Getting Ready for Graduation

With the end of the school year on the horizon, many students have a very special day circled on their calendars—graduation day! It is a time filled with excitement, nostalgia and anticipation for the future. It is also a time to carefully consider access for our students with hearing loss so they are privy to detailed rehearsal instructions and the meaningful messages delivered by commencement speakers. The following are key areas to consider as graduation exercises draw near.

Organize communication between the student and key staff.
Those in charge of graduation events may not be familiar with the student with hearing loss and his or her specific access needs and preferences. Our teachers of the deaf reach out to each student’s individual and/or class advisors to arrange a planning meeting with key staff. Having an in-person discussion allows everyone to review events and procedures together and identify specific times when accommodations will be needed. This provides an opportunity for the student to ask questions and participate in developing an access plan. Following this meeting, keeping everyone updated in the days and weeks leading up to graduation (such as through group emails) helps ensure no stone goes unturned.

Make use of the student’s personal FM system.
For many students, their FM system is essential during rehearsals and on graduation day. With an entire class coming together for practices in an auditorium, gymnasium or outdoor facility, catching all of the directions is more challenging due to distance from speakers, background noise and reverberation in these settings. If the person leading rehearsals is new to the student, encourage the student to meet with this person briefly prior to the first rehearsal to explain how to use the FM correctly. For graduation day and related awards ceremonies, students often request that the FM system be placed at the podium for each speaker to use. This provides much better access than what they can hear and understand via the public speaker system.

Provide preferential seating.
Seating for graduates is typically alphabetical, which can pose a problem for students with hearing loss depending on where this places them. For those who need to be close to the front for better access to speakers, there can be easy workarounds. Students have been given an aisle seat near the front, for example, and then simply step into line at the correct point alphabetically when graduates proceed to the stage to receive their diplomas. At banquets and award ceremonies, requesting a seat ahead of time where the student is closer to the podium with unobstructed visual access is ideal.

Provide printed copies of instructions and speeches.
Rehearsal instructions provided in written form will help the student review and clarify understanding of procedures (i.e. “When the speaker says ________, everyone stands”). Calendars with the rehearsal schedule marked clearly help students know where and when rehearsals will be and what will be covered. Written instructions should include related details, such as the process and options for obtaining graduation gowns (i.e. purchase versus...
Consider live captioning. While parts of graduation ceremonies are scripted, many moments are not. Poignant exchanges and comments from speakers are often added to planned remarks, jokes are interpolated, and so on. CART (Computer-Assisted-Real-Time-Transcription) is another option to consider for providing complete access. CART offers live captioning of all communication conveyed to the audience. Your student’s commission for the deaf and hard of hearing is a good starting point for locating a CART professional in your area (advance notice is required).

The Collaborative for Communication Access via Captioning (CCAC) urges schools to offer CART as a means of providing universal access:

“We encourage school leaders in plan to include CART during graduation ceremonies. Up to fifty percent of the large audience will use it and appreciate it. A transcript of the special day will be created at the same time. Including CART (i.e., live captioning) will help educate all about the need for captioning in so many places…”

ccacaptioning.org/captioning-education-literacy-graduations

Don’t forget the youngest graduates! While we typically think of high school students during graduation season, the lower grades often host special ceremonies, too. Schools may celebrate the completion of kindergarten or the final year of elementary school. Preferential seating; projecting agendas and lyrics to songs and poems for all to see (and reviewing them together ahead of time); making use of the FM system during rehearsals and on the big day—all of these strategies are important to consider in advance.

End-of-the-year ceremonies are a perfect opportunity to help our students learn about access planning and explore the strategies that work best for them. The most important thing to remember is that each student’s needs and preferences are unique. Organizers should not assume that an access plan that worked for a previous student is applicable to a current student. Involving the student provides important access planning and explores what they need and how to ask for it, our students will be well equipped to get the most out of these special occasions and walk away with memories that will last a lifetime!

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10 Tips for Successful Spring Field Trips

After a long winter—especially here in New England—students and teachers alike look forward to a change in the daily routine and a chance to explore a new place away from school grounds. While good preparation makes field trips more meaningful and enjoyable for all children (as well as the adults in charge!) there are some simple steps that will ensure your student with hearing loss gets the most out of your next excursion.

1. Connect with the facility you plan to visit ahead of time and, if possible, speak directly to the person who will be leading your group. Ask what the children will see, and what they will let them do and not do, so you can share essential information about time of day. Don’t take for granted a child’s background knowledge and vocabulary related to the destination, or assume the child knows what the place is or what the rules are.

2. Schedule the time at a day that provides the most possible listening environment. To lessen confusion and background noise, ask what days—and times of the day—will be less crowded. In addition, ask for preferential seating, closer to the speaker and with clear visual access. If possible request that your guide meet with your group in a quiet area at the beginning of a visit for introductions and review of rules.

3. Let the facility know that a child with hearing loss will be in your group. Keep the explanation simple. You might say that the child speaks, listens and speaks to communicate. Encourage the guide to speak normally and to be open to repeating or rephrasing occasionally. Ask the guide to stay in one location when talking, and then move to the next location. A guide who talks and walks around at the same time will be difficult for the child who needs speechreading cues.

4. Make use of the student’s personal FM system. Check the system to make sure it is charged and on the correct setting before leaving. Teachers can use the system for communication as needed during the bus ride. At your destination, the tour guide can be asked to wear the FM system. If students are dismissed after a presentation to examine on their own, the student’s chaperone or teacher in charge should then wear the FM. Remember to bring along extra hearing aid or implant batteries.

5. Request captioned media ahead of time. If students will watch a movie on the bus, make sure it is captioned and that the bus driver knows how to turn the captions on. If a movie or short film is part of a tour, ask ahead of time if it is captioned. If it is not, ask if a script is available.

6. Plan for the weather. Let families know how much of the trip will be outdoors regardless of weather conditions so the child can pack appropriate gear (jacket with a hood, sweat guards) to protect amplification devices.

7. Prepare and review a simple itinerary. Knowing what to expect helps prevent a child from being caught off guard and not knowing what he or she should be doing.

8. Review associated language and vocabulary with the child before and after the trip. Parents and the child’s teacher of the deaf or speech pathologist can be excellent partners in preparing and following up with the child to check understanding. Sharing information about an upcoming trip such as your itinerary, a brochure or website is helpful for previewing. Share any photos taken on the trip so they can be used for follow up processing.

9. Consider accessibility ahead of time for overnight trips. Your student may have the opportunity to go on a multi-day class trip or participate in school athletic events that require overnight stays. Public facilities must provide accommodations that ensure accessibility (e.g. visual fire alarms, TDDs or amplified phones, closed captions, door signalers, bed shaker alarms) when given advance notice. Hopefully your student has a system for waking up independently (if parts of the trip were difficult to access, the student may enjoy and thank the tour guide for doing a great job with the FM, for example. If parts of the trip were difficult to access, the student might explain why and offer suggestions for improving the experience for future guests with hearing loss (such as the need for captions or written guides).

10. Look for ways to raise awareness and promote self-advocacy. After a trip, talk with your student about what went well and any areas that may have been challenging. Teachers often have students write thank-you letters to the people who managed the trip. This is a perfect opportunity for the student to share what he or she enjoyed and thank the tour guide for doing a great job with the FM, for example. If parts of the trip were difficult to access, the student might explain why and offer suggestions for improving the experience for future guests with hearing loss (such as the need for captions or written guides).
Printed copies of graduation speeches are a necessity for many students, even when the FH system is being used at the podium. Some schools have been able to provide copies for students with hearing loss ahead of time, while others have copies ready at the ceremony (i.e. placing a copy at a student’s assigned seat).

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End-of-the-year ceremonies are a perfect opportunity to help our students learn about access planning and explore the strategies that work best for them. The most important thing to remember is that each student’s needs and preferences are unique. Organizers should not assume that an access plan that worked for a previous student is applicable to a current student. Involving the student provides immediate access that will benefit the student now and in the years to come. At the college level, for example, students bear sole responsibility for requesting access prior to commencement exercises. Knowing what they need and how to ask for it, our students will be well equipped to get the most out of these special occasions and walk away with memories that will last a lifetime!
“Nothing is rock solid in aviation.” This quote explains Ryan, is often heard around the airport. It’s something pilots keep in the back of their mind on every flight. “Anything can change with the flip of a coin,” adds Ryan. The ability to stay calm under pressure, to problem solve and trust in yourself and your training are the attributes of someone who is going to be successful not only in the air, but in life. Steady, determined and easygoing, Ryan is an outstanding example of what can be accomplished when you find your passion and put in the hard work to achieve your goals.

Ryan, a 2010 graduate of Clarke Schools for Hearing and Speech, entered the mainstream in high school and graduated from the Williston Northampton School last June. He has a moderate to profound hearing loss and wears hearing aids. Currently a freshman at Emmanuel College, he has been interested in aviation for as long as he can remember. Fasten your seatbelts and prepare to be impressed as he tells us about his journey toward becoming a pilot.

How did you become interested in learning to fly?
I’ve always been fascinated with planes and what makes them work. When I was about 12 or 13, I started going to camp at a local airport. I was hooked after going up in airplanes and landing in different places.

What license are you working toward and what steps are involved?
I am working toward my light-sport aircraft license. These single engine planes have a wing span of about 40 feet and seat two people. I chose this to start with because it is a more cost effective way to learn to fly and there are no hearing requirements since radio communication is not required. [Other licenses require medical certification. Pilots who do not meet the hearing thresholds can request a SODA—Statement of Demonstrated Ability—and be issued a license with certain restrictions, such as not flying in airspace that requires radio communication.] I have my student pilot certificate, which is similar to a learner’s permit. You always have to carry it with you when you fly. Getting your license requires at least 20 hours of flight instruction, but many people go beyond that to make sure they are prepared. You begin with ground school and flight instruction. Then you take a pre-solo exam and if you pass that, you get an endorsement from your instructor to take your first solo flight. For this you stay within a mile of the airport, in contact with the instructor and in his line of sight. I took my solo flight in August 2014. The next step is preparing for a cross-country flight, which involves flying solo to three different airports and going at least 75 nautical miles. You have to prove that you are competent and comfortable with the aircraft and can operate it safely and effectively. After that, you prepare for the FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) written test and flight exam.

What are some ways you’ve made communication work during lessons?
I offered suggestions to my instructor, such as asking him to look at me when speaking. At the beginning of a lesson, the instructor walks me through what we are going to do before we get in the plane and the engine is running. We go over types of maneuvers, how we will turn according to the wind, and how the plane will react. Instruction is one-to-one so it’s personalized and you can spend more time working on the things you need to. In the cockpit, we wear headphones with microphones so my instructor and I can talk to each other. The headphones fit over my hearing aids and block out engine noise. When the instructor is on the ground and I am in the air, we communicate with the headsets and he speaks more clearly. If he says something and I don’t respond, he will repeat, and if I don’t hear him clearly, I ask for repetition.

There is an aviation alphabet which allows for a quicker and clearer way of understanding. For example, planes have call signs used to identify themselves. The aviation alphabet uses words to identify letters (A= Alpha, B= Bravo, c= Charlie and so on) to similar sounding letters like ‘m’ and ‘n’ aren’t confused. One letter could mean the difference between a single propeller plane and a private jet; each behaves differently and has different airspeeds to maintain. [Visit phl.org/passengerinfo/KidsCorner to see the full alphabet.]

Describe a challenging maneuver you have learned to do.
Doing stalls in an aircraft is fun! We go up to about 4,000 to 5,000 feet, pull the power back and raise the nose so it’s at a steep angle. You begin losing airspeed and when you are at the point where there is not enough air speed to keep going, the nose dips down. Then, you add full power and try to raise the nose back up so you don’t go into a spin.

Do you ever get nervous?
I’m always a little nervous, but it’s fine to be nervous. It keeps you aware and maintains respect for the aircraft.

What have you learned about yourself in the process of learning to fly?
I’m more capable than what I thought. If you think about it, there can be huge pay-offs that can benefit you and everyone around you.

What do you enjoy about flying?
Flying because you love it—it’s hard and it takes a lot of time. Flying is a way to get away from everything. You are not able to focus on what’s bothering you because you have to focus on flying the airplane.

After you earn your license, how do you envision making use of it?
I plan to fly for recreation, such as in the autumn to see the beautiful foliage over the Berkshires or to go to Cape Cod for the day for sightseeing. Hopefully one day I’ll get my private pilot’s license, which would allow for a single engine, more powerful plane that seats up to four people versus the two-seaters that I am currently flying.

What advice do you have for other kids with hearing loss who have an interest in flight?
Don’t be afraid, take chances. There are more opportunities out there than what you think. Stick up for yourself. There’s something out there for anyone in aviation—pilot, mechanic, engine and more—there is something there for you if you follow your passion. It’s helpful to go to an airport and talk to someone one about what the options are and to get an idea of the requirements.

Ryan’s flight log with documentation by his instructor of his first solo flight!

Aviation History and Hearing Loss
Ryan joins a number of impressive individuals whom your students will surely be interested in learning about! Here is a glimpse, along with websites to check out for more information.

Calbraith Perry Rodgers was the first pilot to fly across the United States in 1911. He had a severe hearing loss that was the result of scarlet fever as a child. [nationalaviation.org/rogers-calbraith]

Nellie Willhite was not only the first woman to fly in South Dakota, in 1927 she became the first deaf woman to earn her pilot’s license. Willhite contracted measles at age 17, which caused her hearing loss. She flew in acrylic show, was a transport pilot and flight instructor, and a charter member of the “Ninety-Nines” (an organization for female pilots). [southerndakotamagazine.com/nellie-willhite]

Stephen Hopson became the first deaf instrument-rated private pilot in February 2006. This arduous license allows him to fly in all kinds of weather, relying on instruments when visibility is poor. Access Stephen’s 2011 Clarke commencement speech at clarkeschools.org/gradspeech2011.

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The Sky’s the Limit
College, he has been interested in aviation for as long as he can remember. Fasten your seatbelts and prepare to be impressed as he tells us about his journey toward becoming a pilot.

What do you envision making use of it?
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Deaf Pride
By: Carys, Grade 7
Can you see the pride that I feel inside? A continuous fire-breathing dragon
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What have you learned about yourself in the process of learning to fly?

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What do you enjoy about flying?

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Ryan’s flight log with documentation by his instructor of his first solo flight!

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Today’s technology puts so many resources at our fingertips. Apps have expanded the repertoire of student-friendly tools that educators, therapists, and parents can use when working with children on speech, language and listening skills, social conversation, organization and more. They can be a fun way to provide supplemental practice in therapy sessions and at home. Because there are so many apps out there, it can be hard to sift through them all and determine which ones are really worth the download. In this and future issues, we will feature apps recommended by our staff. Here are the first few that are kid tested and teacher of the deaf approved!

Popplet by Notion
Suggested ages: Elementary through high school and beyond
Overview: Our teachers of the deaf often use Popplet to help students organize their ideas before writing a rough draft. It allows students to create a visual map when brainstorming. For example, a student asked to write a paragraph to describe something (e.g. the Vikings), would put that word in the center and then add different “bubbles” (categories) of information connecting to it. The student might talk about the land, the people, the religion, and so on. The app is simple and user-friendly, allowing you to easily adjust the size and color of the bubbles. Another cool feature is that you can add pictures in addition to words.

Toca Boca apps by Toca Boca AB
(Toca Tailor, Toca Kitchen, Toca Fairy Tales, Toca Foods) to name a few!
Suggested ages: 4+
Overview: Toca Boca apps allow children to create and explore in a non-competitive format (racing to be first or earning points are not part of these apps). Each app offers a play space with a particular theme where a child’s imagination leads the way. While they can be used for independent play, our teachers of the deaf find them to be great tools for building vocabulary (clothing, food, colors, prepositions) while practicing auditory skills and directions. Endless possibilities for instruction can be adjusted based on a student’s level. For example, using Toca Tailor, a student can be asked to dress a character with basic directions like, “First choose a hat, and then choose a color.” Or, more complex, “After you put a red scarf around his neck, put on his green hat on his head.” Still more complex, “Before you make the upper half of the shirt red, make the lower half of the shirt green. Then choose a green hat on his head.” Still more complex, “Now take a photo of your character with basic directions like, “First choose a hat, and then choose a color.”

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Will is a fifth-grade student who has a strong interest in helping others learn about hearing loss.

Will
I am going to be changing classes for the first time next year. Do you do that yet? I am not sure about carrying all my stuff plus my FM system. Do you have advice?

So, yes, actually I ran into that problem myself this year. With all the books, pencils, and the binder it’s hard to do! One solution I used was to just clip it to the binder. So you have a checklist.
1. Hold the binder with the thickest part facing forward.
2. Take the FM’s belt clip and clip it to the top of the binder.
3. If the rings are big enough (two inches or larger) you can slip the pass-around mic into the rings and it fits well.
4. Other than your hearing aids, do you use any other technology at home?

Yes. I like to use closed captioning for TV and movies. This helps me because if you are watching a show and you miss a word or two you can use the words to help you. It takes a little while to get used to, but it’s really worth it to know everything the person said (especially when someone says something funny!). Recently my brother and I were lucky to receive an FM system as a gift from our grandparents to use at home. It’s helped us out so much. First of all, it helps us with after school activities such as clubs, Sunday School and sports. It’s also very helpful to use with the TV or when listening to music.

Do you or your students have questions for Will? Please send them to mainstream@clarkeschools.org.

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Do you or your students have questions for Will? Please send them to mainstream@clarkeschools.org.

Clarke’s Summer Adventure Program Expands Offerings for 2015

Exciting changes are on tap for Clarke’s Summer Adventure Program. By popular request, the ages of the camp have been extended. Two programs will run simultaneously: Summer Adventurers for ages 9-13 and Summer Explorers for ages 14-17. The camp will be held July 7-17, 2015 on the campus of the Williston Northhampton School in Easthampton, MA.

This year’s theme—Clarke’s Amazing Race: Believe It, Achieve It—is all about building self-confidence, challenging oneself, working as a team, making friends, building leadership skills and having fun! Clarke camp is the place to be if you want to meet other kids with hearing loss who use listening and spoken language. Campers spend their days with teachers of the deaf doing fun activities, going on field trips, swimming, hanging with friends, learning about themselves and their hearing loss. They spend their evenings in the dorm with dorm counselors, many of whom have hearing loss and serve as great role models. Summer Adventure brings children together on common ground, while encouraging them to discover new things about themselves and what they can accomplish.

For more information, please visit clarke schools.org/summeradventure or contact Martha deHahn at 413-587-7387 or mdehahn@clarkeschools.org.

Special thanks to our backpack sponsor: Odyssey Savings Bank and t-shirt sponsor: Mainstream News & Services.

Sports are hard if your implant keeps falling off, but there are two ways to fix that. You can put your implant under your hair then put your hair in a ponytail around it, but make sure that the magnet is completely covered with your hair. Another way is to use a sweat band and put it over your hearing aid. If all else fails, be creative and make your own! Summer Camp and school is so much fun until your battery dies! To prevent that, always bring an extra battery pack or batteries. Going to a new camp means explaining to people that you’re deaf. The first step in doing that is to be comfortable about it, it’s a beautiful part of who you are! The second step is to be patient. People are going to ask good questions and some stupid ones, too. Just answer them calmly and as best as you can to help them understand. Have fun with it and remember a little creativity can go a long way. Take off your implant and have someone sing a song while acting it out and you have to guess the song!

Going to a new camp means explaining to people that you’re deaf. The first step in doing that is to be comfortable about it, it’s a beautiful part of who you are!
Kid Tested, Teacher of the Deaf Approved!

Today’s technology puts so many resources at our fingertips. Apps have expanded the repertoire of student-friendly tools that educators, therapists and parents can make use of when working with children on sign, language and listening skills, social conversation, organization and more. They can be a fun way to provide supplemental practice in therapy sessions and at home. Because there are so many apps out there, it can be hard to sift through them all and determine which ones are really worth the download. In this and future issues, we will feature apps recommended by our staff. Here are the first few that are kid tested and teacher of the deaf approved!

Popplet by Notion
Suggested ages: Elementary through high school and beyond
Overview: Our teachers of the deaf often use Popplet to help students organize their ideas before writing a rough draft. It allows students to create a visual map when brainstorming. For example, a student asked to write a paragraph to describe something (e.g. the Viking), would put that word in the center and then add different “bubbles” (categories) of information connecting to it. The student might talk about the land, the people, the religion, and so on. The app is simple and user-friendly, allowing you to easily adjust the size and color of the bubbles. Another cool feature is that you can add pictures in addition to words.

Toca Boca apps by Toca Boca All (Toca Tailor, Toca Kitchen, Toca Fairy Tales, Toca Foods) to name a few!
Suggested ages: 4+
Overview: Toca Boca apps allow children to create and explore in a non-competitive way. They can be used for independent play, our teachers of the deaf find them to be great tools for building vocabulary (clothing, food, colors, prepositions) while practicing auditory skills and directions. Endless possibilities for instruction can be adjusted based on a student’s level. For example, using Toca Tailor, a student can be asked to draw a character with basic directions like, “First choose a hat, and then choose shoes.” Or, more complex, “After you put a red scarf around his neck, put on a show and you miss a word or two you can use the words to help you.” It takes a little while to get used to, but it’s really worth it to know everything the person said (especially when someone says something funny!). Recently my brother and I were lucky to receive an FM system as a gift from our grandparents to use at home. It’s helped us out so much. First of all, it helps us with after school activities such as clubs, Sunday School and sports. It’s also very helpful to use with the TV or when listening to music.

Do you have a favorite app that you use with your students? Send your recommendations to mainstream@clarkeschools.org.

Dear Wil,

I am going to be changing classes for the first time next year. Do you do that yet? I am not sure about carrying all my stuff plus my FM system. Do you have advice? So, yes, actually I ran into that problem myself this year. With all the books, pencils, and the binder it’s hard! One solution I used was to just clip it to the binder. So you have a checklist:

1. Hold the binder with the thickest part facing forward.
2. Take the FM’s belt clip and clip it to the top of the binder.
3. If the rings are big enough (two inches or larger) you can slip the pass-around mic into the rings and it fits well.

Other than your hearing aids, do you use any other technology at home? Yes, I like to use closed captioning for TV and movies. This helps me because if you are watching a show and you miss a word or two you can use the words to help you. It takes a little while to get used to, but it’s really worth it to know everything the person said (especially when someone says something funny!).

Wil is a fifth-grade student who has a strong interest in helping others learn about hearing loss.

Oliveia’s Summer Tips

Swimming and going to the beach is fun and relaxing, but watch out for the sun! Swimming is a whole different world, but sometimes it’s a pain not to hear while swimming. Thankfully there is a solution. All you need is a waterproof bag that can hold your implant and a bathing cap. First, I like to put the bathing cap on. Next, I put my implant in the bag and slip it inside, connecting the magnets like usual. Even though I use the bathing cap, some of my deaf friends don’t! Before we go into the pool, we make up simple signals for words or phrases to communicate easier. If all else fails just use a wet finger and write out the word or phrase on the edge of the pool. Going to the beach is always a must, but your implant can have some limits. If you take off your implant to go in the water don’t put it in a beach bag, put it in a zip-lock bag. You can also use the bathing cap and waterproof pack for the beach.

Oliveia is a sixth-grade student who wears cochlear implants. With some creative solutions for her technology— and a positive attitude—Oliveia shares her advice for summer fun!

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Mainstream News

Mark your calendars!

Clarke Mainstream Services’ 36th Annual Mainstream Conference
“The Sounds of Success: Believe It and Achieve It!”

OCTOBER 22 & 23, 2015
Best Western Royal Plaza Hotel & Trade Center
Marlborough, MA

Join us for two days of workshops, keynote speakers and networking opportunities offered by experts in the field of hearing loss.

Day two of the conference also features the 13th annual “Making Connections!” program designed for students with hearing loss who currently attend a mainstream school in grades 7-12. Young adults, who are deaf or hard of hearing, design and facilitate the program and serve as role models to the students who attend.

Visit clarkeschools.org/mainstreamconference for more information.