

Descriptions of the Pilots

Project LADDER (Long Awaited Demand for Deaf Education Reform)

Target Population

Deaf and hard-of-hearing high school-aged students in Los Angeles County.

Project Purpose

To plan, develop, and implement a specialized regional high school educational program in the arts, sciences, and technology for deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing students in Los Angeles County.

Description of Project

The concept of co-enrollment is being piloted with elementary and middle school pupils at the TRIPOD program in a public school located in the Burbank Unified School District. TRIPOD enrolls deaf and hard-of-hearing preschool and elementary-aged students as well as some hearing students who are interested in a close learning association with deaf and hard-of-hearing students. Instructors use a variety of communication strategies (American Sign Language (ASL), Signed English, Aural/Oral, and writing) so students benefit from direct instruction. All students have learning plans designed to embody six criteria: complex thinking, collaborative contribution, innovative production, self-directed learning, involved citizenship, and effective communication.

The high school program (to be named the Laurent Clerc Academy in honor of the first teacher of the deaf in America) is designed to offer a high caliber, comprehensive high school curriculum with extended and enriched emphasis in the areas of performing and visual arts, science, and technology. These areas are often unavailable in the more traditional school programs for deaf and hard-of-hearing students. At the high school level, hearing students will be required to master sign language prior to enrolling in the academy. American Sign Language (ASL) will be one of the foreign languages taught in the linguistics department.

Burbank High School enrolled its first deaf and hard-of-hearing students in the ninth grade class of 1994, the first class of the new four-year high school program. The school now has two classes which are operating as a "school within a school." Enrollees include hearing students from TRIPOD who are taught following a team teaching model, with a general education and a deaf education teacher planning and presenting as a team. Students are following the regular Burbank Unified School District high school curriculum at the present time.

Project LADDER addresses the global causes of problems in the service delivery system as stated in ACR 55 (due to the severity of the condition, low prevalence within the population, highly specialized needs, and inadequate funding) by combining deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing students into a single instructional program offering several specialized interpreting services. The project is essentially a feasibility study of an educational program for hearing impaired students centered around a course of study of comparable quality to that offered to hearing students. The low prevalence of deaf and hard-of-hearing students is addressed by offering all of the specialized interpretation methods of spoken communication, while serving hearing impaired students in classrooms together with normal hearing students. In effect, LADDER is piloting a new kind of program option for hearing impaired students.

Activities

A steering committee established the structure for a comprehensive educational program serving all students with a hearing loss rather than a selective few. Members met with local special education and SELPA directors to gather input. Goals and objectives for the high school were carefully formulated as the curriculum framework for each year was established. Discussions of criteria for the physical location of the academy led to a formal proposal being submitted to CSU Northridge administration to house the program. The committee established phase-in procedures which are presently in effect at Burbank High School.

Project Outcomes

As a feasibility study involving activities as yet uncompleted, it is too early for evaluation. Initial testing of the academic progress of elementary-aged students in the preliminary program is encouraging.