

ABSTRACT
Nebraska Early Childhood Deaf Education
Professional Upgrade Partnership
(NE-PUP)

The need for qualified deaf educators is greater than ever given the increased identification of young children with hearing losses due to newborn hearing screening projects, the incidence of ear infections, allergies and associated mild conductive hearing losses in the early years of a child's life, advances in amplification technologies and the increase in cochlear implants below age 5. Furthermore, given the shortage of deaf educators nationally and deaf education training programs, the early childhood special education (ECSE) teacher may play a critical role on IFSP and IEP teams for children with recent cochlear implants, amplification, or fluctuating or late-diagnosed hearing loss and act as a key liaison for the deaf educator whose caseload limits direct involvement. These practitioners would benefit from understanding each other's role on the early intervention team and the impact of family decisions about initial communication modality, amplification and surgical interventions, as well as the short and long-term cultural implications of decisions families make regarding their young children's hearing/communication abilities.

The proposed state-funded project intends to compliment the efforts of a four-year, federally-funded, distance education project at University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) for full-time, degree-oriented students entitled: *Mountain-Prairie Upgrade Partnership in Early Childhood Deaf Education (MPUPEC)* (OSERS grant H325K050151). Both projects will increase the number of highly qualified personnel in Nebraska, where shortages of deaf education teachers exist and trained ECSE teachers are in great demand. The Nebraska-funded project would support **five** certified teachers (at least 2 ECSE and 2 Deaf Education) or Speech-language pathologists in Nebraska public schools each year who are recommended by employers/supervisors for advanced education to enhance their work with young children (under age 5) who are deaf or hard of hearing. These employed teachers would enroll as part-time non-degree, distance education students at UNL for completion of 10 credits within a one-year period of time. The coursework will include 9 credits (3 courses) of specialization in either ECSE (for the Deaf Education Teachers) or Deaf Education (for the ECSE Teachers) and 1 credit for a year-long seminar/practicum in *Early Intervention for Children with Deafness and Hearing Impairment*. No degree or new endorsement will be awarded to the Nebraska-funded students although they can use these credits toward a degree/credential if they choose to continue their studies. The 10-credit specialization is intended to enhance the Nebraska teachers' abilities to meet the needs of families with young children who are identified as deaf or hard of hearing, by encouraging collaboration between the ECSE and Deaf Education teachers and modeling collaboration between local specialists and the family/care providers.

The project will supplement the teachers' existing professional expertise as ECSE or Deaf Education teachers with interdisciplinary coursework and practica. Both ECSE and Deaf Education participants from Nebraska will enroll in a year-long interdisciplinary seminar to accompany supervised fieldwork with young children who have hearing loss, and their families. The year-long seminar will focus on issues of family-centered-services, home-visiting, interdisciplinary team-work, and early selection of communication modalities and amplification options. The field-work will provide participants practical experience with a child who is deaf or hard of hearing and their family.

In addition, Deaf Education teachers will complete the following early childhood courses: SpEd 960: *Family-Centered Services* (3), SpEd 861: *Infant with Disabilities* (3) and SpEd 862: *Teaching Preschool Children with Disabilities in a Classroom* (3). These courses promote a philosophy of inclusion and family-centeredness by introducing the students to principles of family systems, home visiting, coaching/consulting and developmentally-appropriate activity-based interventions in natural environments.

The ECSE teachers will complete the following Deaf Education courses: SLPA 884: *Speech/Language Development in DHH* (3), SLPA 850: *Audiology for Educators* (3), SpEd 872: *Psych/Soc of Deafness* (3). Topics will include pediatric audiology, psychology and sociology of deafness, auditory and speech-language development and an emphasis on developmentally appropriate care, transitions and collaboration with families and community providers. Interested participants are welcome to register, at their own expense, for any of these or other ECSE/Deaf Education courses offered at UNL.

On-campus sessions for one week in the summer (and for two weekends in academic year) will complement the year-long instruction via distance education and provide added opportunity for distance students to establish a community of learners around shared interests in young children with hearing loss. All Nebraska-supported participants will be enrolled in courses with full-time graduate students funded under the federally-funded MPUPEC project. Representation of both ECSE and Deaf Education teachers in these courses provides the MPUPEC and NE-PUP participants an opportunity for interdisciplinary discussions and collaboration.

State funds are requested to support five Nebraska teachers each year with part-time enrollment at UNL and completion of 10 graduate credits by providing for waiver of tuition-and fees and annual stipend of \$350.