

# PEPNet Then, Today (Now) and Our Hope for the Future<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

As many of the members of the audience have probably experienced, students who are deaf and hard of hearing are attending colleges and universities at a higher rate than ever before. This presentation will provide an overview of the Postsecondary Education Programs Network (PEPNet), including a review of the initial goals and activities of the regional centers, a description of current projects, and a discussion of plans for the future. Key to the success of the project are the establishment of a network of regional postsecondary education centers for outreach and technical assistance that focus on individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing, the use of new and emerging technology, traditional and non-traditional approaches, flexible and interactive learning settings, and low-cost resources to provide increased opportunities.

**Ramon Rodriguez:** We have been looking forward to this conference for the past two years, ever since we met in Orlando, Florida. I would like to

present greetings from Secretary Riley of the Department of Education; from Judy Heumann, Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services; from Fred Schroeder, who is the Commissioner of RSA; and from the new guy on the block, Ken Balick, who is the Director of the Office of Special Education Programs. This is the program that funds PEPNet, the four postsecondary regional centers for the deaf. On behalf of the directors of our regional centers, welcome to PEPNet 2000.

I'm very happy to be here. I'd like to share with you where we have been. Before PEPNet was developed, there were four very independent regional centers that developed model demonstration programs to serve Deaf and hard-of-hearing students in the four regions of the country. These programs provided direct services to students. Around the time of the last grant competition, there was a lot of discussion within the department: Is this an effective way of really reaching many, many more Deaf and hard-of-hearing students who were beginning to attend

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<sup>1</sup> This is an edited transcript of the panel presentation.

mainstreamed programs? Until that time Gallaudet College (and later Gallaudet University) and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf at RIT were two national programs that provided wonderful programs for the students who wanted them.

However, PL 94-142 mandated that all children with disabilities should attend their neighborhood schools, changing the educational opportunities for Deaf and hard-of-hearing students across the country. Since that time, a vast majority of students who are Deaf and hard-of-hearing are attending mainstream programs. In a recent survey by the Department of Education, published in March 1996, it showed that there were about 20,000 students who were Deaf and hard-of-hearing in some 1,850 institutions around the country. It was interesting to note that there were about 7,500 students who reported themselves as being deaf and about another 7,000 students said that they were hearing-impaired or hard of hearing. The remaining number indicated that they had a hearing loss.

Today we project that there are between 25,000 and 30,000 students out there that you are serving or not serving. There is also a population of students who are hard-of-hearing; many of these students have severe needs and may benefit from services that you can provide. But, unfortunately, they have not identified themselves to you yet. Hopefully, we will be able to serve that group over the next several years.

This evening, the four regional center directors will share with you what is happening today, including what PEPNet is doing and some of the things that are happening within each region. So, I present to you Don Ashmore from the Postsecondary Education Consortium, who will provide us with a history of how PEPNet came to be.

**Don Ashmore:** Hello. It's good to see you all today. I'm a mile high, and I lost my voice in the process. After PEPNet '98 in Orlando, we reviewed the evaluations from the participants, and one of the strongest comments was that the participants wanted to know more about PEPNet. They felt that it was important that we explain it to the group. So our panel is here to share with you who we are, what we do, and how we might impact or affect you.

Today, PEPNet is five years old. That includes the pregnancy. (*laughter*). There are four of us. In 1995, California State University Northridge, the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, Saint

Paul Technical College, and the University of Tennessee at Knoxville all submitted proposals to become regional centers for postsecondary outreach and technical assistance. As Ramon said, we had four very independent regional centers. He challenged us to work together to provide a national impact and enhance postsecondary educational opportunities for students who are Deaf and hard of hearing.

In the fall of 1996, the regional center directors and their staff all met in Washington, DC. The question that was before us was: How shall we work collaboratively together and coordinate our efforts for a maximum national impact? It was a very interesting process. During that time, we identified 14 different areas that we should be addressing.

Several months later, the regional center directors met on the campus of California State University Northridge to develop a mission, vision, and goals for PEPNet. At that time we also developed a preamble, which served as a guideline about how we would work and function together as a team.

The mission of PEPNet was to promote coordination and collaboration among the four regional centers. You have to remember, this type of collaboration was something we had never experienced before. It was something new. And what would it mean? Where would it lead us? Our thought at that time was that the four centers wanted to work in collaboration and cooperate with one another. The directors decided to strive for being the best model for networking for all other professional organizations. We wanted others to be able to learn from us. And we are currently in that process.

We developed four goals during that meeting. The first goal was to improve postsecondary access for students who are deaf and hard of hearing. This does not include only those individuals going to college, because it also includes those participating in other postsecondary training programs. The challenge was to serve that broad spectrum.

The second goal was to develop a national design for technical assistance and outreach. We weren't sure at that time what would happen or what would be developed, but that became one of our goals.

Our third goal was that we really wanted to expand the knowledge and skills of all of the professionals working at different institutions all over

the country. But how could four regional centers accomplish that?

Our fourth goal was to increase the networking. I think that's a very key word, and it's been very successful.

Finally, with the goals that we had established, we wanted to increase postsecondary enrollment, retention, graduation, as well as employment rates. All of these needed to be increased for Deaf and hard-of-hearing students who were attending postsecondary programs.

When PEPNet was three years old, we got tired of the baby food. (*chuckles*) We realized that we had to get back together to carefully consider our future, how we would plan, how we would expand, and what kind of impact we would like PEPNet to have across the country. This time we met in Knoxville. It seemed that after that strategic planning meeting, we started a family. We recently met in Rochester at NTID, and it wasn't just the directors and the staff of the regional centers. We also included personnel from our outreach sites. Suddenly, there were 70 of us. And we were growing, and we still are. During that particular meeting, we had a "train-the-trainers" workshop. It was an opportunity for all of us from across the country to exchange information. We needed to show the different training models to one another that we had developed with the intent of training others across regional lines. We affectionately called this group the "PEPNet family."

Now we are in the year 2000, and we have developed a hunger for more knowledge. We need to know what really works, what's effective, what truly increases enrollment, retention and graduation as well as employment. What does that? We feel that that the research conducted in the past might not have specifically addressed our issues. So we decided to develop a framework for a national research agenda. To do that, we wanted to be all-inclusive and invited representatives from NTID, Gallaudet, several Rehabilitation Research and Training Centers, and PEPNet to come together to provide a framework. We will share some of this framework with you during the course of the conference. We will have external reviewers—reviewers from your institutions—to advise us, because we need to know if this is really what you agree that we need to study.

So that's where we are right now. Now, I'll turn it over to Ray Olson from the Midwest Center for Postsecondary Outreach.

**Raymond Olson:** Thank you, Don. I'm Raymond Olson, and we are live on the Internet at the PEPNet website right now. Tonight, you can see what PEPNet has to offer. I feel it is a privilege to stand before all of you to share this information, because you helped make this successful. I'm going to show you what's happening here in PEPNet, via what's included on the website. Many of you have already surfed the net and have looked at the PEPNet site. Later, I will share some statistics that will probably surprise some of you regarding what has transpired through <pepnet.org>.

This is our first page. It explains who we are. When we want to look for information from one of the four regions, we go to this page to access the news from each of the regions. This is our linkage between each one of us. So, technology here has really brought us closer together. I don't think any of us could have done as much as we have without all the technology that we have seen in the last five years.

There are links to each of the regional centers as well as other kinds of information that can be helpful. One link that has been very popular is the one that lists job vacancies. This is a good resource to find out what positions are available across the country.

We also have a link regarding grants information. We are linked up to many sources of grants that are available, and we are planning to enhance this to include information to help people develop grants and find out where they are.

There is a link to the PEPNet listserv. The address for it is <pepnet@rit.edu>. Members of the listserv are from all of the regions of the country.

Many of you have accessed the on-line orientation to deafness. This is an on-line training activity that has really developed since last April.

Many of you went to the PEPNet biennial conference link to find out more about tonight. *Innovation in Education*, is truly happening. We include information about the teleconferences, such as the one we just finished. Two more teleconferences are being promoted and will take place within the next year. Those are very successful activities.

We included the schedule for the live PEPNet chats. Although we had a few glitches last year, we plan to continue live chats on the Internet. We had some glitches with the chat software and not many people could log on, but we have solved that problem and there will be other chats in the

future. By the way, we have had successful chats between the PEPNet regional center directors and Ramon, as well as between the trainers and coordinators. We have been really happy with them, especially since we don't have to take notes. We can take the notes right off the chat room transcripts!

There is a link to the PEPNet Resource Center (PRC) where you can access some of the materials and products we've developed. When I discuss the statistics for website use, you'll be able to see how frequently people access this site.

After looking at the information we've gathered, we learned that not all of you sign in the guest book when you visit our site. I know that we have a lot more visitors than we have guests that have signed in. But that's alright. Our site map shows you more of what's included in the website.

We've just completed a live tour of the PEPNet website and we're back home. While I didn't go into all the links, you can start to better understand the depth that you will find on the website.

I'd like to share some statistics with you about the PEPNet website. First of all, we had 51,000 site visits. Any time you have made a contact with the website, it's counted. We have had 12,000 visits from the website to each regional site. This is the number of times that you went from <pepnet.org> to one of the regional sites.

We have had 3,000 visitors to the PEPNet news link since June 1997. The on-line training link has had 2,300 participants since April 1999; 348 participants decided to take a certificate for completing the training. Of the participants, 1,226 are from postsecondary settings. And of that group, I have broken it down for you:

- Administration 21%
- Faculty 14%
- Professional Staff 30%
- Students 12%

We have had 2,100 people visit the job page, looking for work. I didn't know there were that many jobs out there! There have been about 2,000 visitors to the interagency agreement site. In the future, you will see interagency agreements on each of the sites, reflecting the status of the development of them in the states in each region. There have been 1,647 visitors to the grants page, just linking you to other grant locations. Since January 2000, there have been 700 visitors to the PEPNet

teleconference to find out about our most recent broadcast.

There have been 16,808 items that were sent out from the PRC. While our data indicate 1,300 visitors to the PEPNet listserv from <pepnet.org>, I'm sure there are more people who contact it directly.

This gives you a picture of what the technology has done and how it has enhanced our efforts. I don't think we could have done that through the mail. PEPNet.org has been a part of this, including the listservs, the contacts with the PRC, and all of this technology. There is much more being done, but I'm just sharing with you all of the linkages we're able to create through the PEPNet web page. Now I would like to turn the microphone over to Karen Hopkins from the Northeast Technical Assistance Center. She will share information about each of the regional centers and state outreach sites.

**Karen Hopkins:** I'm Karen Hopkins from the Northeast Technical Assistance Center, and I have the privilege this evening of introducing you to the PEPNet family. Yes, we are four regional centers. We are each set up in a little bit different way because we established our structure based on what works best within our own region. I am going to miss a few names tonight, because we would be here until long after 9 o'clock if I introduce every member of the PEPNet family who is in the room. So I'll recognize some key players.

I'm going to start with WROCC. We have both hubs and affiliates within the WROCC site. We will start with the hub representing Utah, Wyoming, Nevada, and Montana: Kay Fulton and Linda Marie Allington. Cheryl Davis represents Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington.

Our hostesses are Lindsey Antle and Paula George, representing Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico. Coming from Rochester, New York where they had to de-ice the plane this morning, it's a pleasure to be in sunny Colorado where it's 76 degrees. Wonderful weather!

Because the State of California has so many postsecondary institutions to serve, they have an affiliate in the north and an affiliate in the south. In the north, we have Angela Funke Koetz. In Southern California, we have Audrey Parker and Lucinda Aborn.

You can see that the WROCC site is set up with representatives for every state, and in the State of

California there are two institutions working with WROCC. Also, from the WROCC Central Office, there is a team of several people who are here tonight, including Gary Sanderson, Allisun Kale, Jennifer Olson, Tony Ivankovic, Jim Macaluso, and Terri Goldstein.

When we move to the southern region, Don's team in PEC is set up a little bit differently in that each state, for the most part, has a single institution and a single representative. There are a few states that are being served by the PEC's Central Office.

From Alabama, Dan Miller and Cindy Camp are here. Arkansas' representative is Sharon Downs. From Florida, we have Harriet Clark and Rebecca Herman. Georgia's representatives are Lisa Fowler and Katherine Bruni. In Kentucky, Vicki Brashear provides outreach. Louisiana's representative is Jennie Bourgeois. Carol Kelley and Jamy Dickson serve Mississippi. From North Carolina, Peggy Brooks is here. Oklahoma's representatives are Don Hastings and Shelli Dismang. Nancy Lane is South Carolina's representative. Virginia is served by Lucy Howlett. Tennessee, Texas, West Virginia, and the Virgin Islands are served by the PEC Central Office team, including Marcia Kolvitz and Kay Jursik.

Because of the regional center concept, we were each encouraged to set up our centers in ways that worked best within our region. So MCPO established sites that would serve postsecondary institutions within their specific states, but then also sites that would serve community-based programs. Serving colleges and universities in Ohio and Indiana is Claudia Bergquist. Tom Thompson and Denise Kavin provide outreach in Illinois and Missouri. Postsecondary institutions in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Iowa work with Ginny Chiaverina and Bambi Riehl. Serving community-based programs east of the Mississippi River are Diane Jones and Steve Sligar. Serving community-based programs west of the Mississippi River is Sharaine Rawlinson from the MCPO Central Office. Also, here from the MCPO Central Office are several staff members, including Debra Wilcox Hsu, Dave Buchkoski, and Patty Brill.

Finally, the group from the snowy northeast, the NETAC team, the Northeast Technical Assistance Center. From Connecticut is Elaine Taylor. Delaware is currently served by the NETAC Central Office, in a similar way that PEC is serving a few states. The District of Columbia is served by

Sylvia Walker, who was not able to be here this evening. From Maine, Barbara Keefe is here. Maryland's representative is Flo Clooney. From Massachusetts, Jane Nunes is here. New Hampshire's representative is Cate Weir. Josie Durkow is from New Jersey. Because of the size of New York State, we have an upstate person and a downstate person. Desiree Duda is serving the New York City area, and Charley Tiggs serves upstate New York. Charley is from the NETAC Central Office. Pennsylvania is represented by Lori Hutchison. Juanita Rodriguez-Colon represents Puerto Rico. Brenda McGill is here from Rhode Island. Joe Panko is the representative from Vermont. We also have several members of the NETAC Central Office team here, including Pat Billies, Mary Lamb, Charley Tiggs, and Pam Francis.

So you can see, we are a diverse structure, but we are making it work. We have done, we think, a very good job pulling together services all across this country. We not only take what we developed within each region, but we take that and share it with everyone else in the other regions. We try to share it with you through the PEPNet Resource Center. We are here to make your lives easier in the future. We know that there will be more and more Deaf and hard-of-hearing students entering your programs.

At this point, I want to turn it over to Merri Pearson from WROCC, who will be talking about some of the changes that we expect you will be seeing in the years ahead—the vision of the future.

**Merri Pearson:** Hello. I'd like to talk briefly about what's happening in terms of the future of education, the future of the United States, and the future of deaf education. First, as you can see, we have what is called in today's business terms a "loosely coupled organization" here, which means all four centers have very different organizational structures. They have very different ways of doing things, and yet we still work together. I think that's exciting. I think we are right now ready for the future because the future will demand organizations that are capable of handling change. These organizations must be flexible enough to deal with the rapidly changing economy, the job market, and education as being impacted by technology.

So, in brief, you've heard from Don, Ray, and Karen. And now you're stuck with me. This is my

first year with PEPNet. I am amazed at the work that all of you are doing. Wow! It is so impressive. Because on a national level, data is a commodity. Like it or not, the future jobs will be either in data or in service. The people who can manipulate data and the people who can provide a service will have jobs. So that influences what we should be doing in postsecondary education, right?

Did you know we're moving toward a global economy? We're not just the United States anymore. We have to think in terms of global economy. We have to think about jobs. We have to think that the graduates of today will have, on average, seven career changes. This means that the kids in your classrooms are going to need to understand that learning does not stop when they finish their bachelor's degree or their associate's degree or their technical certificate. It means we're talking about lifelong learning and change. It's a little bit frightening, but think about the things we as community colleges, vocational schools, technical colleges, and universities can do. We should be busy forever.

The community colleges are no longer focusing on educating students for transfer into universities. Some of you have already noticed this. You know that students finishing technology programs in community colleges can go out into the world and get a job and earn more money than most of you. (*laughter*) Students in technical and vocational schools can graduate from programs and not necessarily want to continue their education right now. So we're seeing some changes there as well.

Colleges, universities, and other postsecondary institutions must become institutions for lifelong learning. We have to change our mindset. Right now, we see some personnel shortages. There are not enough teachers of the deaf. This is true not only in K-12 schools, but also in postsecondary institutions. Where do we find the people? I was talking with Al Pimentel, the superintendent of New York School for the Deaf in White Plains. He is desperate to find good teachers of the deaf. I was talking with Ramon, and he was explaining that even NTID is looking and looking and looking for qualified teachers of the deaf. We are desperate. We need good educators who understand the needs of Deaf and hard-of-hearing people.

I talked a little bit about the national things that are happening. I talked a little bit about the

postsecondary institution issues. Now I want to talk about the population that we are serving. Did you know that by the year 2002, one-third of our students will be "ESL." That means that English is not the primary language in the home. And I'm not talking about deaf kids of deaf parents. I'm talking about Deaf and hard-of-hearing children of hearing parents. One-third. We need to be ready for that. There are cultural, social, and other issues in addition to language that we have to be ready for.

Did you know that 20 years ago we could only identify 70 percent of the babies who were born with hearing loss? Now, with technology and the new tests they have, we can identify 90 percent. There are significant implications. Some parents may choose technology enhancements, cochlear implants, and other assistive listening devices that can help with language acquisition.

Did you know that schools, with all of the legislative and regulatory requirements, are continuing to move toward inclusion? Now, for deaf kids that can be scary. You may know and understand the concept of critical majority, or critical mass, but some of the school districts and states may not understand that. So we need to be ready for that.

Poverty is another issue. If you look around, the United States seems to be richer and richer and richer and richer, and you hear about the stock market and technology. Understand that some of the deaf people in our country do not have access to the growing economy. And, in fact, in most of the reports that I've read the deaf children of deaf parents are becoming more impacted by poverty. That will influence what we should be doing.

Lastly, think about this concept of transition. You know that federal legislation now requires transition planning for all children with disabilities, right? But how many of the plans consider the trends toward the global economy, the changing job market, and the educational changes that are happening? We need to do better. We need to be thinking not only of high school to college transition or community college to university transition, but we also need to be thinking about transitions in elementary school and middle school. We need to recognize transition issues not only into community colleges and universities, but also computer schools, vocational schools, and other types of training programs. We need to think about where

the jobs will be and the training programs that students need to enter these jobs.

So to conclude, we should be very proud of what's happened in the past five years through PEPNet. We have brought together four very different organizations. We have been successful at collaborating with national level goals and ideas and concepts and dreams. But now, as we look at the research agenda and as we look at the next step, don't forget about what's happening out there in the world, in the economy, and in education. And I think that knowing all of you, we're going to do really well.

It's an exciting time. So now, I turn it over to Ramon Rodriguez. He will talk a little bit about what's happening at the federal level. Many of you know that we're in our last year of the current funding cycle, and we will have to compete again to get money from Congress to continue our work. Ramon?

**Ramon Rodriguez:** Thank you, Merri. Thank you, Ray, Karen, and Don, for your presentations. Let's talk a little bit about the future. By the way, we are in our fourth year of your grant, and we have one more year to come.

I think this is a very exciting program. If you have not read my welcome letter in your program book, you will note that this program is authorized under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). That Act includes a statement that the Department of Education will fund postsecondary regional centers. It does not say four nor does it say that the country is divided into regions. But the appropriations authority says there will be four regional centers. The program is up for competition in 2001, which will be the final year of this grant. We are optimistic that the program, as you know it now, will continue. We're looking for a focus in areas that we did not ignore, but—because of lack of time and resources—we could not address.

We have tried our best, and I think it has been quite successful, to set up an organization that cuts across the four regions, resulting in coordination and collaboration of services and activities. The purpose was to avoid duplication, and I think we have done that very well. However, there are areas of our population that are not being served. If they are being served, they are being served in a very limited way.

I would also like to share with you that through the directors and their leadership, two very, very important outcomes resulted. One was through RSA and the Institute on Rehabilitation Issues. PEPNet sponsored a meeting in Washington, DC, about a year ago and expressed concern that individuals described as low-functioning were not being served. As a result of that, OSERS through RSA commissioned a study on this issue. That report is out, and I hope that that it is well-disseminated throughout the country. We would hope that in the near future you will be able to take some leadership in providing services to that population.

The second very important area that resulted from the PEPNet leadership was a national policy forum on deafness. It had to do with federal funding—past, present, and future. A report has been out, and recommendations are forthcoming. So those are two very important issues. And that is the future; we will act on those issues.

The work of the regional centers in addressing the federal priority has exceeded our expectations. That's the work we're doing right now that will continue through 2001. So I look forward to your continued support and your interest. As some of us said while working on our national research agenda, we invite your input. Think out of the box. Think the unthinkable.

And with that, I want to thank you very much for your attention this evening.