Tennessee Observer
“We must always keep the needs of the students at the center of our work. We are charged with preparing them to be successful, independent adults.”

- Superintendent, Dr. Vicki Kirk

I am so proud of the work that is going on at TSD this year! We have a great mix of faculty and staff who have served our students for many years and new faces this year bringing fresh ideas. This combination helps us to hold on to the wonderful traditions of our campus while also checking out new experiences.

We have developed goals in four student-facing areas and also in three supporting areas as pictured below:

Our Outreach efforts are many, but I will highlight one: TSD's Deaf Mentor Pilot. We have engaged 11 families to participate in the pilot which consists of weekly visits by a Deaf Mentor and a Parent Advisor. Weekly lessons and activities will be conducted with the purpose of building language skills and positive identity and helping families advocate appropriately and prepare their children for success in school. This is an exciting venture! We are grateful to the Deaf Community members who advocated for this and for the legislature for approving funding for this pilot program. We are particularly grateful to Representative White and Senator Massey for sponsoring the bill.

Language and Literacy are central to our students’ success. This year we have hosted experts who helped us understand and implement the bilingual philosophy. We also had interns from Boston University come and teach model lessons in the Bedrock Curriculum for our elementary school. This was interesting and exciting to watch. The lessons were very engaging and effective, and our teachers are excited to implement these new ideas with their students. We have goals this year to increase English/language arts proficiency and to increase fluency in ASL.
To ensure that we produce Ready Graduates, we are increasing the number of opportunities our students have to engage with the world of work or post-secondary opportunities. We currently have articulation agreements with three community colleges, and we are seeking to add two more which will give our students options in each area of the state. We also currently offer two career technical pathways for students: structural foundations and culinary arts. We are exploring the addition of a third, cybersecurity. Last year we had a few students complete the OSHA 10 certification. This year we are planning to add opportunities to certify in OSHA 30, NCCER (structural foundations), and ServSafe (culinary arts).

We aim to educate the Whole Child. We want our students to manage their own behavior and be advocates for themselves in preparation for successful, independent living. Our Student Life department strives to offer students opportunities to learn and practice these skills in both on- and off-campus settings. Student Life will begin developing curriculum and training on topics that will help students in these areas.

Our foundational and operational areas of Talent Management, Stewardship, and Technology and Communications all serve to support our student-facing work. This year we are developing some strategies for employee engagement, improving our training, and human resource services. We have developed more effective means to budget appropriately and then monitor spending to ensure we are devoting funds to student learning and success as much as possible. Operationally, we are developing an inventory of fixed assets and a preventative maintenance schedule to make sure we are good stewards of our resources. And, finally, we are working to develop a three-year plan for technology, improve our online presence, and improve online security on our campus.

These are but a few of the initiatives we are working on this year. I am extraordinarily proud of the Central Leadership Team’s efforts in these areas and of the work going on in each department on campus to support this work. We must always keep the needs of the students at the center of our work. We are charged with preparing them to be successful, independent adults. The work is progressing well, and I am confident we will see great strides in student success over the coming years.
Greetings from the Instructional Department. Wow, what a busy school year. Our mission to empower students, families, and stakeholders through education, advocacy, and community has been a great challenge and a profitable goal.

To recap the school year, we started with a new School Leadership Team; this included a new lead principal, two assistant principal positions, and two curriculum coach positions. Although we still have a couple of positions to fill, we have a great recruitment plan that will result in all positions being filled within the next few months.

We have seen increased enrollment this year on the Knoxville campus, and our numbers continue to grow. The new Nashville campus opened its doors last year with one student, and this year we’ve grown to thirteen students and have several in the wings. Additional teaching and support staff have been added to keep up with the growth. We project TSDN to double enrollment by the start of next year. The Jackson campus, WTSD, is now in need of an ASL Specialist and is working toward adding a deaf plus classroom to their school program. We are excited to be growing at all three campuses across the state.

We have had several professional development opportunities this year for all three campuses. Two expert bilingual specialists visited TSDK, TSDN, and WTSD to provide professional development to our teaching staff. They observed in classrooms, talked with teachers, and met with the bilingual committee. Dr. Wyatte Hall also came to speak on language development for deaf students. It was an honor to have such a distinguished scholar come and speak to our teachers. In November, a group from Boston University came to the Knoxville campus for a week and worked with our teachers and students in the elementary department. They modeled bilingual teaching strategies related to language development in the classroom. Teachers and leaders from the TSDN campus came to learn alongside their Knoxville colleagues.

“If you walk through the halls, if you sit in the classrooms, or if you talk with the teachers, you will sense a change, a growth mindset. This growth mindset is pushing us upward and onward. We ARE empowering our students, growing skilled educators, and most importantly advancing language, language, and more language.”

- Director of Instruction, Lisa Collins
Students continue to apply these strategies in their writing, reading, and math classes. It was a great week of learning. In addition to what's happening on campus, we sent twelve teachers from the Knoxville, Nashville, and Jackson campuses to Kansas School for the Deaf to learn more about bilingual strategies used in the classroom. It is impressive and reassuring to see the increase in expressive and receptive language skills among students and staff.

In addition to great successes around language development, the instructional department is embarking on an aggressive and ambitious plan of improvement in the following categories: literacy and language, school culture, effective leadership, and ready graduate. Our improvement plan involves language development; curriculum selection; development of appropriate pedagogical skills, including teacher voice and teacher leadership; and effective leadership structures. In order to accomplish these goals, we have partnered with NIET (National Institute for Excellence in Teaching) to work with our school leadership team and teachers. We started this deep dive with NIET in January. Our school leaders from all three campuses will be working closely with trainers from the NIET team.

If this isn't enough, the superintendent, director of instruction, school leaders, and a select group of teacher leaders will attend a training, Capturing Kid's Hearts, in February. This training will begin the first stages of developing a strong student leadership program. This training will help teachers identify and develop student leaders that will model positive student culture and establish constructive student peer groups. Our goal to graduate strong student leaders is a must. We are excited to see how this takes root and begins to mature.

Overall, it has been a busy and productive school year so far. It’s exciting to be part of the Instructional department. I’m proud to work with such great teachers and instructional support staff. Every day, I see teachers go above and beyond the call of duty to teach, coach, and encourage our students. I’m honored to be working with such a great group of educators. They rise to the challenge daily to meet the needs of our students. It’s inspiring to see the high expectations teachers have set for students to think tougher, imagine more, and push harder.

If you walk through the halls, if you sit in the classrooms, or if you talk with the teachers, you will sense a change, a growth mindset. This growth mindset is pushing us upward and onward. We ARE empowering our students, growing skilled educators, and most importantly advancing language, language, and more language.

It’s a great time to be at TSD!
Student Life continues to provide a positive and enriching learning environment for our students. TSD provides the feel of “home away from home” for our residential students. Age-appropriate recreational and educational activities are provided for the students to enjoy and to help improve their independent living skills.

Student Life staff provide student supervision, regularly scheduled study time, and plan constructive and fun activities for students. Field trips, meal preparation, and activities are planned to be age-appropriate, as well as educational and fun for the students.

This first half of the school year, we have participated in many adventures and experiences:

- Student Led-Activities with Pellissippi State College
- Senior Seminars with Knoxville Center for the Deaf
- Planning events for TSD’s 175th with University of TN
- Hosted Dack Viring
- Deaf Awareness Week activities
- Athletic Events/Socials
- Recreational Activities/Arts and Crafts
- Thanksgiving Dinner
- Students working in the SUB
- Field Trips - Mall, Stores, Local Events
- The Christmas Carol at University of TN
- Shadrock’s Holiday Lights
- Dollywood
- Variety Holiday Party
- Holiday Activites
- Holiday Store
- Learning new experience and going on adventures
- Cottage Life skills

Student Life staff will continue to incorporate more events and learning activities to promote the Whole Child and Ready Graduate vision we have at TSD.

Please welcome these new staff to the Student Life department- Sarah Solomon, Kayla Brooks, Diane Rifaie, Jennifer Fiebke, Austin Gross, Michael Milcznski, and Jimmy Miller.

We appreciate our Student Life staff assisting with the recent Viking Classic basketball tournament! Kudos to the Student Life staff!

We continue to seek qualified individuals to work in the Student Life department in Youth Service Worker I and II positions. Please apply if you are interested!
The Comprehensive Educational Resource Center (CERC) has experienced some changes in the past year, starting with the retirement of Judy Brookshire in October 2018. Judy had been the CERC director since 2012. In March 2019, TSD hired a new CERC director, Jack Johnson. Jack comes to TSD with experience working at other schools for the deaf including Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind and South Carolina School for the Deaf.

Since 2017, the CERC coordinated outreach services throughout the state of Tennessee for families with children ages birth to five with hearing concerns, for families with deaf or hard of hearing students in kindergarten through high school, and for local school districts that are educating deaf or hard of hearing students. Beginning this year, we have been involved with developing the Deaf Mentor Pilot Project that connects parents and families of babies who have hearing loss with a Deaf mentor. Parent outreach has also been an area of focus over the past year as TSD has transitioned to the Bilingual Education philosophy. There is a lot of great work going on within CERC and related outreach across the state of Tennessee, and there is still much to do. We are looking forward to the work ahead in 2020.
The Fountain is Back!

For the last few years a focal point of campus has been missing. The fountain, which was gifted by the class of 1965, sat in storage after the retaining pool was damaged during construction. Repairs proved harder than initially thought, and for some time the courtyard was empty, but recently the TSD Maintenance department refurbished the fountain and the water is flowing again. With a new retaining pool, pump, and electrical upgrades the fountain will be appreciated by many future classes.

Oliver Lang
Director of Facilities, Maintenance & Security

Front Row: Pete Barone, Mark Oppie, Larry Bishop, Mose Vanover, Mark Carpenter, Brents Dickinson, Daniel Cabbage. Back Row: Daniel Cone, Marcus Burget, Rocky Fox, Jimmy Murray, William Foster.
Both technology and communications are an integral part of our everyday lives, from how we do our work to how we function and interact. The Technology & Communications department for all campuses of the Tennessee Schools for the Deaf encompasses technology, archives, and marketing for the school, as well as supporting staff communication and language use on campus. The department is made up of five teams: Technology, Student Media Archives, Creative Services, ASL Services, and Interpreting Services. Services provided by each team are an integral component of support for the three campuses.

Each team has been busy this year working to enhance services by supporting the goals and strategic plan for all campuses. With the new calendar year of 2020, it is important to take a moment and reflect on accomplishments during the past year, and the department certainly has a list of accomplishments to reflect on. The Technology team has supported the install of new media projectors and screens in three areas on the Knoxville campus which included collaboration with the Maintenance department on the creation of theatre type displays for projection in the dining room. ASL Services staff have provided ASL classes for staff and the community that have been well received. The Student Media Archives team has organized multiple sets of student paper files dating back into the late 1800s, when the school was opened, and has prepared them for digitization. Creative Services has developed marketing and communication plans and improved fiscal use of resources while also developing students in learning about graphic design. Last but not least, the Interpreting Services team has once again exceeded the number of interpreting hours provided during the prior school year to date, and they are working with K-12 Educational Interpreters across the state to provide outreach and support as requested.

The overarching goal of serving and supporting the school’s mission, vision, and strategic plan focuses the department and staff’s work and ultimately empowers Deaf and Hard of Hearing students and their families. As part of this work of empowering students, I had the opportunity to work with students in the STEP program before the holidays and discuss the importance of internet safety. Students learned about the progression of the Digital Age how media use has changed over time, and how using technology creates their “digital footprint”. We discussed the importance of making sure that we are taking an active role in internet safety and being mindful of our digital footprint.

It has been a good start to the 2019-2020 school year, and the Technology & Communications department is excited about the work ahead.
Have you wondered what the TSD interpreters are up to? It has been just over a year since the interpreting team was established. In that time, Charis, TJ, Danielle and Angela, with over 100 years of combined interpreting, have gained new experience working as a unified team on a Deaf campus. This new perspective on their work has guided their efforts to improve the services that they provide everyone at TSD. There are many projects underway, some in collaboration with the TSD teaching staff, TSD outreach departments, public schools, post-secondary school internship programs, etc... Each interpreter has been doing their part to participate in the successful outcome of these projects. Take a look!

A DAY’S WORK:
The interpreting team has had a busy 2019-2020 school year so far. On our busiest day we have had 25 hours of interpreting requests (yes that is in one day). Our average daily interpreting requests are about 16 hours. There are several ongoing interpreting assignments that we cover daily, plus added meetings, trainings, and events. Our goal is to provide the best services possible. We work to improve our skills by meeting with the ASL specialists and our consumers to gather helpful feedback.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:
In October, the team attended a Deaf Schools Interpreter Conference at the Indiana School for the Deaf. In all, twelve schools for the Deaf were represented: Tennessee, Kentucky, Indiana, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Arizona, California (Freemont), Texas, Louisiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania (PSD), and the Learning Center in Massachusetts. The conference began with a Poster Session. Each school made a poster to represent their interpreting structure and the populations served at their given schools. The presentation also included a conversation about techniques in resolving common interpreting issues that arise on Deaf campuses throughout the country. After that, we had a Bilingual Deaf education tour, a Panel discussion on Power, Privilege and Oppression, a workshop on CDIs (Certified Deaf Interpreters) working at residential schools, and a workshop on Use of Depiction in an Academic Environment. Plans are already in the works for next year’s conference to be hosted by Texas School for the Deaf.
INTERNSHIP:

TSD’s interpreter internships have been around for some time. It was not until the 2018-2019 school year that the newly established interpreting team saw the need to formalize the process. TSD offers a unique opportunity for interns. Typically, it is believed that interpreting in schools for the Deaf is educational and in the classroom. This is not true at all. Interpreters are rarely in the classroom. TSD provides a unique environment with a well-rounded interpreting experience. Types of interpreting include presentations (formal and informal), medical, mental health, legal, IEP’s, workshops/training, performing arts, human resource/benefits trainings, and much more. In addition, much of our interpreting is sign-to-voice due in part to our bilingual approach. Our bilingual environment is a major benefit to our interns. As part of TSD’s outreach across the state, during spring semester, we will be presenting to UT’s Educational interpreting Program and Maryville College’s interpreting program regarding the benefits and unique opportunity of applying for mentorship here at TSD.

In collaboration with the University of Tennessee Educational Interpreting program, one of TSD’s interpreters provided many hours of one-on-one mentoring to a UT intern in preparation to interpret A Christmas Carol at UT’s Clarence Brown Theatre. The intern worked side by side with the TSD interpreter to interpret the play with a large number of Deaf attendees.

OUTREACH:

Interpreter Outreach was another service that TSD has supported in the past years. However with the January 2021 Tennessee Licensure requirement for Educational Interpreters (EIs) to interpret in public schools, it was the perfect opportunity to provide specific support to the EIs statewide. Danielle was asked to take on this outreach project as she came to TSD with an extensive background in educational interpreting. She has begun collaborating with the Comprehensive Educational Resource Center’s (CERC) Local Education Agency (LEA) Outreach to provide well rounded support to Tennessee’s Educational Interpreters which will support TSD’s goal of improving the quality of services that Deaf/Hard of Hearing students receive while attending public schools. Danielle has visited and has been in communication with a couple of schools. The response has been so positive that she was requested to provide additional supports and training for their educational staff. We are looking forward to watching this outreach project grow into a long term program for TSD to impact Deaf students statewide.

In March of 2019, the interpreting team was asked to take over the planning and running of the annual summer Educational Interpreter Institute, a week-long conference in June, geared specifically for interpreters in the public schools. In keeping with the Institute’s 27 years of rich history, 18 workshops were provided by TSD staff and other professionals in the field. These workshops covered a variety of topics such as interpreting for standardized tests, content specific signs, word choices and other topics focused on assisting interpreters to pass the EIPA and obtain licensure required by the state of Tennessee as mentioned previously. This year we had 54 attendees from all over Tennessee as well as five neighboring states. Planning for the 2020 Institute is already underway.
NEW STAFF AT TSD SCHOOLS

Briella Diaz
TSDK Deaf Mentor Coordinator

Briella Diaz is the new Deaf Mentor Coordinator for the Deaf Mentor Program.

Briella was born and raised in the state of Utah. She attended Jean Massieu School, a deaf bilingual school that her mother founded in 1999. She ended up graduating from Kansas School for the Deaf before graduating from Gallaudet University in the spring of 2018 with her bachelor's degree in Bilingual Outreach with an emphasis on Education and a minor in Linguistics. Outside of Briella's professional life, she enjoys going on long walks, playing video games like Pokemon Go or The Legend of Zelda on her Nintendo Switch, cooking, and learning about anything new!

In short, Briella is very excited to work with the campus on the Deaf Mentor Pilot-project. When asked why Briella is passionate about her career, she explains, "It's near and dear to my heart as a Deaf individual myself who is extremely passionate about language development in deaf/HoH babies. If you're curious about this new program that we're implementing, or if you just want to chat about a delicious recipe that you've just made, feel free to stop by my office or to shoot me an email so we can discuss it." Briella is looking forward to getting to know the community here!

Riley Smith
TSDK Educational Assistant

Riley Smith has been selected as the new teacher's assistant for 5th and 6th grade. Riley grew up in Blount County and attended Pellissippi State Community College, and Maryville College. When she was a sophomore at Pellissippi she decided to take ASL. Riley explained that she had no prior knowledge of ASL or the Deaf Community; she didn't even know how to sign the alphabet. After one semester of taking ASL, she fell in love with the language and the community. That is when she decided to change her major from Spanish to ASL. Once she had completed ASL 1 and 2, she began looking into colleges to transfer to. When she found out about Maryville College's ASL-English Interpreting program, Riley was confident that's where she wanted to go.

Fast forward to her last semester at Maryville College, Riley was in the middle of writing her Senior Thesis and starting an internship at TSD with the Interpreting team. She graduated from Maryville College in December of 2018 with a bachelor's degree in America Sign Language – English interpreting, but she started working one-on-one with a Deaf-Blind student in elementary in October before she graduated. Additionally at the beginning of this year, she received a job as a teacher's assistant. Riley has definitely enjoyed her time here so far!
Cindy Perdue
TSDN Administrative Assistant

Cindy Perdue is the new Administrative Assistant at TSD Nashville. Cindy was born in Fort Lauderdale, Florida and became deaf when she was three years old due to the German measles (rubella).

Cindy’s family moved to Iowa where her stepfather ran a farm. She attended and graduated from Iowa School for the Deaf in 1987. From there, she attended the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) and graduated with an associate’s degree in Office Technology. Gradually, Cindy took some accounting courses to improve her portfolio. Presently, she resides with her husband, who is also Deaf, in Mount Juliet, Tennessee. She has two sons: Robert, who is studying linguistics at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and Nathan, who is going to be a senior high school.

Cindy is involved a lot in the local Deaf community. Recently, she was the secretary for the Nashville Chapter of Tennessee Association for the Deaf for two years. Presently, she is with the Metro Nashville Deaf Community Church as the treasurer. Additionally, she is the director of the Sign Club Company, a non-profit agency which is helps Deaf children make friends through sign language and advocacy.

After working for three and a half years as a Senior Payment Specialist for an insurance company, Cindy was recently hired to work for Tennessee State for the Deaf-Nashville (TSDN) as an Administrative Assistant. Cindy is really excited to work as a team player to help the school for the Deaf be a success!

When asked what Cindy enjoys doing in her free time, she explains, “I enjoy hanging with my deaf friends, shopping, and camping with family.”

Cindy is looking forward to meeting new friends and staff.

Emily Jones
WTSD Audiologist

Dr. Emily Jones is the new Audiologist at WTSD. She is a native of White Bluff, TN and practiced at a small ENT practice for two years, in Tullahoma, before joining WTSD. Dr. Jones was diagnosed with severe to profound, bilateral, hearing loss when she was 15 months old and is now a bilateral cochlear implant recipient. When asked about her hearing loss and cochlear implant journey, Dr. Jones stated, “It made a huge impact on my overall quality of life and it allowed me to be the independent person I am, today. Without the technology of cochlear implants, I would not have been able to have chosen the profession of audiology. With my personal experience with hearing loss, I can relate/empathize with the kids and their families. I feel my success in life can be an encouragement to the families I serve, and it shows them that hearing loss does not have to limit their future accomplishments. This is why WTSD is a perfect place for me to work. I am very passionate about helping the kids hear their best and want to make positive differences in their lives with hearing loss.”

Dr. Jones was mainstreamed into public school and participated in several school sports as well as recreational sports. She was offered a scholarship to run cross country/track at the University of Tennessee-Martin and was also awarded an academic scholarship. After earning her Bachelor’s Degree at UTM, Dr. Jones attended graduate school at The University of Tennessee Health Science Center where she received her Doctor of Audiology degree in May of 2017.

In her spare time, Dr. Jones likes to bake, hike, work on DIY craft/house décor projects, and run. She was recently honored as a HearStrong Champion in Nashville. The Department of Speech and Hearing Services is thankful for Dr. Jones and her contributions to WTSD.
Laurel Maradik is a first-grade teacher at TSD Nashville. Laurel graduated from University of Arizona in 1995 with bachelor’s degree in Deaf Education. She then went on to obtain a master’s degree in Family Center of Early Childhood Education in 1977 from Gallaudet University. Laurel recently moved in Nashville from Tucson, Arizona and is excited to start her new adventure. Helping Deaf children and their families grow into self-realization and become all that they can be is a passion of Laurel’s. Laurel is a dog lover and crazy about coffee, cooking, sewing, painting and yoga.

Rhonda Andrews has been selected as TSD Nashville’s newest educational assistant. Rhonda started her career as a Rutherford County Interpreter in 1999. In 2004, she was hired by the Tennessee School for the Blind to be an interpreter for a Deaf/Blind student. She continued with this student until that student graduated in 2013. Starting with a new deaf/visually impaired student from 2013 until 2019. Due to an expected career change, Rhonda applied for an EA position at TSDN and felt very blessed to be hired there to start upon a new exciting journey. She studied Sign Language Interpreting at Nashville State.

Rhonda is married with two daughters and four granddaughters which are her greatest loves. Her hobbies include hiking, crochet, reading and of course sign language.

Chad Blalock has been selected as WTSD’s newest member of the maintenance department. Prior to joining WTSD, Chad was a maintenance technician for an apartment community in Henderson, TN, where he cared for 122 homes as well as the grounds and pool. Additionally, Chad was employed as a damage adjuster for State Farm insurance in Georgia. Notably, Chad had a ten year stent as a Paratrooper with the 20th SFG(A) that included combat deployments to the global war on terror. He has been married for almost six years and he and his wife have three dogs. Chad enjoys hunting as well as mudding on his ATV. We welcome Chad and thank him for his service to our country.

Joining WTSD's maintenance department is Michael Murphy, simply known as “Murphy”. Prior to joining WTSD, Murphy was employed by the State of Tennessee for a combined five years in the Department of Transportation and then the Department of Corrections. Interestingly, Murphy was a professional wrestler for over twenty years. He is married to his wife, Patti, and has four daughters and 6 grandchildren. Outside of work, Murphy enjoys boating and yard selling. The maintenance department, as well as all of WTSD, are grateful for Murphy’s addition.
Julia Gilliam is a new educational assistant at TSD Nashville. Julia explains, "I am very excited to get started working in the classroom. I love working with children!" In the last few years, Julia has worked as a camp counselor for Camp Summer Sign, a team leader for a teen ministry called YOKE, and as an instructor and advocate for elementary school aged students with special needs. She is a recent graduate from Maryville College with a degree in Deaf Studies and American Sign Language Interpreting.

In her free time, Julia enjoys exploring the outdoors, traveling back and forth to Haiti, many different types of art, and hanging out with her dog, Fonzi. She is originally from Huntsville, Alabama and has just moved to Nashville, but like the song says, “Rocky Top will always be home sweet home to me!” Julia is very much looking forward to this year and the adventures that it brings!

Jennifer Dean will began as TSDK's elementary assistant principal on Monday, January 6th. Jennifer is partnered to Sean Dean, an Air Force military man, who will be retiring this year. Jennifer is also a mom to three adorable quirky cats - Oscar, Bunni, and Penelope. She has taught for over twenty years in a variety of settings including large deaf schools, small deaf schools, and a mainstreamed school. She has worked across all grades and has an endorsement in English. Jennifer is from a third-generation Deaf family that originated in New York City. She loves to cook whole and plant-based foods, make most types of crafts, and loves to play board and card games.

Jennifer looks forward to getting to know each of you and is very excited to work at Tennessee School for the Deaf! Stop by and say hi when you get a chance and welcome her into the TSD family.
Clayton Marr III was born and raised in Portland, Maine. One small fun fact about him is Clayton wasn’t his first name! When he was born, his mom wanted to name him Kyle but his dad did not. Kyle was his name for 11 Months when his dad had his name changed from Kyle to Clayton.

Clayton is the seventh generation of Deaf in his family. He graduated from the Governor Baxter School for the Deaf, where Sammy Hargis, a TSD alumni, was his first best Deaf preschool teacher! He has traveled to 37 states and more than 20 countries, and also went backpacking for two months in Europe. All of this was an amazing experience for him! Clayton is also a huge fan of disc golf. He explains, “I can’t live without disc golf! It is my world!” He has traveled to many states for Deaf disc golf events and even went to Spain this past October for a golf tournament. If you like to play disc golf, let him know; he would love to play with you!
At the beginning of December, several staff members from the Tennessee Schools for the Deaf (TSD) were given the opportunity to take a trip to visit Kansas School for the Deaf (KSD). Our team included teachers, speech therapists, and our librarian as well. The purpose of this trip was to allow us to see a bilingual approach in action. This gave us the chance to meet and collaborate with teachers and other staff at KSD. During our visit, we were able to observe a variety of classrooms, ranging from preschool to high school. It was a great opportunity to learn about new bilingual strategies.

There were a few things that really stood out to us during our time at KSD. First, we noticed the overall positive culture on campus. We enjoyed seeing that the elementary school had a behavior system that was consistent from kindergarten through sixth grade. When it was time to celebrate students for their good behavior, the entire school participated in a reward day together. We also noticed that KSD flexibly groups their students for certain subjects based on ability level. For example, during reading classes, students in grades first through third were mixed together and the same for students in fourth through sixth grades. This gave teachers the opportunity to offer more support or enrichment for students. Kindergarten students remained in their classroom all day in order to help them make the adjustment to the elementary school setting. We also loved seeing the use of bilingual strategies in a high school ELA class. They used a strategy called “chaining” to teach vocabulary that seemed to be very effective. Chaining teaches students new vocabulary through a combination of pictures, signing, fingerspelling, and writing the words.

The trip gave us the chance to ask many questions, take lots of notes, discuss our observations as a team, and better ourselves as teachers. Sometimes it takes stepping out of your everyday normal and into someone else’s to gain new perspectives and leave with fresh ideas. Following our trip to KSD, I believe each of us returned to TSD ready to begin implementing some of those new ideas and strategies. We are hopeful and excited about the changes to come for TSD as we continue to make our transition to becoming a bilingual school.
Last year, our 12 Beta Club members participated in a total of 142 service hours; and this year, they have hit the ground running once again. Let’s take a look at what our Beta Club members accomplished over the past three months!

In October, several of our lady Betas volunteered at Ronald McDonald House here in Knoxville near East Tennessee Children’s Hospital. This was our second year volunteering there. Ronald McDonald Houses serve families who have a child sick in the hospital and provide them a place to stay and meals to eat for little to no cost so they can focus on the health of their child. Leaely, Ashley, Rebecca, Martinna, Tierra, Lalia, and Tierra cleaned toys outside in the play areas and inside the playroom, raked leaves, and swept porches and sidewalks.

In November, most members continued our tradition of volunteering at TSD’s 60th annual Pancake and Sausage Day event – Jerry, Shawn, Martinna, Tierra, Lalia, Rebecca, Tristen, Leaely, and Cassady provided assistance. Some helped with games, some served and bused tables, some assisted in the White Elephant sale, some sold crafts and baked goodies, and others helped clean dishes in the kitchen.

In December, we sent holiday cards to a few older Deaf community members to cheer them up this time of year. We wanted them to know they are not forgotten during the holiday season.

As we look forward to more volunteering this year, we could not be more proud of our Beta Club members who not only excel in school but who are sacrificing their time for the good of others.
The student culinarians from the Tennessee School for the Deaf Culinary Arts program worked tediously on creating a colorful Gingerbread Village! The scratch-made gingerbread houses were put on display for approximately two and-a half weeks at the Elaine Alexander Gallery in the Alan J. Mealka High School. The Gingerbread Village received many visitors and marvelous compliments for the student culinarians’ hard work. This is the beginning of the annual Gingerbread Village display. We look forward to seeing what the student culinarians have for us next year!
During the third week of October, the TSD Recreation Department hosted Dack Virnig, international Deaf ASL Storyteller. Dack graduated from Rochester Institute of Technology in 2011. He is fourth generation Deaf, meaning, there are three generations of Deaf before him in his family. His bona fide American Sign Language skills draw in Deaf and Hearing alike, encapsulating the beauty of ASL Storytelling. This face-to-face tradition can be dated back to approximately 1910, when the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) produced performances, poems, stories, and lectures. In order to execute the story properly, much dedication goes into the production of the signs. Since ASL is a visual language, there are several factors, or language parameters, that need to be precisely constructed and practiced in order to correctly perform the plot. This art form has been passed down for over a century, and TSD was proud to host one of our generation’s greatest story tellers.

Dack led an ASL workshop on Tuesday evening and performed his famous stories the following night. The energy could be felt a mile away, and students could not turn their eyes from Dack’s captivating stories. He shared detailed moments from his childhood, his favorite folklore legends, and even a romantic story that ended with a tear-filled audience. Allowing for students to participate throughout his performance, he created teachable moments in a way that children learn best: through PLAY. In my interview below, I had the chance to learn more about Dack’s process:

What other Deaf ASL storyteller do you look up to? Why?
“I do have couple of Deaf ASL Storytellers that I do look up to. I saw Peter Cook’s vlogs back in the day. I did not know his name at that time. I kept watching it from time to time. I thought that he was amazing and very talented. Then I learned his name and made the connection to his vlogs that I had been seeing! I did get to meet him in person! Also, I am fan of Jon Thompson’s work, especially his ASL story “An Idiot and A Motorbike” which had inspired me to make my Mountain Dew Man vlog! Austin “Awti” Andrews, for his “Deaf Ninja”. Also, few others to name— Ben and his brother Adam Jarashow. Meg Davis, Rosa Lee, and Mark Wood. “

How do you practice and perfect your artwork (stories)?
“Practice by signing on video, signing to myself in a mirror, or signing to my family, friends, or to someone— those are my methods of doing that to help me to modify my signing to form into 4D the best. It doesn’t take me for the first time to make it to look good! It takes me couple of times to continue tweaking myself as the way I see with my eyes. I try to watch my signs like watching a movie. If the sign that I did does not look right or make the motion picture that I wanted it to look like. I will think more and adjust to the point of where it becomes what I want people to see what I see."

If you could give anyone wanting to improve their storytelling skills advice, what would you tell them?
“My advice would be—practice, practice, and practice! Film yourself doing your ASL Storytelling then watch how you sign. If you notice parts that do not flow into the way that you want the people to see, try and think of other way to sign it. Your hands are art and you can form it into anything that you want it to be. It is OK to ask for other people’s opinion or tips for ideas! I also suggest you watch YouTube videos or any vlogs to watch other ASL Storytellers to learn any inspirations or tips that you can use for your own. You got this!”

Dack Virnig, ASL Storyteller

MICHELLE NORMAN
RECREATION SUPERVISOR

TENNESSEE OBSERVER
Students and staff gathered on November 8th to witness the dedication and presentation of the flag of our country, “Old Glory”, to the Tennessee School for the Deaf, Knoxville by state representative, Tim Burchett. “Old Glory” honorably flew over our state’s capital before being presented to TSD.

Alongside Representative Burchett were members from the Tennessee Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) to insure TSD had a flag to proudly fly. Students Ava Helms and Elijah Echols led the Pledge of Allegiance to conclude the ceremony.
Scavenger Hunt

MICHELLE NORMAN
RECREATION SUPERVISOR

To celebrate this winter season right, the Recreation staff put on a Scavenger Hunt that led to a surprise ending for the Upper School students. They started their journey in the Old Gym, and were split into three groups: Pink, Blue, and Green. Each group was given a clue that would take them across campus. Immediately, you could see the students with strong leadership skills taking charge and communicating well with the rest of their teammates. The envelopes were opened and the race was on! It was almost like watching a scene out of Scooby Doo, watching each clan run around outside searching for the next hidden message. Their clues led them to places like the courtyard water fountain, Superintendent’s house, the clinic, and eventually the SUB (basement of the Old Gym). They were shocked to see that the SUB had been completely decorated with Christmas lights and a table filled with hot chocolate and several toppings for them to indulge in. One by one, the teams came running in, but my favorite part by far was witnessing the facial expressions of the staff who had to accompany the rushing students. After a brisk Scavenger Hunt the students enjoyed the rest of their night socializing and laughing under the lights.
TSD Knoxville had a unique opportunity to bring professional development right to our classrooms. This year, our teachers have been collecting data and utilizing new strategies to improve student vocabulary, writing, and ASL comprehension. During the week of November 18th, Boston University students spent time on our campus to use and practice bilingual strategies with our students. Our students engaged in activities related to Reading, Writing, ASL Comprehension, ASL Composition, and Math. We also had “Huddle Hour” full of applied English, ASL, Science, Social Studies, and interactive eBooks. Students used technology, videos, and group discussion to learn more about these topics. This highly interactive and visual approach to learning was fun and exhausting for our students. What a great opportunity as we continue to incorporate bilingual strategies daily in our classrooms!
Pancake and Sausage Day was held on Wednesday, November 27th celebrating 60 years of tradition. The annual Pancake and Sausage day is near and dear to our school and Deaf community. Many friends, staff, and alumni of TSD gathered to enjoy all the fun Pancake and Sausage day offers! This year's event included a baked goods sale, white elephant, silent auction, door prizes, TSD’s 175th Anniversary information table and, of course, delicious food! It was a successful and exciting day. We appreciate everyone who came out to support the event!

Lynn Beam and I, representing the 175th Anniversary Committee, worked the booth at our annual Pancake and Sausage day, selling anniversary products and TSD Bricks. It was special acknowledging TSD’s 175th anniversary and 60th annual Pancake and Sausage day in one setting! I have sweet memories attending Pancake and Sausage day when I was a student at TSD. I will never forget being so excited to eat the delicious breakfast and buy Christmas gifts for my parents. I am glad this tradition continues for the current students, alumni, staff and parents.
Students and staff have done a lot of fun activities this year in cottage 302! To begin, we have a wonderful reading program which includes a large game board on the wall with a movable game piece. All of our cottage 302 boys must encourage each other to read at least one book per day. Once all the boys have read a book they can move the game piece to the next square. When reaching a special square on the game board they receive fun rewards. The rewards have ranged from ice cream parties to Chuck E Cheese.

Our cottage is known for throwing what we call, “holiday dance parties”. We like to invite the other elementary cottages to join in the festivities. This fall we threw a couple big dance parties. The first one we threw was a “back to school dance party” in August. We welcomed the elementary kids back with a fun dance party to start the school year off right! The second was a huge Halloween dance party. All the kids came dressed in their favorite costumes and ate lots of delicious treats, while dancing the evening away. We have many more planned for spring!

Our cottage enjoys going on field trips, especially roller skating! Last month we took a field trip to the local park and had a pizza party. We are a very active cottage and like to take biking trips around campus as well as Ijams Nature Center. We also love to make arts and crafts. For example, our kids painted glass bulbs as Christmas gifts for their family. We also love to watch movies at our cottage as we have a projector and show many kid friendly movies. Before Christmas, we had a hot chocolate and “Home Alone” movie night and, as always, the kids really enjoyed themselves!

This year has been a busy one for 303!

We have taken trips to Walmart and our annual Christmas trip to Gatlinburg. At Walmart, students went Christmas shopping to buy for loved ones and friends. In Gatlinburg, students enjoyed Texas Roadhouse and delicious doughnuts at Krispy Kreme! We also saw many Christmas lights while in Gatlinburg.

Back in the cottage, we typically focus on reading and math skills. Erick, Sarah, Ryan, and I are involved in educational activities with the students. We use flashcards, read to the students, learn new words every day, and how to spell, sign, and recognize words. The boys also use math practice drills weekly. This is repetitive drills to help their memorization of math facts.

Drew Collins, a student in cottage 303, is working hard every day on the basketball team. He practices in the afternoons before team practice to improve his skills. Erick, Ryan, and I spend time with him weekly to help him practice!

We have enjoyed the year thus far in cottage 303 and we are excited for more fun and learning!
Cottage 314 has had a busy, but fun semester! During the hot summer days we set up a water slide for everyone to use in the backyard. Three Bears were involved in the activity to help everyone have an awesome party. It was a great time for us to come together and enjoy the social gathering. Students enjoyed playing loud music and feeling the vibrations, while also playing ping-pong and volleyball spike out. They really enjoyed getting to know each other better and develop interpersonal skills. Many students and staff hung out in Berggren Court and played basketball. This helped students and staff get to know each other better and develop mutual respect for everyone. Altogether, this day was important because it helped bring team members together as they work each and every day for a common interest.

Our cottage activities encourage students and staff to develop better time management skills, social skills, to become more responsible, and to learn something new everyday. To do so, we play game cards to bond students and staff without the use of technology. This also allows students to earn points for Viking Privileges. Students also earn points by washing the cottage van and doing ‘community service’ in the cottage such as participating in activities and discussion with staff concerning plans for cottage field trips. They really enjoy earning points for Vikings Privileges! Notably, staff encouraged students to find a way to add curriculum to fun. Students did so by filling out job applications, defining terms of legal awareness, learning bank vocabulary, counting money, and giving each other ‘pop quizzes’.

The ladies in cottage 314 have taken “responsible” to a whole new level! One of our students, Tierra Smith, received a job selling concessions in the Old Gym. This helped Tierra gain a better understanding about being responsible for a job and managing the money she receives from a pay stub. She plans to apply her experiences for her future jobs and her resume. Another student, Leaely Andrade, is working hard towards her goal to get a job at Chick-fil-a. She learned how to apply for the job and is learning to manage her money with debit card. Lastly, Ashley Alvardo received a job at a local fast food restaurant. She is excited to begin her new job!

Cottage field trips give students the opportunity to visit different grocery stores, supermarkets, malls, and restaurants. This semester, they learned how to count money independently and be responsible when using a debit or credit card. Students learned to order food independently, be able to read the menu, and leave appropriate tips if they ate at a restaurant with services. They applied their communication skills with the cashier by using a phone to communicate. Some of our group learned to use Self-Check aisles, available through new technology. They know it is important to have a receipt for proof of purchase.

Our group visited Blaze Pizza to support the TSDAA fundraiser which encourages Deaf awareness. We really enjoyed socializing and meeting new people. We also recently went to a movie theater without closed captions on the main screen; they learned it can be a struggle to use the google device with closed captions provided. It is important for students to face reality when they come out into the Hearing world. Our group of seniors went to the Knoxville Center for the Deaf (KCD) to learn about leadership and using critical thinking with a team on an important project.

Overall, from August 2019 to December 2019, cottage 314 has really enjoyed working as a team to develop better attitudes, learn to respect others, and to accept discipline when needed. However, we remind students daily to have fun and enjoy all activities and field trips. We will be working toward more outdoor recreation activities in 2020!
Holiday Week Festivities at TSDN

RHONDA ANDREWS
TSDN EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANT

Holiday week at TSDN was a huge hit with staff and students alike. The teachers all collaborated on fun activities and fully participated in all aspects of making this a very memorable week for the students with their main focus being vocabulary building using ASL. The students were having so much fun they didn’t even realize they were learning.

On Monday everyone arrived excited for the week ahead. The staff all had on Santa hats, which elicited lots of smiles and giggles as the students got off their buses in the morning. Santa hats were passed out to all the students, much to their delight! Tuesday was Star Day representing the star on the top of the Christmas tree. The students wore big yellow stars on their shirts that the EAs made for them. Wednesday was Ornament Day. Teachers and EAs worked together to help the students create a big red ornament to make and take home for their family tree. Thursday was Pajama Day; staff and students wore their pjs. The students were adorable getting off the bus in their PJs! It was a snugly and comfortable day for everyone. Friday was a very special day full of fun festivities. We started the day with centers set up around the school. The students were full of holiday energy while making tree ornaments, moving on to delicious hot cocoa tasting and using cookie cutters with magical Christmas playdoh. We then all headed to the library for an ASL interactive Christmas story time. They were so excited when “Santa,” who looked suspiciously like Laurel Maradik sneak in the back door to leave gifts for a sleeping Briggette Ocoha. We had quite a few family members attend, and you could see on their faces how proud they were to see their children sign and interact with the story.

The most special memory today was having a Deaf Santa visit our school. Santa flew in on his sleigh all the way from South Carolina just to be with our kids. The students were in awe as Santa walked into the room and signed “Merry Christmas” to all. Each student sat on his lap and told him what they wanted for Christmas. Every single student told Santa that they had been good this year!

The students also received very thoughtful and special gifts from Pastor Aric and Allison Randolph from Brentwood Baptist Deaf Church. They also made sure each family went home with a bag full of groceries. It was a wonderful way to send the students off to their Christmas break with hearts full of love and Christmas Spirit.

TENNESSEE OBSERVER
West Tennessee School for the Deaf hit the ground running this year with family-friendly activities, fun classroom learning activities, and impressive accolades that were all made possible by the dedicated staff and eager-to-learn students. WTSD has had a rewarding year thus far noting the annual Fall Fest, the animal and recycling units in Mrs. Allison's 3-4 year old class, the award for RTI2-B and its subsequent highlight by the University of Memphis, the Jackson Sun's Readers' Choice winner for Best Hearing Center and recognition of Emily Jones as the HearStrong Champion.
WTSD’s annual Fall Festival for families was held on the evening of Thursday, September 27th, 2019. The gymnasium was filled with games, an inflatable jumper, and stations that offered face painting and balloon art. Everyone enjoyed hotdogs, chips, and drinks as well as time to visit with friends. The main attraction seemed to be the baby kangaroo that was part of the petting zoo! Parents were able to receive a “punch” on their punch card as part of WTSD’s RTI2-B reward system for participation. Thanks to Jackson Center for Independent Living and the Jackson Chapter of the Tennessee Association of the Deaf for their contributions.
WTSD was honored to have been selected as a Model of Demonstration School, Bronze Level, for Response to Instruction and Intervention-Behavior (RTI2-B). This is recognition for the RTI2-B team’s development and implementation of WTSD’s positive behavior support program. Many hours were logged by the team to ensure that WTSD had a policy that was both motivational and rewarding for good behavior for the students as well as for parent participation. Because of their efforts and positive outcomes, WTSD was spotlighted in the University of Memphis Lambuth Campus’s Tennessee Behavior Supports Project. In the spotlight, WTSD was praised for implementing a new and creative way to encourage families to participate in school-wide events. Through an “Eagle’s Lair Family Engagement” punch card, attendance is tracked at various family events with a prize to be given at the end of the year with a drawing from completed cards. This is incentive for families to participate in all offered events throughout the school year.

WTSD's outreach program provides diagnostic audiological evaluations, hearing aid evaluations and fittings for West Tennessee children ages birth to 5 years old, provides educational recommendations and in-services to Local Education Agencies, as well as performs follow-up newborn hearing screenings for hospitals in West Tennessee. These practices earned the department the honor of Jackson Sun's Readers' Choice winner for Best Hearing Center.
As part of their Big Day for PreK curriculum, Mrs. Allison's class studied about their community and “going green” during Theme 3. They read the books “Big Earth, Little Me” and “The Clean-up Surprise.” Their Block Center was transformed into a Recycle Center and students practiced recycling by sorting plastic, paper, and metal. They enjoyed being creative by reusing trash (empty boxes, cans) to assemble robots, build towers, etc. At the sensory table, students practiced planting trees and flowers.

Her class recently finished Theme 4: Awesome Animals. This unit focused on learning about different kinds of animals as well as their habitats. Students enjoyed using items from the classroom to create habitats. In the Dramatic Play Center, students dressed up in animal costumes as well as pretended to be Veterinarians by working on the stuffed animals. Their science center includes a variety of pretend bugs for the week’s “Creepy Crawly insects.”

**HearStrong Award**

Dr. Emily Jones, WTSD audiologist, received the HearStrong Champion Award. HearStrong has a goal of inspiring a mass hearing healthcare awareness movement and Dr. Jones was recognized as a remarkable person with hearing loss. She was honored with a reception in Nashville, recently.

It has been a busy year at WTSD with more activities and learning opportunities than can be counted or highlighted. We are fortunate to have dedicated teachers and staff and eager students that make the learning process fun for all.