



2024 Special Education Conference Agents of Change

by Pat Herman, MURP, AICP, ADAC, Special Projects Planner

The impact of the 2024 South Dakota Special Education Conference transcends mere statistics, yet the event boasted remarkable numbers indicative of its significance. Held at the Convention Center in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on March 5-6, the conference achieved three noteworthy milestones:

- A record-breaking 47 vendors participated.
- A remarkable 50 breakout sessions were conducted.
- The event garnered its highest-ever attendance with 590 registrants.

Among the diverse attendees, representing 107 schools spanning elementary through high school, the Oglala Lakota County School District stood out with an impressive 43 “Agents of Change” in attendance. St. Francis Indian School contributed 18 representatives, the second highest attendance.

The conference commenced with a captivating keynote address by Dr. Ross Greene, a distinguished clinical psychologist renowned for pioneering the evidence-based

approach known as Collaborative & Proactive Solutions. Over the course of two days, breakout sessions delved into an array of vital topics including behavior management, early intervention strategies, transition planning, data analysis, IEP development, advocacy initiatives, addressing human trafficking issues, support systems, impacts of poverty and legal considerations.

Concluding the event on a moving note, Parker Hanson shared his remarkable journey, illustrating resilience and determination in overcoming adversity. Hanson’s narrative, enriched by his experience of being born without his left hand, underscored the invaluable life lessons he gleaned on his path to realizing his dream of playing professional baseball.

Anticipation mounts for next year’s conference slated to take place in Rapid City, South Dakota, on March 18-19, 2025. As the committee continues to convene, exchange ideas, and drive positive change, the legacy of the Special Education Conference as a catalyst for progress remains unwavering.



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The Center for Disabilities at the USD Sanford School of Medicine is South Dakota's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research and Service (UCEDD). As the South Dakota UCEDD, the Center for Disabilities works with others to create opportunities that enhance the lives of people with disabilities and their families through training, services, information, research, and community education. The Center for Disabilities delivers activities across the lifespan from a community-based, family-centered and culturally-competent perspective.



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This newsletter is available in alternate format upon request by contacting the Center for Disabilities.



Oyáte Circle

Our Oyáte Circle team has had several busy months. In February they presented at the Fatherhood Conference in Rapid City, South Dakota. During March they attended the Avera Inaugural Maternal American Indian Rural Community Health Summit in Box Elder, South Dakota. Also, in March the team took their Disability Training for Native American families to three different places. Two sessions were held at the Oyate Health Center in Rapid City, South Dakota, one at the Sinte Gleska University Multicultural Center in Mission, South Dakota and another at the community building near Porcupine, South Dakota, at Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation.



2024 Samuel Gridley Howe Award



Amy Scepaniak

Join us in congratulating our Amy Scepaniak of our DeafBlind Program, for receiving the 2024 Samuel Gridley Howe Award, from the Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired! This award is given in recognition of her exemplary service and demonstrated outstanding practice working with individuals with visual impairments and multiple disabilities, including deafblindness. Amy is most deserving of this esteemed national award, as she has gained the respect of peers, professionals from other disciplines, and the families and individuals she has served.

We are extremely proud to have you on our team here at the Center!

SD LEND Legislative Trip



Grace Hayworth

Grace Hayworth is one of our 2023 – 2024 South Dakota Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (LEND) trainees. She has shared with us her experiences from two trips she took with fellow peers to Pierre, South Dakota.

My legislative visits to Pierre with both the occupational therapy department and LEND cohort were eye-opening experiences. Through these visits, I gained a deeper understanding of government processes and policies, particularly regarding healthcare and human services. Meeting with legislators and witnessing legislative sessions firsthand provided valuable insights into how bills are introduced, debated, and passed.

During the occupational therapy department visit, I engaged directly with legislators and learned about important bills related to childcare and occupational therapy licensure. Notably, Senate Bill 125, aimed at addressing the state's childcare crisis, and Senate Bill 40, which established background check requirements for occupational therapists, were discussed.

During the LEND visit, discussions with Disability Rights South Dakota and Senator

Hunhoff shed light on issues such as skilled nursing facilities and legislative budgeting. Witnessing the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services in action underscored the importance of proposed bills like House Bill 1098 and 1131, which aim to provide essential documents for individuals experiencing homelessness, potentially impacting future occupational therapy practice.

The visit also highlighted the significance of House Bill 1202, which sparked considerable debate and interest but was ultimately not passed. However, its potential impact on occupational therapy services indicates the ongoing importance of legislative advocacy and engagement. Overall, these visits deepened my appreciation for the intersection of policy and healthcare and inspired a commitment to continued involvement in legislative processes.



Gold Humanism Honor Society



Naryese Nicolet



Keely Walker

We would like to congratulate two of our current South Dakota Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental & Related Disabilities (SD LEND) trainees, Naryese Nicolet and Keely Walker, who have been selected to be inducted into the Gold Humanism Honor Society!

The Gold Humanism Honor Society (GHHS) is a community of medical students, physicians, and other leaders who have been recognized for their compassionate care. GHHS reinforces and supports the human connection in healthcare, which is essential for the health of patients and clinicians.

GHHS is an active organization with a diverse membership. GHHS members in medical school lead initiatives that foster humanism, and GHHS members throughout their careers are expected to be humanistic leaders.

We are so proud of their work and mission in caring for others!

Source: <https://www.gold-foundation.org/programs/ghhs/>



GOLD HUMANISM HONOR SOCIETY
THE ARNOLD P. GOLD FOUNDATION

New Team Members

We are excited to announce our newest team members Heidi Aderhold and Amy Sternhagen. Please help us welcome them to the Center for Disabilities!



Heidi Aderhold

Heidi Aderhold, Ed.S. has joined us as a new Education Specialist. She will be conducting trainings, assisting our diagnostic clinics, and serving as a liaison for schools and providing technical assistance to professionals, parents and community members.

Heidi Aderhold received her bachelor's degree from Winona State University in Elementary Education. She went on to earn her master's degree in Special Education from George Mason University in Fairfax, VA. Most recently she earned her Educational Specialist Degree from the University of South Dakota with certifications in K-12 building level leadership and Special Education Director.

Her professional journey includes six years of teaching in a self-contained special education setting in Virginia, primarily serving students with cognitive disabilities and autism, followed by one year as a resource room teacher. Following her experience in Virginia, Heidi relocated to Sioux Falls. She taught special education at Anne Sullivan Elementary School for six years where she had the opportunity to work with students and their families as they embraced a wide variety of disabilities. Most recently she served eight Sioux Falls schools as an Elementary Special Education Instructional Coach. Concurrently, she shares her expertise by teaching online courses through Augustana University, helping aspiring educators earn their Special Education Alternative Teaching Certificate.



Amy Sternhagen

Amy Sternhagen has joined us as our new Birth to Three Intake Specialist. She will be talking with families about the Birth to Three program, processing referrals and working with the school

districts to determine if the child is eligible for our services.

Amy received her associate degree from Southeast Technical College in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. She studied Early Childhood Education.

Her professional journey includes nine years working in Early Childhood centers and four years working as a Special Education assistant at Roosevelt and Jefferson High School. Most recently, she was a Child Engagement Specialist at New Start through Volunteers of America, Dakotas.

Upcoming Trainings

Stay up-to-date through [Facebook](#) and [X](#).

Functional Sign Language Course

We have two different nine-session courses happening this summer. These courses are designed to provide introductory sign language vocabulary skills to parents, professionals and community members. Participants will explore a variety of vocabulary that will promote clearer communication within the home, classroom, work or community environment.

Class Format:

- Class is presented through Zoom meetings
- Two sessions designed for you to bring your own list of vocabulary
- Independent practice opportunities provided

Cost: \$150

Courses run June 4 - June 20. Two different times to pick from to register for during that day

Early afternoon session (12 p.m. - 2 p.m.) – [CLICK HERE](#)

Late afternoon session (3:30 p.m. - 5 p.m.) – [CLICK HERE](#)

Upcoming Trainings (continued)

Previous Recordings of Dr. Barkley Educational Series

Have you missed some of our amazing Educational Series with Dr. Russell Barkley? Or have you been able to join but wish others in your work setting or personal life could hear this same great information that Dr. Barkley has been sharing?

Participants are now able to access Series 1, Series 2, Series 3 and/or Series 4 for the low cost of \$30/series. You can access each series for 12-days, selecting a start date that works best for you!

For more information about the videos in each series, and to register, [CLICK HERE](#).

2024 Summer Workplace Readiness

We have an exciting FREE opportunity for transition-aged students with a disability/social challenges (students aged 14-21 who are still enrolled in a secondary school) to develop critical skills for workplace readiness and self-advocacy! One of the best predictors of successful employment is the ability to demonstrate pro-social skills.

We will conduct Pre-Employment Transition Services through Zoom utilizing a highly effective and evidence-based curriculum to build these critical skills required for employment success. These interactive and engaging activities will feature the PEERS (The Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills) curriculum, with an emphasis on teaching social awareness and self-advocacy skills to participants, especially as they pertain to the workplace environment! We would like for students to participate as independently as possible during the direct instruction time. We would also like for caregivers/parents of the student to serve as 'outside coaches' for practice in between sessions to generalize the social skills being taught across settings. We would like students to plan on participating in all 8 sessions if possible. Consistent attendance for these dates is highly encouraged and will result in better learning and retention outcomes for the participant.

This 4-week program will take place from 12:30 - 2:30 p.m. on the following Mondays and Thursdays.

July 8, 12:30 – 2:30 p.m. CDT
July 11, 12:30 – 2:30 p.m. CDT
July 15, 12:30 – 2:30 p.m. CDT
July 18, 12:30 – 2:30 p.m. CDT
July 22, 12:30 – 2:30 p.m. CDT
July 25, 12:30 – 2:30 p.m. CDT
July 29, 12:30 – 2:30 p.m. CDT
Aug. 1, 12:30 – 2:30 p.m. CDT

To find out more information or to register a student, please contact Jon Wallner at jon.wallner@usd.edu or call 605-357-1516.

Introduction to Deafblindness and Assessment & Instructional Strategies

The South Dakota DeafBlind Project will be hosting a special summer session and fall session of An Introduction to Deafblindness. The summer session is a great option for teams to get a jump start on foundational deafblind training before the next school year begins!



This will be a condensed 6-week course with the option to add on 3 graduate credits from USD. Total cost with registration and 3 graduate credits is just \$570! It's a fantastic, affordable option for educators!

To register for summer session, [CLICK HERE](#)

To register for fall session, [CLICK HERE](#)

Registration is also open for our **Assessment & Instructional Strategies**. The fall session registration link is where you can register for that training.

Please share with your networks of educators including special education teachers, teachers of the deaf/hard of hearing, teachers of the blind/visually impaired, speech language pathologists, certified orientation and mobility specialists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, etc.

It can be extremely effective to have multi-disciplinary teams join the courses together to work collaboratively and begin implementing strategies right away! If you have any questions, please email brandy.sebera@usd.edu.