REBECCA KLEIN:

My name is Rebecca Klein, and I'm a content marketing manager for 3Play Media. Thank you for joining us today for the session Advancing Equity and Inclusion for Deaf Students in Higher Education.

Today, we are joined by Lore Kinast, Director of Strategic Support, and Kate Lewandowski, Accessibility Resource Coordinator for the National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes or NDC.

And interpreting today are Sarah Janeece and Liang. So thank you all for being here, and I'll pass it off to Lore and Kate to get started on today's presentation.

KATE LEWANDOWSKI THROUGH INTERPRETER:

Thank you. Thank you, Rebecca. Hi, everyone. My name is Kate Lewandowski. I'm the Access Resource Specialist here at National Deaf Center, and I'm a part of the help team. I provide support, guidance, and resources on how to navigate access and accommodations in postsecondary environments and training programs for students after high school. My pronouns are she and her, and to describe myself, I'm a white woman. I have dark blonde hair, pulled back in a bun at the back of my head. I'm wearing a black shirt, and I have a black wall behind me.

Hello, everyone. Lore, go ahead.

LORE KINAST THROUGH INTERPRETER:

Hi, everyone. I'm Lore Kinast. My pronouns are she and her. I'm the Director of Strategic Support, as we call it, SST. We provide very in-depth training and work with different entities to make transformative change to their practices on campuses, whether that's coordinating interpreters or other types of services.

We help colleges centralize their systems on campus. And oh, I forgot to describe myself. I am a white woman with grayish blonde hair and glasses. I'm wearing a dark short-sleeve shirt, and I have a gray background.

For this presentation, we will be using the term deaf. Deaf is an inclusive term that we use, recognizing there are culturally deaf people, those who are deaf blind, deaf disabled, hard of hearing, late deafened. And we want to acknowledge the spectrum of deaf people and those who experience any type of differences in hearing levels.

So regardless of your identity, your hearing level, your communication preference, we use the word deaf. And we use that term to identify all deaf people we serve. And we do that to be inclusive of the experience that deaf people have from various communities.

At the same time, we want to honor people's differences in perspectives and experiences. Let's look at the next slide. Here at the National Deaf Center, we do surveys from time to time, where we interview or send surveys out to students or professionals who work on campus to see about the climate that they're experiencing on campus, especially in college settings for deaf students.

The data that we collect helps us develop products, resources, and services, like online learning courses for you all to take advantage of, webinars, and trainings. We support our stakeholders in their work improving access for deaf students.

So we have a few statements from deaf students that we collected from that survey, and it helps us understand their experience on college campuses. So we'll start with a quote from this student. They are facing struggles in connecting with others on campus. So this student says they would hope that a social gathering would be organized and hosted for deaf people and signers, that the ASL club is hearing populated and doesn't center their club on deaf culture or language.

They said, I feel isolated as a deaf person of color on campus, despite knowing deaf people are here. But I'm unable to reach out with them. Let's look at our next slide.

For visual description purposes, I will read the quotes from these. The first statement says, be more accountable for professors who do not adhere to accommodations. Secondly, it says, the compliance accommodations process for deaf students who have additional disabilities, that they wish that campuses understood that auto captioning is not accessibility, and that disability resource offices need major education and training for deaf students, that their empathy and understanding are severely lacking.

So again, from the survey we sent out, we surveyed 194 students over 65 institutions. And we found that 36% of deaf students were likely to participate on campus activities. It was non-classroom environments, such as guest speakers on campus, student events that highlighted different cultures, celebrations, or awareness, visiting companies or businesses for career networking.

All of those contribute to the student's personal growth. It contributes to opportunities to develop connections for job prospects, creating friendships and partnerships. And of course, those need to be made accessible.

Another survey we did in 2018 through 2020, prior to the pandemic, a student commented that there is a lack of ASL interpreter and captions at different events and really anything outside the classroom. They said, I can't just do things. I can't on the spur of the moment decide to go to an event. I always have to set up access beforehand, and often people are hostile or even annoyed or have no idea how to set up access. It's very isolating.

So with that quote, we've seen that many institutions have policies that outline interpreter or speech-to-text services, which is like CART, C-Print, or TypeWell. So they have a request procedure, but very few institutions have built robust systems that are able to support requests on short notice.

The reason NDC is here is really what I've just shared with you in these first few minutes. It's the barriers that students face that we want to remove. We want deaf students to have equal access to education, work, and training after high school. We want them to have opportunities to be competitive in the workplace and to be able to move up the ladder in their career advancement.

We provide our contacts and colleagues with information to learn best practices and strategies, to connect with others, to leverage resources and work on transforming all of these systems that impact deaf people. So definitely check out our website. While you visit the website, I want to call your attention to the Disability Services for Students, or what we call DSS, professionals resource portal.

Our website really digs in. If you enter the website and click that DSS professionals link that's on the left-hand side, you will have a host of resources there.

Even though more and more deaf people in the United States are completing college degrees, deaf people do not have similar completion rates. For example, 61% of deaf students, compared to 77% of hearing students, have an associate's degree. 71% of deaf students, compared to 82% of hearing students, have a BA degree. So again, we want to point out that mismatch there.

Also, the higher educational attainment a deaf person receives increases their employment, earnings, those types of opportunities, a higher quality of life, and positive social outcomes. So in this chart on the screen, you'll notice that employment increases more and more for deaf people, and more for deaf people than hearing people, as they go to college. And once deaf people get a bachelor's degree or higher, that gap closes quite a bit. So with the more education a person has, we see better outcomes.

Now, we would ask you to look at our interactive data dashboard on our website. The data dashboard is a great resource to pull data by national level, by state, age, race, gender, disability, and specific job fields. So I encourage you to look there. That dashboard can be used to pull data for policy changes, programming services, justify an increase in your budget or spending, and so forth. So please take advantage of that. Let's look at the next slide.

This chart shows educational attainment and completion by race and ethnicity of students 25 to 64 years old. And you can see significant disparities between Black, Indigenous, people of color who are deaf, and hearing people. For example, an estimated 16.8% compared to 26.2% of Black students and then 16.3% compared to 20.8% of Latinx people have completed a bachelor's degree or higher.

We also know that educational experiences are significantly more challenging for deaf disabled people and those with intersections of race, ethnicity, and disability. So understanding these intersections can really help us understand the challenges that BIPOC deaf students face and deaf disabled students face. And you can address those challenges more effectively if you have that understanding.

Now, everything, the data that I just shared and the information about the data dashboard brings to mind we also have a student report that will allow you to dive in even more in depth to some data. And it is the undergraduate enrollment of deaf students in the US. So I have a link that I'll share with you so that you can see who's going to public or private institutions, if they're two or four-year institutions or training centers. So there's even more data to be found on our data dashboard.

All right, Kate. I think this is yours.

KATE LEWANDOWSKI THROUGH INTERPRETER: Yeah, this is Kate. So we know that deaf people have to navigate highly complex and multi-layered systems as part of the pathways. So we know that deaf people have to navigate highly complex and multi-layered systems as part of the pathways to postsecondary education and training.

It's critical to acknowledge that college readiness is a two-way street, both for students and institutions. They both need to be ready. You know, most often, when we look at data, people will attribute the gaps to something happening within that student's control, what the student is or isn't doing. If a student struggles or withdraws, it's attributed to something the student has done.

But instead, we need to look at barriers that are within the system. What's done in the system that creates those barriers that then impact students? We know that student engagement and providing a holistic approach to student needs, with better networks, tailored resources, extracurricular opportunities, they all support student retention and enrollment.

So earlier in the presentation, Lore had shared feedback and quotes that we have gathered from deaf students that show they face so many barriers just simply accessing campus programs and services beyond the classroom. And that tells us that, for many students, campus programs, services, and activities simply aren't designed with access in mind. That, in turn, directly impacts the deaf student's success in higher ed.

So colleges must strive for equity in experiences and opportunities. And equity is needed in all six of these constructs. We have to think about equity across the board, whether it's the environment, communication, technology, engagement, attitudes, and services.

So at this time, take a moment to think about what equity looks like for deaf students on your campus. Consider how deaf students are navigating environments such as accessing the counseling center, drop-in advising for financial aid, or living in the residence halls. Do deaf students have the same level of communication in those environments as their hearing peers? Do they have access to technology? And is that technology being well used?

Can they access and effectively use interpreting or speech-to-text services? Do they have access to other accommodations, like note-taking or assistive listening systems? Then finally, think, what is the overall perception of the campus climate about deaf people? How do people on campus view deaf people in general?

Now, while many institutions have policies about interpreter services or other services for deaf students, few colleges have built robust systems that are able to support requests on short notice. Being unable to fully take part in the full collegiate experience, it can be stifling. Their experience is completely different, both socially and academically. So opportunities to meaningfully engage with information and peers is essential to access. Back over to you, Lore.

LORE KINAST THROUGH INTERPRETER: Yeah, I shared student feedback a few minutes ago. And upon reviewing the data from that survey, our research team analyzed different parts of access and inclusion for deaf students, their college experiences, and they identified three categories-- accommodating learning environments, campus connectedness, and a deaf-affirming climate. So I'll discuss each one of these in a moment.

But the overall score for all three of these categories was a 2.6 out of 4. That's a 65%, meaning there is a lot of room for improvement in providing deaf student services and providing these deaf students with a better college experience.

So we have a survey that's currently open. It's the Deaf Postsecondary Access and Inclusion Survey. We call it the DPAIS. It's for deaf students to share about their college experiences. We also provide a custom report to colleges, if asked, as long as that college has 10 or more responses from deaf students. This survey is open through next year, so please share that with deaf students who are on your campus.

You will see here these three areas. And the first is accommodating learning environments. For this category, we ask deaf students questions such as, are faculty likely to provide slides or notes ahead of time? Is it likely that your requests to the accessibility office are responded to promptly? And are you likely provided with consistent access to providers? For that category, the score was 3 out of 4.

We want to encourage you to reflect on your campus's current policies and procedures. Consider strategies that reduce barrier-laden procedures that are laborious to the deaf student just to simply get access to the classroom or campus events, on top of the responsibilities they already carry as college students.

Most institutions have an accessibility office or a disability services office, and they're the ones who typically handle students' requests for accommodations. They typically process procurement of services and manage the providers and equipment. They also work with faculty and staff to make in-class adjustments. We know that the majority of campus views this office as being responsible for everything.

But the truth is, this is a campus-wide responsibility. Most of these offices or departments do not realize how they contribute to access barriers, and they don't know what can be changed. For example, maybe a department has a video on their website that isn't accessible.

So one strategy to address this is for all departments on campus to receive awareness and training on making all videos, lectures, and content accessible to everyone. Any audio content needs to be made accessible with captions. And we all know that captions don't simply benefit deaf people, but they benefit everyone.

The other category is campus connectedness. That also received a scored of 3 out of 4. For this category, we asked students questions such as, are you likely to feel welcome engaging in conversations with classmates? Are you likely to participate in campus student activities? And are you likely to ask for help from friends?

I think that you may recognize that that sense of belonging and connecting with your peers and faculty is a big part of anyone's college journey. So for marginalized groups, such as Black students, veterans, first-generation students, it leads to better outcomes when they have that connectedness.

For deaf students, this is an important issue because they frequently report that attending college can be isolating if they don't have access to connect with others. Maybe their peers want to go see a movie, but the campus movie theater doesn't have captioned films. That could be one way they feel disconnected.

Maybe there is a sporting event, and there are no captions there. So deaf students build social capital and by developing relationships and networks based on shared values and that allow them to exchange information and resources. So accessible social networks are invaluable for deaf individuals to share tips and strategies on how to navigate campus life.

The third category is the campus climate and a deaf-affirming climate. So several research studies have found that creating a culturally-affirming space inside and outside the classroom will improve a student's self-concept, academic and social well-being.

So knowing that, does your college foster a sense of community and mentorship for deaf students specifically? Is there a student-led deaf awareness club that organizes regular meetups and social events or workshops? Because through clubs like this, deaf students can connect with other deaf students, build friendships, receive guidance from senior deaf students who have successfully navigated their college experience.

Think about your campus, and do you recruit deaf faculty? Have you invited deaf speakers to raise awareness? Do you employ a coordinator or counselor who has knowledge and experience working with deaf students? When faculty and staff proactively affirm students' cultural identities and assets, harmful experiences and occurrences of microaggressions are significantly reduced when that happens.

So to wrap up these three categories, colleges have to be trained and ready to embrace deaf students with multiple identities, with additional disabilities, those who communicate in different ways and in different contexts.

So one strategy to work toward this is to take a position in the DEI movement. Make sure that deaf students are included in all of the opportunities on your campus. Work closely with your DEI office, the Disability, Equity, and Inclusion offices. And invite deaf people to the table. Hear their stories. Develop relationships with departments and various campus groups, and then join your efforts and your resources to work toward the goals across campus that will address awareness and expand the deaf population. Over to you, Kate.

KATE LEWANDOWSKI THROUGH INTERPRETER: So when we think about what it means to be student centered, it requires us to take a holistic view of experiences on campus. We also recommend using systems transformation. That lens examines various operations within institutions and includes systems coherence, which is structures, policies, practices, resources; relational capacity, which really comes down to relationships, including communication, connections, and thinking about power dynamics. Third is equity mindset. That includes our attitudes and our biases.

By adopting this system's lens, the focus of barriers is shifted toward the institution instead of toward students. And it acknowledges that barriers are created for deaf students. So once you can acknowledge those, you can create plans to address them and promote sustainable changes that will ensure that all programs and services offered on campus provide equitable experiences and opportunities for deaf students.

So you'll see here that although deaf students may be gaining increased access to education and training in these different settings, the accommodations they are giving are not consistent. They're of poor quality. They are insufficient to achieve equitable educational experience. And many of these barriers are often indicative of areas for improvement within the systems transformation model.

So in this slide, we listed some common barriers that we have witnessed from disability service personnel, from deaf students, and these directly impact campus accessibility. For example, common structural issues are inconsistent services delivery or absence of clear policies regarding these services and how to use the services. A lack of awareness or training on how to interact with and support deaf students, and that represents a weak relational capacity.

So when students report that they're not engaged in the interactive process or when campus leadership dismiss the need for accessible policies and practices, this suggests those attitudinal barriers, those attitudes and biases. And those are true barriers.

Now, this slide doesn't list everything. It's not an inclusive list. But this is under those three systems transformation categories. And several of these categories have pieces that overlap as well. The lack of centralized system involving budget or services coordination can be impacted by all areas of influence.

There may be someone on campus who does have expertise and who can provide that support with knowledge, but the lack of centralized systems typically has to do with attitudes and structures and relationships. So access, equity, and inclusion efforts, they're all complex issues that require a deeper level of commitment towards solutions.

So for systems transformation to be successful, we need to focus on improvement strategies that include building relationships and addressing those attitudes and biases. The reason for this is because systems at their core are made up of people. So achieving sustainable systems transformation is more likely when we, as the people working in the system, address three levels of this systems change.

So that first area of systems change focuses on system coherence. It addresses structures and fragmented systems. It's important to clarify roles and responsibilities to support the implementation of best practices and centralized systems, a centralized budget, and one central place where experts can be found, knowledge and awareness of accommodation practices. So that's first and foremost.

Campus-wide training and awareness is critical. It's important that staff understand accommodation practices. Clear communication about expectations on using accommodation practices across campus is critical so that everyone knows how to get these accessibility features, who pays for it. And that way, students aren't met with quite so much resistance when they go and look for these accommodations.

Number three here says, be consistent and transparent with communications about policies and practices. It is important to not just have a policy but to explain the reason why that policy is in place, to explain the intent, the purpose, or why there are limitations even within that policy itself.

Number four here says, implement person-centered and evidence-based practices. So you need to think about how you can perform regular audits and get feedback on your programs and services and how accommodations are provided for those programs and services. Getting consistent feedback will allow you to make small adjustments over time and make your systems even better.

Now, on this slide, even though we just talked through a lot on how we could make some improvement, we know that there's a lot of-- there are a lot of laws related to discrimination and the rights of deaf people. We also know that despite the laws that are supposed to protect the civil rights, that structural inequities and issues persist.

So some institutions provide services to deaf students, but they're providing the minimum according to the law. And they don't consider access outside the classroom. It's important that any student have complete access, not just in the classroom but any program and service offered by the campus. Training for campus-wide staff and faculty are important. Because when they know how to provide access, it makes the experience so much better.

The second part of systemic change is relational capacity. So we recognize the need to intentionally build relationships, authentic and reciprocal relationships. And there are three areas and ways we can do that. We provide space for engagement, and that can be through training or one-on-one feedback loops.

Second would be increase the efficiency of cross-agency collaborations. That can mean implementing a cross-departmental commission or committee. You think about who should be at the table for those types of committees, faculty, staff, students, and they can get together and discuss how to address some of the barriers that may be present on your campus.

And then work in the community, not in isolation. Be willing to change power dynamics by including and deferring to deaf people in your decision making. Power dynamics are major on campuses. It's important, though, that we empower deaf people to make these decisions and policies and procedures that will have a direct impact on them.

So a key element in building relational capacity is to engage the campus community in inclusion efforts. So the slide here says, support accessibility on campus by establishing interdepartmental relationships with faculty, staff, and students. Actively include deaf people on campus committees. So we have seen colleges find success with robust and accessible captioned media policies, for example. Those captioned media policies and practices are often developed through inter-departmental committees. They include staff campus-wide who are familiar with these caption policies.

We have seen campuses build these successful relationships. And when we see that, it's, again, very important to include deaf people in that process.

OK, the last section of this systemic change is equity mindset. Equity mindset really just means recognizing that inequitable outcomes is a problem of practice rather than a problem with the students. We want to eliminate educational and employment disparities for these marginalized students.

So it's important to practice a self-assessment, to look at your own power and privilege that impacts your work. You want to evaluate and explore opportunities for critical self-reflection and continue learning. You want to engage with that deaf student. Get to know what their experience has been. Understand their various identities. That's why it's important if you invite deaf students onto campus, invite deaf speakers, people to provide presentations to share about their experience.

And then engage deaf people in student clubs and activities as well. And then we also want to prioritize different people's lived experiences, both those who are on campus and those who aren't on campus. It's so important to look at the multiple intersecting identities and provide cultural competency and awareness trainings for students, staff, and faculty so that they can better interact with deaf people on your campus.

So the slide here reads, improving outcomes for deaf students, including students of color, deaf disabled, deaf blind, and LGBTQIA+ starts with leadership and campus personnel who believe that systems need to be changed, not deaf people. So again, it's important to work with your campus DEI office or committee. Think about how to address campus leadership, faculty, and staff with this topic because every person in the system, regardless of their role, has some type of impact on the lives of deaf people.

So it's important to involve that diversity, equity, and inclusion frame from the beginning. OK, back to you, Lore, and think we'll be ready to wrap up.

LORE KINAST THROUGH INTERPRETER: Yes, so the key takeaways from what we've talked about and for college readiness for deaf students and the campuses, we want campuses to be ready to serve a diverse group of deaf students who may show up on their campus.

It's important to commit to equitable experiences for deaf students, and it requires readiness within campus operations and the people who are operating the campus systems. So NDC is asking institutions to really take a good look at their operations, their structures, their attitudes, and how all of those things impact students.

So we want you to consider a continuous improvement plan. And if you need help with this, NDC is here to support you. We can provide a framework that includes all of these things listed here, and you can make adaptations to these plans. You can look at your overall capacity to serve deaf students who are on your campus and include them in all projects, programs, and services on your campus.

So this information is really just a starting place for your campus. It can help you see areas where you're doing really well and areas where you could use some improvement. We can help you develop action items and see what needs to be prioritized. We can help you develop a plan for making change, develop specific action steps, and even a timeline because often we have really good intentions, and we set some goals and action steps, but we don't give ourselves a timeline, so we lack the follow-through needed to actually make those changes.

Any changes should also be in partnership with deaf students, deaf staff, and across the campus. Students will tell you what the barriers are. They will tell you the frustrations they're experiencing as they navigate your campus. So you can't move forward without their input.

And also continue checking in on your campus accessibility. Maybe you get a good report. Continue to check in because things change. The people on your campus change. So often we'll set it and forget it. We'll get a new policy or a new procedure and things are working really well, and we get very comfortable with the status quo.

It's important to continue to reach out and check in, including the holistic experience of all deaf students of different identities. So that's something we want you to continue to think about as we finish this presentation today.

And with that, I want to thank you again for allowing us to present today. We have quite a few resources we will provide to you. I mentioned earlier, we have the disability services professional portal on our website. We also have an online learning module and webinar. We have multiple modules and webinars that you can see. We have the game Deafverse. We have news feeds that we post. Everything we offer is at no cost to you. It is free, so please do take advantage of those resources.

Thank you again for this opportunity. And any last words, Kate?

KATE LEWANDOWSKI THROUGH INTERPRETER: Hi, this is Kate. No, thank you. We appreciate being here, and we'll take your questions now.

REBECCA KLEIN: Yes. Hi. Thank you for that incredible presentation. I know that we've had a few questions come in. But I encourage everyone to keep asking, and we will try to get to as many as possible.

So in the presentation, you talked a bit about centralized systems for accessibility. Could you talk more about what that means and what that looks like?

LORE KINAST THROUGH INTERPRETER: OK, that's a great question about centralized systems. The centralized approach on campuses is fantastic to consider. It's one centralized place, as said by the word. Any campus, any classroom, any event, whether it's for students, staff, faculty, or community, one place that requests can be sent, one office. And that's typically what happens because that office may have someone who is skilled and competent in being able to handle access requests.

And then that centralized office will reach out to the department or the host of the event to get more details. Also, they may have access to pull student reports, to know what classes are being taken, so things like that. So that centralized system can be very supportive.

A centralized system for cost and budget is also highly recommended because we discourage campuses to put the burden of the budget on each department. Often a disability services office budget will run out very quickly if they are responsible to pay for all access. And it's important to know legally the entire campus is responsible. They share the burden of providing access to people on your campus.

So a centralized budget, where each department can contribute to the overall budget-- and of course, the administrators determine what that number is. But that reduces the amount of finger pointing whenever a request is made because one department will say, well, the host needs to pay. And that host will say, well, it's being hosted at your event, so you all need to pay. A centralized budget is a great way to remove a major barrier that deaf students face when requesting accommodations.

So we've seen that as one of the better practices. Kate, do you have anything to add about a centralized system?

KATE LEWANDOWSKI THROUGH INTERPRETER: No, this is Kate. You summed that up beautifully.

REBECCA KLEIN: OK. I think that we are just about out of time, but I want to thank Lore and Kate for this excellent presentation. And also a thank you to our interpreters and to our own 3Play captioner for helping to make this presentation accessible. And thank you all for joining us today. Thank you all again, and I hope you have a great rest of your day.

INTERPRETER: Thank you. Thank you so much. We appreciated the opportunity.