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OBERKOTTER FOUNDATION TO ESTABLISH NEW NATIONAL CENTER FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN LISTENING AND SPOKEN LANGUAGE

Launch planned for Spring 2015

At their March 2013 meeting, Oberkotter Foundation Trustees approved an ambitious new initiative to create a national professional learning center (Learning Center) to advance knowledge and skills that support listening and spoken language outcomes for children who are deaf or hard of hearing. Working toward the launch of the new Learning Center in spring 2015, the Foundation will create partnerships with a network of content experts, universities, professional organizations, government agencies, early intervention providers and others who share the goal of equipping a wide range of professionals for excellence in early learning and family support. The new Learning Center's offerings will support pathways to Professional Certifications and include broadly available pre- and in-service online learning at both graduate and undergraduate levels, practicum and field experiences, immersive face-to-face learning, and live as well as technology-enabled coaching and mentoring. A specialty academic credential in *listening and spoken language early intervention* is also envisioned.

The Foundation has engaged Teresa H. Caraway, PhD, CCC-SLP, LSLC Cert. AVT, as "Chief Learning Officer" charged with development and implementation of the Learning Center. The Oberkotter Foundation and Dr. Caraway will continue to reach out to families, front line professionals, thought leaders, content experts, academic institutions and others as curricula, learning platforms and field experiences are developed.

Simultaneous to establishing the new Learning Center, the Foundation's existing grant commitments to university Teacher of the Deaf programs will be phased out. Many university partners are receiving OSEP (Office of Special Education Programs) funding for these programs in 2013-14 and beyond. The Foundation will be announcing an RFP process to award a single new 3-year grant to an academic institution to serve as a national center of excellence for preparation of Teachers of the Deaf going forward beginning in academic year 2015-2016.

Since adopting its new strategic framework in early 2012, the Trustees have been considering strategies that exemplify the Oberkotter Foundation's passionate belief that all children who are deaf or hard of hearing should have the opportunity to reach their full potential. The Foundation's commitment is to concentrate its efforts and funding on three areas: greater national awareness that children who are deaf or hard of hearing can learn to listen and talk; strengthening early intervention

systems for children 0 – 5; and developing networks of professionals who support children and families beginning at birth and continuing through the child’s education.

The Foundation’s new strategies follow inevitably from profound shifts in how professional learning is being delivered and a dramatically changed landscape for children who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families. Today, 85% - 90% of parents of children born deaf or hard of hearing are choosing listening and spoken language. To produce the best outcomes for every child and to capitalize on the critical stages of cognitive and language development between birth and age five, the Foundation believes that families must have access to comprehensive information and quality services as quickly as possible.

To reach the estimated 20,000+ children 0 – 5 who will seek listening and spoken language services in the U.S. each year, the Foundation is poised to develop and implement a contemporary professional learning program that includes Teachers of the Deaf and Speech-Language Pathologists as well as reaching out, educating and equipping the range of critical professionals who work with children and families including early interventionists, early childhood educators, general education teachers, special education teachers, audiologists, pediatricians, social workers and others.

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