

# PEPNet

## Test Equity for Individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

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## PEPNet Test Equity Summit Highlights

The 2008 Test Equity Summit convened by the Postsecondary Education Programs Network (PEPNet) identified and examined problems, challenges, and issues that academic and psychoeducational tests pose for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. Participants in the summit included specialists on deafness and educational testing; individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing; test and test accommodation developers; language and communication researchers; academicians; K-12 educators and administrators; health professionals; and clinicians with extensive experience in psychoeducational evaluation.

### Here are a few of the issues:

- Individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing of all ages are failing critically important tests, or their abilities are not being fully shown by test results.
- Educators, schools and test developers need to recognize that many students who are deaf or hard of hearing have not had the same access to English as their hearing peers. This is critical because academic tests require a fundamental understanding of English. Educators need to look at how tests are developed, written and administered, and how test results are used so that they accurately measure the competence of every individual.
- Standardized tests frequently permit sign language interpretation/translation of the instructions. However, interpreting/translating test content from English to American Sign Language is a complex issue, and the policies vary.
- K-12 and postsecondary schools may not have standards or guidelines on test design or administration for a class that has students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Where sign language translation of classroom tests is permitted, the quality of that translation can vary considerably.
- Professionals who conduct psychoeducational testing, assessment, and evaluation to determine learning disabilities and other vital factors affecting the education of students who are deaf or hard of hearing also need to better understand hearing loss and its implications. Because the most widely used psychoeducational measures are English-based, the results may not be accurate for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Students who are deaf or hard of hearing may be misdiagnosed as having co-occurring disabilities because evaluators didn't take into account the effects of early-onset hearing loss.
- Individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing are at a disadvantage for most tests required for professional licensure, employment, and advancement—from post office proficiency exams to written driving exams—because those tests are English-based.
- There is no academic research on many key aspects of testing that would help educators, psychologists, students, parents, public policymakers, and others make appropriate decisions for the education of students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

# Test Equity Summit Overview

## How the Summit Came About

PEPNet, a national collaboration of four regional centers, is supported by cooperative agreements with the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, and provides resources, information, in-service training, and expertise to enhance educational opportunities for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families. PEPNet works with professionals in two- and four-year colleges, universities, secondary education programs, community rehabilitation programs, continuing education programs, adult basic education programs, and vocational and technical training programs.

The federal contracts supporting PEPNet require that a needs assessment be conducted during the first year of the contract. This needs assessment was conducted in spring 2007. The assessment focused on identifying needs in areas traditionally addressed by PEPNet, such as managing provision of support services, application of technology in provision of services, and legal requirements for institutions, as well as the assessment of needs of individuals providing transitional services to students who are deaf or hard of hearing. The assessment addressed questions such as developing transition plans, making assessments during the transition process, and programming for deaf or hard-of-hearing adults who will not enter postsecondary educational programs.

PEPNet delivered the Needs Assessment to stakeholders by mail and via the Internet, making it available to 20,000 institutions, parents, students who are deaf or hard of hearing, and professionals in fields related to deafness, such as audiologist and speech therapists.

A total of 2,231 stakeholders responded, expressing interest in training and information on assessment and testing of individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing including those with co-occurring disabilities. More than 80 percent of respondents identified three specific areas of interest:

- psychoeducational testing and assessment
- academic testing
- reasonable testing accommodations for students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

PEPNet responded to the Needs Survey requests for test-related training and information by creating the 2008 Test Equity Summit to explore test equity issues experienced by individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.

PEPNet's 2008 Test Equity Summit identified and examined problems, challenges, and issues that academic and psychoeducational tests pose for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. Participants in the summit included specialists on deafness and educational testing; individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing; test and test accommodation developers; language and communication researchers; academicians; K-12 educators and administrators; health professionals; and clinicians with extensive experience in psychoeducational evaluation.

Equal access to testing can be a lifelong quest for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, and Summit participants agreed that it would not be possible to explore every test equity issue in the time available. They decided to focus on certain "high stakes" tests that can have life-changing consequences for a student who is deaf or hard of hearing: standardized testing for K-12 students, some postsecondary academic testing, and psychoeducational testing and assessment.

## The Importance of Tests

Educational institutions, employers, government agencies, and others depend on tests to measure achievement and competency. Academic tests range from classroom quizzes, true/false, short answer, and essay tests to standardized multiple choice tests, including those required by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the SAT, and the ACT. Academic test results can determine whether a student is promoted, graduated, or accepted to a technical college or university. Employers rely on tests to determine an individual's qualifications for hiring or promotion, and licensing bodies often issue or deny professional licenses and certifications based on test results.

Schools also use a variety of psychoeducational tests to assess a student's intelligence, cognitive development, visual perception, motor coordination, and emotional status. Psychoeducational tests can identify learning disabilities, attention deficit disorders, and other factors that affect a student's education.

## Testing Outcomes for Individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Taking a test is challenging for anyone, but, for reasons we'll discuss, individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing may face additional challenges. Many students who are deaf or hard of hearing fail tests even though their classroom work and/or work performance demonstrates that they know the subject well. Results of standardized tests and psychoeducational evaluations for students who are deaf or hard of hearing also may be inaccurate.

Participants also emphasized that misdiagnosis can have long-term effects and dictate or limit life choices for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, and evaluation outcomes—accurate or not—often determine an individual's eligibility and competence for professions, employment, education, and other opportunities.

## Fundamental Issues

Summit participants suggested that a large array of complex factors might determine how a student who is deaf or hard of hearing could perform on a given test or psychoeducational evaluation. The factors can occur in any combination, and each factor or mix of factors might affect individuals differently. Ultimately, the unpredictability of the factors that can affect test performance yields unpredictable and inaccurate test results for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. An understanding of the ramifications of deafness is critical in developing accessible tests and testing accommodations.

### 1. A Solid First-Language Base

The aptitude to do well on tests requires a strong language base. The evolution of an individual's language base is a complex process that is shaped by the input received from parents, schools, peers, and others. It is supported by an individual's ability to acquire language, and language acquisition depends on access to language during a child's formative years. The majority of children who are deaf or hard of hearing are born to hearing parents who face the challenges of learning about the impact of their child's hearing loss, establishing a communication system, and building a language foundation for their child. Despite their parents' best efforts, many children who are deaf or hard of hearing do not have full language access during their formative years.

Providing communication access—access to curriculum, teachers, classroom discussion, and social interactions with peers—is complex, but critical to the language development of an individual who is deaf or hard of hearing. Broad, inclusive communication access is essential in building a strong language base. Schools and school districts utilize a variety of accommodations to provide educational access for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. The level of access depends on the suitability and the quality of the accommodation provided.

## 2. Lack of experience in providing accommodations for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing

Accommodation needs of people with physical disabilities are fairly easy for the general population to understand and physical access is becoming commonplace in public places, businesses, and transportation. Accommodating hearing loss is not as straightforward, and is an intricate process that may be different for each individual. The nature and characteristics of an individual's hearing loss, the way they communicate, or the presence of a co-occurring disability may affect the choice of an appropriate accommodation--and no single accommodation will work for every person who is deaf or hard of hearing. And, because accommodations and services often are coordinated by professionals with little experience accommodating hearing loss, individuals may not receive the most appropriate accommodations.

## 3. The Increasing Importance of Testing

Low or failing test scores can have long-term effects and dictate or limit life choices for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. Results of tests for academic courses, vocational aptitude, professional licensing, occupational certifications, driving, college entrance, and others open or bar—access to professions, employment, education, and other life choices for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. Some knowledgeable, qualified individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing are not reaching their educational or employment goals because of the barrier of testing. Tests are increasingly the gateway to opportunities of all kinds and even entry-level jobs require passing a test to be hired.

### Specific Summit Topics

Summit specialists discussed many specific test-taking issues that affect students who are deaf or hard of hearing, but linked them all to the fundamental issues of differing experiences with English, the scarcity of qualified professionals who understand the impact of a hearing loss, and the lack of testing standards. Among the specifics are:

#### The Design and Wording of Tests

- The language style and structure of tests can present obstacles to individuals who do not have a strong language base. The language of tests uses phrasing, grammar and sentence structure that is different from everyday English. Multiple-choice questions, idioms, words with multiple meanings, homophones and those with complex grammar or unnecessary information may be difficult to understand for some students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Thus, test results for these students may underestimate their skills and abilities, making it difficult to determine the significance of the results and how they should be used.
- The limited access to spoken and written language for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing may mean tests contain English vocabulary that is unfamiliar to them.
- While there is no word-for-word parallel between English and ASL, any concept expressed in English can be expressed in ASL. However, students who access classroom course content via ASL are at a disadvantage if they are tested on that content in English.

- Few test developers have expertise in deafness or the accommodations that a student who is deaf or hard of hearing may need. In addition, test developers rarely use people who are deaf or hard of hearing as evaluators or include them in norm groups.
- Standardized tests are structured to elicit specific information from students in a very specific way. This is quite different from the classroom tests that are written by K-12 teachers or college instructors who may not be skilled at developing tests or making tests accessible to students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

## Testing Accommodations

- The types, quality, and availability of accommodations almost certainly will change as a student who is deaf or hard of hearing moves through the K-12 system and into postsecondary education. A student comfortable with an accommodation in high school may not find the same accommodation available in college.
  - When a student who is deaf or hard of hearing is mainstreamed in public schools, a teacher who has a single student who is deaf or hard of hearing may not have the resources to understand the ramifications of a hearing loss or understand the issues involved in test equity.
  - There are differences between accommodations for standardized tests and accommodations for classroom, course-specific tests. At the secondary level teachers and/or the IEP team decide on accommodations for tests. At the post secondary level, instructors generally work with disability service offices to determine the appropriate accommodations for academic tests. These are determined on an individual basis.
- Standardized testing agencies, on the other hand, have developed and implemented specific accommodation policies for their tests. Some may allow an individual with a verified diagnosis of early-onset hearing loss as much as 50 percent more time to take a test. Additional time and accommodations are sometimes possible if supplementary documentation supports the request. If an individual who is deaf or hard of hearing requests accommodations for a co-occurring disability, testing agencies may require verification of that as well. Obtaining the required verification may be difficult because there are few professionals qualified to diagnose co-occurring disabilities for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Sign language interpretation may be an effective accommodation for some students, but many students who are deaf or hard of hearing do not use or understand signed languages, such as ASL.
  - The English wording and structure of standardized test questions is critical. Translation into another language—spoken or signed—may alter a question’s meaning.
  - Skills of classroom sign language interpreters can vary widely. Many states have established state standards for educational interpreters but there is no consistency and some states have yet to adopt standards. For example, Summit specialists reported that inexperienced interpreters might confuse the ASL signs for the different meanings of English words that sound alike. For example, the ASL sign for “running” as in “I’m running in a race” is different from the ASL sign for “running” as in “my nose is running.” Interpreters may also confuse the sign for the mathematical plus sign (+) with sign for the word “plus,” meaning “also.” A misinterpreted word or incorrect sign can mean a lower grade for the student.

- The Summit found no clear, commonly accepted guidelines in test development or administration for creating tests that are accessible to students who are deaf or hard of hearing. There are no best practices establishing what constitutes reasonable accommodations for testing, such as whether and when test questions should be signed, whether the student may sign test answers for an interpreter to transcribe in English, or whether the student should be given extra time to complete a test.
- In academic testing, instructions and questions are typically presented in spoken or written English. If the required accommodation is sign language interpretation, the accuracy of the accommodation can vary widely, depending on the skills of available interpreters, the content of the test, and the complexity of the test language. In addition, the content of tests may reflect American hearing culture by including questions about sound or cultural cues that excludes individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing .
- Other issues related to using sign language interpretation for testing include:

Interpreters often do not see an academic test until it is given, and have no time for adequate preparation.

Spelling tests can't be signed because they would require the interpreter to use fingerspelling if there is no commonly accepted sign for a particular word.

The student may not be accustomed to working with interpreters in general or with a particular interpreter. Using an interpreter requires specific cognitive skills.

## Lack of Standards for Giving Tests and Using Their Results

- The educational system has no clear guidelines or best practices on administering tests, making tests accessible, or using test results to determine student placement, achievement, or advancement for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. For example, there are no accepted guidelines on what should be presented in sign language to students who sign, who should translate that material, or how the accommodation is granted—if it is permitted at all. Individual schools and states often create their own guidelines on testing access and use of testing results.
- Some schools only allow verbatim interpretation of test instructions and questions, while others allow paraphrasing the information to make it more understandable for the student.
- Providing a videotaped signed translation of a standardized test's instructions or questions to all deaf test takers may not be an equitable solution because of disparities in sign language proficiency among students and the need for region-specific signs.
- Test development companies carefully craft the language of psychometric tests to produce valid results. It would be virtually impossible to provide a psychometrically valid sign language translation, and further inaccuracies could be introduced translating ASL responses back into English.
- The meaning and the use of terms such as "intermediate reading level" for hearing students varies widely. But these terms vary even more for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. No test currently gives a clear picture of whether a student who is deaf or hard of hearing is at grade level or meets other standards, particularly in English language proficiency.



- Other methods of assessing a student's abilities that may be used in place of or as an adjunct to testing include portfolios and other demonstrations of skills and knowledge. However, there are no standards for portfolio content or evaluation, and, postsecondary schools typically demand test results, not portfolios, for admission.

## Transition to Postsecondary Schools and Employment

- A student who had accommodations in K-12 is not automatically eligible for them in colleges, universities, and other postsecondary schools because K-12 and postsecondary accommodations are governed by different laws.
- Students entering postsecondary schools may wrongly assume they'll automatically qualify for additional time, interpreters, or other accommodations. Postsecondary students must self-declare their hearing loss and describe its "functional limitation." They must then negotiate with disability service offices or individual instructors to receive accommodations.
- Many students who are deaf or hard of hearing are reluctant to ask for accommodations, opting to take tests without them. The result is often failure.
- Currently, only 23 percent of high school graduates who are deaf or hard of hearing go on to postsecondary education. More than 79 percent of those students drop out.
- Many postsecondary schools have disability professionals to advise and support students. While many of these professionals are specialists in a range of disability issues, few have an in-depth knowledge of deafness.
- Tests for professional licensure and certification, such as those for vocational rehabilitation counseling or electrician licensing, may not intend to test reading and writing skills, but in effect they do. Driver's exams and other tests that people take every day are written for those who are hearing and proficient in English.

## Psychoeducational Testing, Assessment and Evaluation

- Most psychoeducational tests, like academic tests, rely on English-based instruments and assume that the person being tested has native language proficiency in English. Even nonverbal tests have spoken English instructions.
- Very few school psychologists know the complexities of testing students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Finding psychoeducational evaluators qualified to test these students is especially difficult in rural communities. For any school, psychoeducational testing is expensive and time-consuming; it is even more so when students who are deaf or hard of hearing are being evaluated. Because of those barriers, schools may be reluctant to evaluate as frequently as the needs or the status of a student who is deaf or hard of hearing change.
- Many environmental and familial factors, including delayed exposure or limited exposure to any language in childhood, can mask a co-occurring disability such as a learning disability, or, conversely, can wrongly make it appear that the individual who is deaf or hard of hearing has a co-occurring disability. Correctly identifying learning disabilities in the presence of hearing loss is problematic.
- The social isolation an individual who is deaf or hard of hearing experiences as a result of limited communication with family and peers may affect social skills or his or her comfort in social situations. This can lead to misdiagnosis of psychiatric disorders. The Rorschach Inkblot Test is an example of a psychiatric test that relies on language for scoring and for identifying thought disorder and other emotional distress.

- Norm groups for most standardized psychoeducational assessments do not include individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, making comparisons and reporting difficult.
- Psychologists participating in the Summit said they frequently tailor an assessment to the individual who is deaf or hard of hearing, eliminating any test or instrument that is not appropriate for someone with a hearing loss.

## Recommendations for Improving Test Equity

Summit participants agreed on many solutions to specific issues but recognized that improving test equity for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing will be a long-term effort involving K-12 schools, transition services, postsecondary institutions, deaf consumers, public policymakers, and test development companies. The Summit participants also recommended that parents be involved in all aspects of test equity. Participants felt that PEPNet, with its expertise on deaf and hard of hearing-related issues, was uniquely poised to spur collaboration with the goal of improving access.

### Here are Summit participants' suggestions for various stakeholders:

#### Suggestions for Schools

- Develop a formal set of guidelines providing for multiple measures of a student's abilities.
- Consider test content in determining whether and how tests are to be interpreted.
- Use qualified sign language interpreters. Whether the interpreter gives the test instructions and questions in person or on video, the translation should match the student's needs and be accurate.
- For classroom tests, the interpreter and teacher should meet prior to the test being translated. That will enable the interpreter to know the teacher's intentions for the test. Test development companies have their own requirements for those who interpret standardized tests.
- Provide a language-rich environment for all students who are deaf or hard of hearing throughout their education. There is no one-size-fits-all solution for all individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Help students develop test-taking skills. Teach them how to think like the person who developed the test and to fully understand what the test writer wants from students.
- In addition to using portfolios and other non-test methods, use a team approach to assess a student's potential. A team can see a student who is deaf or hard of hearing as a whole. Include deaf individuals who know Deaf culture and who may be better able to recognize the potential of a student who is deaf or hard of hearing.
- Ensure that curriculum, instruction, and test content are aligned.
- Foster continued professional development of teachers and staff in Deaf culture and testing issues.
- Standards for assessment for special populations, set by the American Educational Research Association (AERA), American Psychological Association (APA) and the National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME), are currently undergoing revision. Schools should offer their experience and ideas for change.
- Teachers and college instructors teaching students who are deaf or hard of hearing should consult teachers of the deaf or other specialists in deafness when designing academic tests.

## Suggestions for Psychoeducational Evaluators

- Understand the student’s hearing loss and its implications before determining which psychoeducational tests will be administered and how results will be analyzed. Know the etiology of the student’s hearing loss (birth trauma, illness, or genetic syndrome) and the age of onset; consider the student’s primary language issues (level of language development, language of instruction, home language, and aural access to English); review intervention history (early or late diagnosis, appropriate early interventions); and know the student’s education history (consistent, inconsistent, single or multiple schools).
- If unfamiliar with evaluating individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, consult with other professionals, such as psychoeducational evaluators with experience or teachers of deaf students, in designing an appropriate assessment strategy. Professional codes of ethics call for psychologists to bring in additional expertise when necessary.
- Gather data about the student from multiple sources: file reviews, interviews with those who know the student, and, especially with younger children, observation in the classroom. Know the setting they learn in.
- To the maximum extent feasible, administer all assessments in the student’s dominant, or natural language. If the student is an ASL signer, modify or eliminate specific tests as necessary to be sure that tests are given in a way that is understandable and that will yield meaningful results. However, document and qualify any deviations from standard practice. Also note that testing results are an estimation of a student’s performance in comparison to hearing peers. That’s because students who are deaf or hard of hearing have not been included in most norm groups.
- “In-house” or internal norms—norms developed from the experience of a particular school, university or site and the given population at that site—can be useful but must be used with caution.
- Give tests multiple times—three times or more if necessary—until the evaluator is confident the results are accurate.
- The current best option for intelligence testing is to use non-verbal measures.
- When conducting a psychoeducational evaluation and using an interpreter it is important to use an independent interpreter, rather than the interpreter the student has in the classroom. The close working relationship between the student and his or her regular interpreter could make a test invalid.
- Even when using a sign language interpreter, bring in an ancillary evaluator, such as a teacher of deaf students or another nationally certified interpreter, as an observer to ensure that the intent of the test and the student’s responses are accurately translated. Certified Deaf Interpreters (CDIs) can play an important role with a child or with an adult who does not have strong skills in either ASL or English.
- Understand that facial expression is an integral part of ASL and can influence how the person administering the test and the individual being tested who is deaf or hard of hearing perceive a question or an answer.
- To make the student comfortable with the testing process, conduct practice tests prior to the actual test.
- Develop school-wide or system-wide guidelines for evaluating students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Involve educators, the professionals who conduct evaluations, and other professionals.
- Evaluating a student is an art, not a science. The evaluator needs to make clinical judgments. Test results—numbers—do not paint an entire picture of an individual.

## Suggestions for Test Developers

- Deafness is a low-incidence disability, so developing standardized tests exclusively for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing likely isn't feasible. However, the principles of universal design can be applied to test development.
- Write tests so that they are clearer and more understandable for all test takers. Avoid test questions with complex syntax, double negatives, passive verbs, and idioms unless their inclusion is necessary to the test. Avoid cultural bias and phrasing or lingo that may not have reached the deaf community.
- Ensure that tests actually measure the knowledge they are intended to test.
- When a high-stakes test has questions that are inappropriate for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, if possible, remove that material and base the scoring on the remaining questions.
- Actively recruit individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing for employment as test designers, to serve on item writing/test development committees, and in advisory roles.

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## Suggestions for Academic Research

- Correlate test scores of students who are deaf or hard of hearing to the age of onset of their hearing loss, the language environment in their home and school, and other key factors that influence the acquisition of language by individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Explore which accommodations work for students who are deaf or hard of hearing and why. Who qualifies? What problems exist? Are there standards for accommodations?
- Extended time for test taking: Who uses it and how? What effect does it have? What amount of time is necessary, effective, and equitable? What types of documentation help determine who needs extra time and how much?
- The aspects of interpreted testing: Does sign language interpretation actually help? What kind of preparation and skills do test interpreters need?
- The effects of the "language of testing" (i.e., typical conventions that characterize the type of English seen in test items) on the performance of students who are deaf or hard of hearing at all levels of schooling.
- The incidence of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and learning disabilities in children and adolescents who are deaf or hard of hearing. What are the best ways to assess and diagnose these conditions, and what skills and experiences does the evaluator need to have?
- The effectiveness of and standards for using alternative methods of assessing the academic skills of a student who is deaf or hard of hearing, such as portfolios and observation.
- What factors influence whether students who are deaf or hard of hearing succeed in their transition to postsecondary education?
- Use the web to provide research updates and offer guidance to professionals who administer tests or evaluations, who use test scores, or who are otherwise involved with the education of individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, and their families.

## What Public Policymakers Can Do

- Public policymaking relies on accurate information. Recognize that current standardized tests may not fully reveal the abilities of students who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Find ways to determine, at all educational levels, how all students and their schools are performing.
- Understand that current failures and problems with testing can mean long-range costs to society. Qualified students who fail tests may not move ahead to postsecondary education and higher paying jobs or they may need government assistance.
- Motivate private test developers to work toward more universal design in standardized tests.
- In cooperation with organizations of professionals who are licensed or certified, make licensing and certification exams accessible to individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing . Enable licensing and certifying organizations to provide test preparation materials and practice tests at little or no cost to individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.

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## What PEPNet Can Do: Leading and Collaborating

- Sponsor a larger, national conference on test equity.
- Use the Internet to link teachers, school psychologists, school administrators, parents, and consumers to information about test equity.
- Recruit more members to PEPNet's 700-subscriber listserv.
- Host a forum on PEPNet's website for schools and others to share test equity solutions and problems.
- Seek collaboration with testing companies and professional organizations associated with testing and test development. Attend and ask to present at their conferences and workshops to increase understanding about test equity for students who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Develop Web-based training—webinars—that will help test developers better understand the needs of individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Hold regional trainings for psychologists on psychoeducational evaluation of individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Compile a roster of psychologists who work with students who are deaf or hard of hearing and would be willing to offer advice on psychoeducational assessment.
- Meet with college and university presidents and administrators for an in-depth discussion of the issue of transition of students who are deaf or hard of hearing, particularly on entrance exams.
- Form an alliance with the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD), the 2,500-member group of college and university-level professional staff who assist students with disabilities at the post-secondary level.

## Conclusion

The Summit clearly recognized that achieving test equity for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing will not happen overnight. It will require collaboration across the educational community. Full and equal access to standardized tests is a long-term goal that will require changes within the educational system and at private test development agencies. But much work can be done at the school and community levels by individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing and those who provide services for them.

Widening the dialogue about test equity is a vital first step. Participants left the Summit pledging to work for change in their communities and PEPNet is committed to bringing national attention to this issue.

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## Summit Facilitators and Participants

Twelve leading specialists, assisted by PEPNet staff, spent two days in Broomfield, Colorado, in August 2008 discussing test equity for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. They shared personal experiences related to testing and assessment, identified gaps in research on testing and testing accommodations, and suggested actions for schools, psychologists, test developers, academic researchers, public policymakers, parents, and PEPNet.

### Co-Facilitators

#### Ruth Loew, Ph.D.

Ruth Loew is assistant director of the Office of Disability Policy for Educational Testing Service (ETS), Princeton, NJ. At ETS, she develops and implements policies and procedures to accommodate test takers who are deaf or hard of hearing and trains ETS staff in the effects of hearing loss on test taking.

#### Judith Mounty, Ed.D., M.S.W.

Judith Mounty is a research scientist with the Language Planning Institute and Center for ASL/English Bilingual Education and Research at Gallaudet University. In her private social work practice, she provides mental health counseling for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families.

### Participants

#### Barbara Boyd, Ph.D.

Barbara Boyd is a professor in English, Communication Studies, and Undergraduate Studies at California State University, Northridge (CSUN). She designs test strategies and accommodations appropriate for students who are deaf taking the Upper Division Writing Proficiency Examination.

#### Lisa Coyner, Ph.D.

Lisa Coyner is a licensed psychologist and certified school psychologist at the Arizona School for the Deaf and Blind. She previously worked for the Community Outreach Program for the Deaf in Tucson.

**Stephanie W. Cawthon, Ph.D.**

Stephanie W. Cawthon is an assistant professor in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Texas at Austin. Her work includes language and literacy development, educational assessment, and policy analysis. She also is lead researcher on the National Survey of Assessments and Accommodations for Students Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing.

**Carol Funckes, M.A.**

Carol Funckes is associate director of the University of Arizona's Disability Resources. She has worked in multiple capacities with individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing and is past president of the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD).

**Mary Huffnell, Psy.D.**

Mary Huffnell is coordinator of training at Gallaudet University's Mental Health Center. She is a licensed psychologist whose clinical interests include attention deficit disorders and learning disorders.

**Luisa Soboleski, M.Ed.,**

Luisa Soboleski is assistant principal (elementary department) of the American School for the Deaf, West Hartford, Conn.

**Robert Weinstock, M.A.**

Robert Weinstock is special assistant to the Provost at Gallaudet University where he also teaches in the Department of English. His experience includes educational assessment, statistics and measurement. He previously worked at Educational Testing Service.

**Dan Farley, M.A.**

Dan Farley is the Related Services and Evaluation Coordinator for the New Mexico School for the Deaf (NMSD). He is a New Mexico-licensed teacher, administrator, and educational diagnostician and has served as NMSD's test coordinator for statewide assessment programs. He consults with NMSD and with schools throughout New Mexico evaluating students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

**Peter Hauser, Ph.D.**

Peter Hauser is director of the Deaf Studies Laboratory (DSL) at Rochester Institute of Technology. He is a deaf clinical neuropsychologist who supervises deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing students who develop, run, and analyze experimental psychological studies.

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Visit [www.pepnet.org](http://www.pepnet.org) for more information about test equity issues and solutions. Available documents include: The PEPNet Test Equity Summit Summary, and Test Equity reports for parents, schools, psychologists and public policymakers. At [pepnet.org](http://pepnet.org) you'll also find informative videos of Summit participants discussing test equity.

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## Glossary of Summit Terminology

**Standardized Tests:** Achievement tests under No Child Left Behind, the SAT and ACT, high school graduation and exit exams, and other high stakes tests that determine whether a student will progress through the educational system. Most of these tests are developed and scored by test development companies that are independent of school systems.

**Academic Tests:** Tests designed and administered by a teacher in the classroom, at the K-12 and postsecondary levels.

**Psychoeducational Tests:** Standardized tests and instruments administered by psychologists that assess a student's intelligence, cognitive development, visual perception, motor coordination, and emotional status.

**Assessment:** The process of gathering information, particularly for psychoeducational evaluation, that may include psychoeducational tests or inventories, observations, interviews, and other measures.

**Evaluation:** The process of making judgments or decisions about a student's strengths and needs based on a psychoeducational assessment. Evaluations may include a summary of the assessment process and may summarize what will or should happen in the future for that student.

**Testing Accommodations and Access:** Testing accommodations are specific modifications to the testing process intended to improve access for an individual with a disability. The purpose of testing accommodations is to make access for an individual with a disability equivalent to that of a person without a disability. Access really isn't defined here. Are both terms supposed to be bold and are they separate terms or is it Testing Accommodations and Access, all one definition?