

February 17, 2012

To National Association of the Deaf, American Society for Deaf Children,  
Deafhood Foundation, and Deaf Bilingual Coalition:

We are writing this letter as members of Utah Association of the Deaf/Education Committee; we wish to share with you information regarding the impact Utah has had on other state schools for the deaf so to warn you about possible future consequences. First, some background:

For years, Utah School for the Deaf (USD) has been proud of its uniqueness because, starting in 1962, this agency, as they call it, has promoted what they now call a “Dual Track” system in which parents choose either Oralism (or LSL as it is called today) or Total Communication (what is now called ASL/English Bilingual Education). As the program stands today, USD personnel are not allowed to teach ASL to parents in Utah who choose to enroll their children in the LSL program; likewise, children who are enrolled in the ASL/English program are not allowed to receive speech services from USD personnel until they enter school at age 3. (If parents wish to learn ASL and or receive speech services, they can do so on their own, often with therapists not specifically trained to work with deaf and hard-of-hearing children.) USD Superintendent, Steven W. Noyce, has repeatedly explained that parents who want their children to both sign and speak should choose the ASL/English option as it includes Oracy, and children in that program do obtain speech services. However, as previously mentioned, the children don't get the Oracy services provided until they enroll at age 3. This is in opposition to the desire of many parents, including those of children with cochlear implants, to have their young children obtain ASL instruction AND intensive speech therapy with therapists who work with deaf and hard-of-hearing children.

For years, administrators at USD have proudly asserted that its system is unique, and, indeed it is, as very few other schools and/or programs throughout the United States have something similar. For many years, this has been an “inside” battle between Utah proponents of the LSL and ASL/English bilingual approaches. For many years, the two camps co-existed in varying degrees of ease/unease. During the past few years, however, especially after Superintendent Noyce took over the reins of the school, former students and other members of the Utah Deaf community have started an intense, albeit silent challenge of his policies. Letters were written, meetings were requested and email sent. Some changes were made, but we are still very fearful of the long-range impact of Noyce's administration. We are also alarmed by the effect that the Utah program is apparently having on other states, in favor of expanding LSL programs and often negatively affecting ASL/English bilingual programs.

As Deaf Utahans who have gone through numerous battles to ensure equal promotion of the two programs and to encourage the ability of parents to choose both learning ASL and intensive speech therapy (rather than the ONE OR THE OTHER choice that currently exists), we don't wish our history of Deaf education repeated in other states.

Now that it is apparent that Utah has had an impact on some states, we wish to present our concerns in hopes that struggles similar to what we have experienced will not happen in other states. Please allow us to give some background information on how this trend is spreading outside of Utah.

On February 21, 2011, the Salt Lake Tribune published an article entitled “Schools for the Deaf Grapple with Balancing Two Tracks” stating that “Superintendent Steven W. Noyce of the Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind (USDB) hoped the Dual Track Program will empower parents and become a model nationally for other state schools for the deaf” (Winters, Salt Lake Tribune, February 21, 2011). One of the results of such a program at USD has been that success is measured by how many students are mainstreamed out of the USD system

([www.usdb.org/Shared%20Documents/Interim%20Final%20Report%202011.pdf](http://www.usdb.org/Shared%20Documents/Interim%20Final%20Report%202011.pdf)).

While students in the Utah ASL/English program “often remain at USD until graduation” (implying un-successful-ness), children in the LSL program in Utah are encouraged to be mainstreamed by third grade. Unfortunately, there is no system in place to follow-up on how they do academically or socially beyond third grade; Superintendent Noyce himself admits this:

“USDB has not been to track students’ performance once students are no longer eligible for special education. [A] data system for longitudinal tracking [is] being collaboratively developed by USDB and the Utah State Office of Education” (slide 26 of Noyce’s speech at a conference in Delaware, discussed further below).

Moreover, another result of the policy of encouraging children to be mainstreamed caused the number of students being educated on the campus in Ogden, Utah to shrink to 35 students (UAD Bulletin, February 1990). The campus does educate more students today, mainly because advocates of the ASL/English bilingual program in Salt Lake City – Jean Massieu School – wanted something similar at Ogden, but the drastic decline in numbers was due to the push to mainstream students out of USD as early as possible.

We saw the same thing happen at South Dakota School for the Deaf (SDSD). We all know what happened there, how the number of students shrunk due to a new policy of segregation between LSL and ASL/English students and the encouraging of mainstreaming among SDSD students. What many people may not know is that, according to Timothy Chevalier, former ASL/English Bilingual Specialist at SDSD, SDSD administrators visited and consulted with USDB administrators in 2005 to study their Dual Track Program (Personal Communication, Timothy Chevalier, June 6, 2011). Soon afterward the USD model was initiated at SDSD

Elsewhere, school administrators at Delaware School for the Deaf (DSD), which is an ASL/English bilingual school, are currently in a struggle with an advocacy group called “CHOICES Delaware,” established in 2010. While CHOICES Delaware concedes that ASL educational services are fine for deaf and hard of hearing children of deaf parents, they assert that speech and audition therapy services are best for those who have hearing

parents. Ursula Schultz, a Deaf employee at DSD shared that CHOICES Delaware wants DSD to adopt the listening and spoken language educational practices following AGBell's principles for LSL in their early childhood classes: "They believe that all children who have a hearing aid or cochlear implants need LSL only. They have been rallying to state officials trying to make change happen" (Ursula Schultz, personal communication, February 12, 2012; <http://choices-delaware.org/position-papers>).

What is Utah's role in this, you may ask? Well, at CHOICES' conference on May 14, 2011: Managing Listening, Language & Educational Outcomes for Today's Children with Hearing Loss, the keynote speaker was none else but USD's Superintendent Steven W. Noyce, a fervid adherent of the LSL program. The title of Noyce's speech was seemingly innocuous: Deaf Education in America: Then and Now; however, one of the main thrusts of his speech was the promotion of the Dual Track Program, which is being resisted by parents, professionals, and the Deaf community here in Utah (<http://choices-delaware.org/delaware-initiatives/update-2011-managing-listening-language-educational-outcomes-for-todays-children-with-hearing-loss>).

On May 17, 2011, only three days after the CHOICES conference, Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels appointed two new members to the board that oversees the Indiana School for the Deaf (ISD). As you are well aware, the two new board members are not only not-affiliated at all with the bilingual education, but are, in fact, affiliated with the Listening and Spoken Language philosophy

Subsequently, as we are all aware, the Indiana Legislature came up with HB 1367: a bill that would take Outreach & Consultation services out of ISD into a centralized agency. Again, Utah had a role; this bill has the support of Dr. Karl White, Director of the National Center for Hearing Assessment and Management at Utah State University, Another Utah adherent of the LSL program, White spoke to the Indiana Legislature, encouraging them to pass HB 1367 (<http://handeyes.wordpress.com/2012/02/06/karen-mayes-info-connecting-of-some-dots-re-indiana-hb1367/>)

Let us digress here with some information about Dr. White. He is the founding director of the National Center for Hearing Assessment and Management (NCHAM) at Utah State University, which promotes programs for early detection and management of hearing loss in children. He is involved with numerous boards and committees developing policies and procedures for early hearing detection and intervention, not only in the United States, but in Poland, Costa Rica and India as well. He is a member of the AGBell Association, and advocates Listening and Speech Learning as the way to go for deaf and hard-of-hearing children, especially those with cochlear implants. He has been very successful in obtaining numerous grants for his work ([http://fellowships.aas.org/09\\_Testimonials/Experiences/White.shtml](http://fellowships.aas.org/09_Testimonials/Experiences/White.shtml) & [http://psychology.usu.edu/assets/files/Karl\\_White\\_vita1.pdf](http://psychology.usu.edu/assets/files/Karl_White_vita1.pdf))

More recently, at a February 10, 2012 meeting of the National Deaf Agenda Committee sponsored by the Utah State Office of Education, Superintendent Noyce explained that one of the goals of AGBell was to expand new statewide agencies (outreach services)

throughout the country. He proudly stated that USD is a model nationally and how he could be of service to other states. He informed the committee that in the atmosphere of protests by the Indiana Deaf Community concerning HB 1367, Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels contacted him for information regarding outreach services at USD. He clarified that the LSL community is not satisfied with the Outreach services provided by ISD and feel they would be better served by a new statewide agency. According to Noyce, several states might soon follow in the same footsteps including New Jersey and Illinois (Noyce has already flown to Illinois for this purpose). He also informed the committee that two private LSL Outreach Services have been established in Washington State and that South Dakota School for the Deaf is now an Outreach Services Agency (as discussed earlier), applauding the idea of statewide agencies.

The Salt Lake Tribune article mentioned earlier included a statement from Noyce in which he states, “I don’ t have any problem with people being an advocate for American Sign Language. I wish those who advocate for ASL wouldn’ t have a problem with those who advocate for listening-and-spoken language. My role is to support very strongly both programs equally” (Winters, February 21, 2011, Salt Lake Tribune). An opinion piece written earlier and endorsed by eight deaf education advocates, however, asserts that contrary to what Noyce believes about himself, “[He] doesn’ t understand the deaf signing segment of the student population well enough to advocate adequately for them” (Opinion Editorial, February 14, 2011 Salt Lake Tribune and Winters, February 21, 2011, Salt Lake Tribune).

Jake Dietz, a hearing father of two deaf children, also had a reaction to the same statement that Mr. Noyce made regarding his supporting “both programs equally.” In his February 21, 2011 blog Jake wrote:

“First of all, I think this statement [the same one as above] clearly shows that he considers himself someone who is advocating for the LSL path. The last part is true, that his role is to support both equally, but clearly, since he wishes those who advocate for ASL did not have such a problem with those who advocate LSL (Steve Noyce), he does not strongly support both. This is all I have been asking for from the beginning, is someone who is more moderate [than] our [current] superintendent. He or she should not have strong feelings one-way or the other, but instead should truly support the choices for parents. Steve Noyce also says that he hopes that the two tracks will empower parents, but in reality they take that power away from parents. I can't speak for everyone, but I sure felt empowered as I was told by USDB after we chose ASL that we would no longer receive the auditory and speech therapy Eliza needed. I felt even more empowered as I heard from USDB employees that because we had chosen ASL for our daughter, she would not be considered a candidate for a cochlear implant. You're right, Noyce, this two-track system is very empowering. ... Let's be honest, if you are choosing LSL, the new two-track system is very empowering, but if you want a bilingual-bicultural approach, the new system is anything but empowering. I support any plan

where all parents are truly empowered” (<http://moderndayheroes-dietzfam06.blogspot.com/>)

Later, at a May 26, 2011 meeting of a task force established by the Utah State Board of Education established specifically to look at the role and administrative structure of USDB, seventy-five people attended. About 80 percent of them were LSL advocates, including Superintendent Noyce and Dr. Karl White. Among the comments that were made, many mentioned how USD was a model nationally for Deaf Education. Jeff Pollock (Deaf), a USDB Advisory Council member also spoke and stated that even though USD may be a model for the LSL philosophy, USD was NOT a model nationally for ASL/English Bilingual Education programs. Moreover, there was a lack of support for the ASL/English Bilingual program housed at Jean Massieu School, regardless of what Superintendent Noyce said (Jeff Pollock, personal communication, June 1, 2011).

Again, the Deaf Community in Utah strongly disagrees with the Dual Track system at USD and does not recommend this for other states. After observing the overall issues in other states, we are starting to see a pattern of involvement by USD Superintendent Noyce and Dr. Karl White. We are deeply concerned that what the Utah Deaf community has gone through because of the exertion by people like Noyce and White are now spreading to other states.

Since Noyce and White are offering their services to other states, we, the UAD Education Committee, are offering our services through collaboration with the NAD at the national level if needed. This information might be valuable for the NAD conference this coming July.

Sincerely,

Philippe Montalette, President, Utah Association of the Deaf

Dan Mathis, Chair of the UAD Education Committee

Jeff Pollock, Member of the USDB Advisory Council and the UAD Education Committee

Jodi Becker Kinner, Deaf Education Advocate and UAD Board member