Task12 is Helping Raise the Bar | CPD

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By Connie Pehrson State and federal laws, including the American with Disabilities Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, require that people who are deaf or hard of hearing be provided with interpreters. Currently, across the nation there is a shortage of nationally certified interpreters for the deaf, and a limited number of people being trained to go into that field. This shortage may increase in 2012 when the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc (RID), the national professional association of sign language interpreters, has declared that all candidates for national certification must hold a bachelor’s degree. The shortage of qualified interpreters affects people who are deaf of all ages; in school, in the community, and at work. Students struggle to find qualified interpreters for their classes; mainstreamed children often have poor quality interpreters or no interpreter at all; people in the work force often have to attend key meetings or conferences without an interpreter; people who are seeking medical or other services are forced to go without a trained interpreter. RID has recognized the insufficient numbers of interpreters available to meet the market’s demand, and has declared a “national interpreter crisis in the quantity, quality, and qualification of interpreters.” The TASK12 (Training and Assessment Systems for K-12 Educational Interpreters) Project, based at the Center for Technical Assistance for Excellence in Special Education (TAESE) at the Center for Persons with Disabilities at USU, is working hard to decrease this shortage of trained interpreters by focusing on increasing the skills and credentialing for educational interpreters for the deaf in public schools across the nation. The TASK12 project assesses the skills of educational interpreters using the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA), a national test of interpreter skills. They then offer their Training of Interpreters in Public Schools (TIPS) training to the interpreters. The TIPS training focuses on the specific areas of weaknesses found during the skill assessment. TIPS guides interpreters through face-to-face and online modules that focus on improving sign language skills, and is followed by a competency test of skills to provide feedback on how they are doing. The TASK12 Project is now entering its seventh year as a multi-state project. Starting with a consortium of nine states and a regional concept, it has expanded to include fourteen states involved nationally in assessing educational interpreters on the EIPA and receiving follow up TIPS training by the TASK12 staff. Directed by Dr. Bernhardt Jones, this project continues to provide members of the consortium with educational interpreter assessment services, annual diagnostic reports that identify personnel training needs, and an opportunity to develop and implement responsive personnel training. For the past three years, the Georgia Department of Education has worked with TASK12 to improve the skills of educational interpreters in their K-12 settings. Dr. Frank Nesbit, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program Consultant, has worked to bring the EIPA test to Georgia and set up the TASK12 testing schedule statewide. Currently, Georgia has administered over 260 tests and is offering another 130 sessions to interpreters during 2010. Interpreters must obtain a score of 3.5 or better on the EIPA to become credentialed interpreters. “The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive in Georgia. Even candidates who did not achieve the minimum score (on the EIPA) have commented on how valuable the diagnostic report is to them,” Nesbit states. In the last two years Georgia has increased from having about 50 credentialed interpreters employed in their schools, to over 150. TASK12 has provided a framework for a number of other states to establish state standards for education interpreters in K-12 settings, and has worked collaboratively with them to resolve issues related to having qualified educational interpreters in their schools. In recent years, the TASK12 Project has observed an improvement in the skills of educational interpreters and higher skill expectations of K-12 interpreters by school administration in the consortium states. The work that TASK12 is doing raises the standard for interpreters across the nation, and when the bar is raised for interpreters, the bar is raised for the students as well.