions. They do not reflect the rate of growth—those little changes that our students make along the way, as they become more proficient and efficient learners. In a recent article by Richard Stiggins, he talks about 'the need for a balance between assessments *of* learning and *for* learning.' As educators, it is our responsibility to find a balance between the learning opportunities and the challenges presented by these tests, for the benefit, not to the detriment, of our students."

The presentations concerning The Learning Center for Deaf Children at Framingham, Massachusetts, provided an example of a school that appears to be working constructively with both students and state officials to "push the envelope," exploring available options for preparation, accommodations, or alternative assessments that have any chance of assuring that deaf students receive regular diplomas.

Michael Bello reported that Massachusetts has developed an extensive set of demanding academic standards. The state has pushed to get 100 percent participation in the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System and currently has gotten 99 percent. The goals have been to identify students' instructional needs, align the state's curriculum with its assessment instruments, and to hold all students accountable for learning the curriculum.



Michael Bello and interpreter Phyllis Rogers

Patrick Costello, the Middle School Supervisor at The Learning Center for Deaf Children, discussed how the school is now testing students annually from grades three through ten and beyond. He said that as IEP teams get to know the students, decisions are made concerning whether a student should try to take 1) the standard MCAS, a paper and pencil test with no accommodations, 2) the standard MCAS with accommodations matching those used with that student during instruction, or 3) an alternative assessment, which will consist of projects and written assignments or other work that are collected into a portfolio that is sent off for assessment. Costello explained that The Learning Center for Deaf Children devotes considerable time to finding ways to measure deaf students' knowledge of the curriculum. The school has worked extensively with an advisory board of legal



Patrick Costello

advocates, parent advocates, educators, and administrators to determine what accommodations or alternative assessments seem fair and appropriate for individual students. Learning Center staff have worked with staff from the Massachusetts Department of Education to try to eliminate test items that are unfairly discriminatory against deaf students. They have worked with the same people to get approval for accommodations and alternative assessments.

Costello described at length accommodations for students with various degrees of difficulty with English. In some instances, when reading per se is not what is being measured, teachers at The Learning Center for Deaf Children can sign questions in ASL which the student then may answer on paper. Costello demonstrated the challenges involved to ensure that the production of the question is done in such a way that the student is responding to the same level of information that would be faced by a hearing student taking the test. In math portions, for instance, when asked to determine the "perimeter" or "radius" of a shape, the signer must fingerspell those words so as not to give away the answer with an iconic sign. In some cases, a practice called "scribing" is used. This involves the elicitation of signed responses that are videotaped and "scribed" (or written in English) by interpreters for later evaluation. This practice of scribing is still being experimented with and is somewhat controversial.

In a separate presentation, Suzanne Recane, Curriculum Coordinator for The Learning Center for Deaf Children, explained that in order for a portfolio to qualify a student for a regular diploma, it must contain substantial evidence of knowledge of core material from the general curriculum. Teachers work with students to determine what level of complexity the student can demonstrate mastery of through some written or otherwise produced demonstration. Materials in the portfolio are developed to demonstrate the student's most sophisticated efforts. It is unusual for these portfolios to lead to a regular diploma, but one student this year is expected to pass on that basis.

The Learning Center for Deaf Children presenters acknowledged that enormous amounts of staff time are required for these kinds of efforts. Many may wonder if the amount of time and energy devoted to "pushing the envelope" to enable small numbers of deaf and hard of hearing students to pass rigorous high stakes tests is worth the effort. Michael Bello addressed this question during the question-and-answer session after his presentation:

"While we're railing against this mandated high stakes testing, I don't think we should lose sight of the fact that as a field—and you can all throw things at me—I don't think we've been very good at using assessment to 'drive instruction' (to use a commonly used phrase), and I have to say that in Massachusetts—as I tried to say quickly in my presentation—the pressure of the high stakes nature of testing indeed helped all of us in our school take a hard look at assessment. And I think we really do have to take a hard look at the fact that in reality we have too many kids that aren't doing well enough in school. And I think the big reason we don't have enough deaf kids doing well in school is that we haven't used assessment well enough as a tool in our classroom. And I agree we need better teacher preparation for this. It has, in our school, really escalated. We've spent much more money on teacher preparation geared toward assessment. And we have seen some positive results coming from that. Our kids are doing better in school. I wish I had some better data on that—'better' is not a good word—but I'm convinced that it has had some positive outcomes."

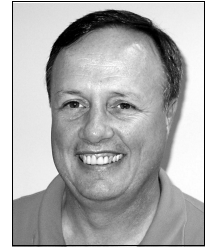
The NAD Position on High Stakes Testing

Bello was not alone in highlighting the possibility that pressure on schools to prepare students to pass high stakes tests may have positive effects. Jay Innes, Associate Professor in Gallaudet's Department of Education and a representative of the National Association of the Deaf (NAD), presented the NAD Position Paper on High Stakes Testing. The position paper takes issue with the view (see: www.nad.org/infocenter/newsroom/positions/hsaa.html) that deaf students are unable to learn the material on state tests and thus should be exempt from taking them. In fact, Innes said,

"The NAD fully supports the involvement of deaf and hard of hearing individuals in state and district-wide assessments and believes information obtained from them should be used to measure an individual's progress towards benchmarks and goals considered essential for ALL students. The NAD also believes that information obtained from such testing is a critical aspect of the educational accountability system and should primarily be used to evaluate schools and programs. In essence, the NAD believes that children do not fail, but that schools and programs, including social service delivery systems, fail children."

The NAD, in other words, embraces educational reform that can bring about improvements in the delivery

of the general curriculum to deaf students. Innes emphasized that the "NAD supports involvement of deaf students in statewide assessments providing the assessments themselves are fair and that the individual has had a fair opportunity to master the content." For this to happen, Innes said, it is essential that deaf children be taught "with direct and unimpeded language and communication access to teachers, peers, and other school personnel entrusted with its delivery."



Jay Innes

The NAD does not advocate specific communication practices for educational programs serving deaf students, but by advocating "direct and unimpeded language and communication access" as a minimum requirement, the organization is setting a standard that many programs are probably failing to meet. If states were to put energy into enabling teachers to give deaf students full access to the general curriculum being taught to "all students," deaf education would surely improve and deaf students and their schools would benefit. Such change is obviously more easily envisioned than accomplished, however, largely, Innes said, because of inappropriate placements. "The NAD is profoundly concerned that many deaf and hard of hearing students are being inappropriately placed in public school settings where they are not being provided with the language and communication access needed, including the need for direct and uninhibited communication access, to acquire the requisite knowledge and skills essential for success in state and district-wide assessments."

Innes said that the NAD, along with many other organizations, including the American Educational Research Association (see <http://aera.net/about/policy/stakes.html>), the American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education, does not support accountability practices harmful to individual students, such as making high stakes decisions regarding promotion and the granting of diplomas on the basis of results of single tests. NAD favors that such decisions be based on multiple measures, and—if merited—alternative measures deemed appropriate by a student's individualized education plan.

A Final Comment

The *No Child Left Behind Act* charges schools with the responsibility of preparing all of their students to meet or exceed the standards of academic performance established in their state. The law requires that over a twelve-year period schools make adequate yearly progress toward this goal. Students with disabilities are not exempt

from the assessments used to measure this progress, so schools are increasingly under pressure to ensure that deaf and hard of hearing students, as well as other students, perform well on state tests. Some states have also created demanding exit exams and may begin to withhold diplomas from students—including deaf and hard of hearing students—who can't pass these tests.

Although many kinds of accommodations and alternative assessments are being developed or considered in many states, students with facility in reading and understanding English will continue to have an advantage when trying to pass statewide assessments. Teaching the content areas in a state's general curriculum will need to occupy large amounts of class time in schools serving deaf and hard of hearing students, but finding ways to increase these students' skill in reading comprehension will also continue to be of critical importance. The bright fifteen-year-old deaf boy described by Mickey Jones at the conference illustrates why. Since deaf students' difficulties with English are at the core of the problems these students encounter when they take state tests, it may

be that the challenges created by the high stakes testing of *all* students—including deaf and hard of hearing students—will prompt researchers and educators to investigate with new urgency various ways that might increase deaf students' literacy levels.

Note: A slightly edited version of this article will be published in a forthcoming edition of *Sign Language Studies*.

Reference: Karchmer, M.A. & Mitchell, R.E. (2003). Demographic and achievement characteristics of deaf and hard-of-hearing students. In Marc Marschark & Patricia E. Spencer (Eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Deaf Studies, Language, and Education*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Recommended Reading:

Heubert, J.P. & Hauser, R.M. (Eds.) (1999). *High Stakes: Testing for Tracking, Promotion, and Graduation*. (Washington, DC: National Academy Press)

Pellegrino, J.W., Chudowsky, N., & Glaser, R. (Eds.) (2001). *Knowing What Students Know: The Science and Design of Educational Assessment*. (Washington, DC: National Academy Press)

Popham, W.J. (2001). *The Truth About Testing: An Educator's Call to Action*. (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development)

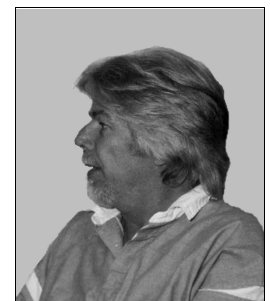
Gallaudet Researcher, Arthur N. Schildroth: An Appreciation

Gallaudet's research community was saddened by the passing on April 7, 2003, of Arthur N. Schildroth, 75, at his home in Silver Spring, Maryland. Schildroth had retired in 1996 as Senior Research Associate in the GRI after working at Gallaudet for 23 years. He was the long-time and well-respected coordinator of the Annual Survey of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children and Youth.

During his years in the Office for Demographic Studies (ODS), Center for Assessment and Demographic Studies (CADS), and the GRI, Art was particularly interested in the effects of various educational placements on the academic success of deaf and hard of hearing students. Much of his research tracked the changes that took place as deaf children across the country moved from special schools into mainstream educational settings. He devoted countless hours to advising educators nationwide on demographics, placement, and achievement testing of deaf children. A gifted writer and editor, he authored many research articles on deafness-related education issues. He also co-edited the books *Deaf Children in America* (1986) and *Deaf Students and the School-to-Work Transition* (1989).

Art was born in East St. Louis, Illinois. He was a graduate of St. Louis University, where he also received

master's degrees in English and theology. He did additional graduate work in theology at Marquette University. He served in the Army Signal Corps after World War II and then entered the Jesuit order. He was ordained in 1961. While serving in Milwaukee, he was active in civil rights protests and in the antiwar movement. He left the priesthood in 1968.



Arthur N. Schildroth

Before moving to the Washington area, Schildroth taught at a high school in Kansas City, Missouri and at St. Louis University. In St. Louis, he was a caseworker and guidance counselor with the American Red Cross, a rehabilitation specialist for the deaf, and coordinator at the Jewish Employment and Vocational Services.

On August 1, 2003, family, friends, and colleagues gathered near Art's old office window on Faculty Row at Gallaudet for a tree-planting ceremony in his memory.

His many friends and admirers both on and off the Gallaudet campus will remember Art Schildroth for his commitment to his work, his integrity, his enthusiasm, his unfailing good humor, and his optimism.

Note: Some of the above was first printed in the *Washington Post*.

New Stanford-10 Norms Study in Progress

The Gallaudet Research Institute is in the midst of developing national norms for the Stanford Achievement Test, Tenth Edition. Testing began in the spring of 2003, but new testing mandates in some states precluded school and program participation. As a result, the GRI is continuing to recruit schools and programs for testing in the fall of 2003 to ensure that the study sample is representative across all regions and program sizes. Deaf and hard of hearing norms are expected to be available in the spring of 2004.

Schools and programs are encouraged to have their students take the science and social science subtests (a single environment subtest at the Primary 1 and 2 levels)

so that performance norms in these subject areas can be offered as well, unlike previous studies. The option of testing students using the TASK 1, 2, and 3 levels (high school curriculum for grades 9, 10, and 11-12, respectively) is also available.

For information about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Ross Mitchell, GRI staff research scientist (ross.mitchell@gallaudet.edu or [V/TTY] 800-451-8834, ext. 5576).

Gallaudet University is an equal opportunity employer/educational institution and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, religion, age, hearing status, disability, covered veteran status, marital status, personal appearance, sexual orientation, family responsibilities, matriculation, political affiliation, source of income, place of business or residence, pregnancy, childbirth, or any other unlawful basis.

**Gallaudet Research Institute
Gallaudet University
800 Florida Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002-3660**

Non-Profit Organization U.S. Postage PAID Washington, D.C. Permit No. 9452

Fall 2003

RETURN POSTAGE REQUESTED