

Videophones and Video Relay Service (VRS) open a wide array of opportunities for schools and agencies serving deaf students and consumers. This presentation discusses some of these opportunities and the essential elements of the infrastructure needed for a successful visual communication network. Texas School for the Deaf (TSD) currently has more than 120 videophones and 80 webcams in place in our visual communication network. This network allows deaf staff and students to expand their communication options beyond text and reduces the need for interpreters. In addition, this network has opened up a variety of new opportunities for TSD, including improved communication access for staff, parents and students; new curriculum tools for developing communication skills; and an innovative outreach program for teaching sign language to parents.

This presentation will discuss some of these new programs along with some of the challenges that we addressed in establishing the infrastructure for this visual communication network. Implementing this network required more than just plugging in the equipment: TSD had to expand the network bandwidth, replace the firewall, revise communication policies, develop new maintenance and training programs, and establish relationships with VRS providers. We will also discuss some of the emerging challenges and opportunities related to videophones and VRS.