

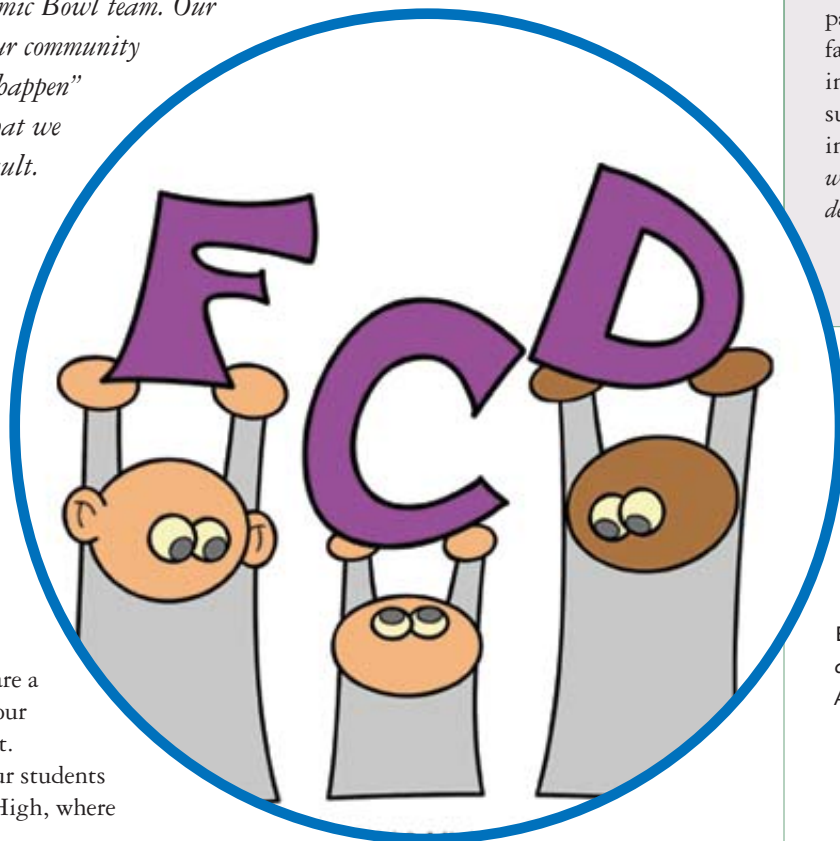


# making a team happen and enjoying the result

By Charon Feild Aurand

*If you have chosen to read this article, you probably already appreciate Gallaudet University's goal to "foster academic excellence and achievement among deaf and hard of hearing students across the country." While everyone recognizes that Gallaudet's National Academic Bowl for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students is one of the many ways that Gallaudet does this, it can be a challenge to find the people and money needed to support students to compete as an Academic Bowl team. Our story is about how our community learned to "make it happen" and the dividends that we have enjoyed as a result.*

While Pinellas is the most densely populated county in Florida and covers a large geographic area, it is only the seventh largest school district in the state. We have 40 deaf and hard of hearing high school students—part of a good-sized deaf and hard of hearing population—and we are a four-hour drive from our residential school in St. Augustine. Most of our students attend Pinellas Park High, where



**Charon Feild Aurand** holds a B.A. in education and an M.S. in aural (re)habilitation. She is an RID-certified interpreter and holds Florida Teacher Certification in Deaf Education, K-12. Aurand is the director of the Family Center on Deafness in Pinellas County, Florida, and the assistant coach of the Pinellas County Academic Bowl team. The Family Center on Deafness, funded primarily by the Juvenile Welfare Board of Pinellas County, links county households with deaf or hard of hearing members to relevant services by providing programs and referrals for parents, youths, and community partners that promote family and individual independence and self-sufficiency. For more information: [www.familycenterondeafness.org](http://www.familycenterondeafness.org).

**Left:** The Family Center on Deafness in Pinellas County, Florida, is one of the supporting organizations that makes the Academic Bowl possible. *Illustration courtesy of Charon Feild Aurand.*



they are provided with self-contained and resource services along with sign language interpreters, speech therapy, and a large American Sign Language program.

As in many school districts

throughout the United States, our professionals recognize that the needs of deaf and hard of hearing students cannot be fully addressed during the regular school day. We want our kids to experience the advantages expected in a residential school—such as easier access to extracurricular activities, frequent contact with deaf and hard of hearing adults, fluent signed communication outside of the classroom, and recreational interaction with peers—while still living with their families and participating in a mainstreamed education.

We are very fortunate to have formed a collaboration between the Pinellas County School Board, our local school district, and the Family Center on Deafness, a private not-for-profit agency working with Pinellas families that include either parents or children who have experienced a hearing loss. We share the goal of providing the best possible educational and developmental environment for our deaf and hard of hearing youths—and we work together to make a local high school Academic Bowl team happen.

### How do we do this?

The Family Center on Deafness provides coaches who create materials, oversee all team sessions, and take the team to competitions. We also fundraise to cover the expenses, including travel to the regional event, and provide transportation after practices. The school



**We share the goal of providing the best possible educational and developmental environment for our deaf and hard of hearing youths—and we work together to make a local high school Academic Bowl team happen.**

board allows us to use its facility and equipment for practices, meetings, and matches. School staff members volunteer in a variety of capacities that keep the team running. They provide technical assistance, make personal donations, drive students home on their own time, chaperone for trips, and are great cheerleaders for our kids!

Our team just participated for the third year in the Southeast Regional High School Academic Bowl competition that was held in Mississippi. While we haven't made it to



Deaf and hard of hearing students throughout the country face off for intellectual competition, camaraderie, and fun. Photography by Hui Zhang

the finals yet, our performance improves a bit each time. Last year, for example, we earned the Team Sportsmanship and Most Outstanding Player awards. There is no doubt that participating students increase their general bank of academic information. The bonus is the social and emotional growth they experience as they form a core of teens who serve as leaders among their peers.

Students annually establish their own handbook and guidelines for participation. They learn to budget and fundraise. They help plan the practice schedule and learn the dynamics of resolving conflict within the group. Having included community service as a requirement for team participation, they often volunteer for their schools and the Family Center on Deafness, assisting with projects on campus, serving as role models for younger deaf and hard of hearing youths at activities, and interacting with the parents of younger students to help them understand how best to face the challenges of raising a child with a hearing loss.

In preparation, team members join other local deaf and hard of hearing teens and attend youth retreats and summer camps, sponsored by the Family Center on Deafness, where they develop team

building, decision-making, and problem-solving strategies. Our students also travel to participate in forums sponsored by organizations such as the Florida Coordinating Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the Florida Association of the Deaf, and the National Association of the Deaf, learning to

identify their needs, network, and advocate for themselves. In response, these organizations have become strong supporters who help sponsor the team's participation in competition, as do several individual members.



### So what's the point of our story?

First, we want to encourage communities like ours to build Academic Bowl teams through identifying and using local assets in creative ways. Not every school will find funding from an agency like the Family Center on Deafness, but most schools have supporters waiting in the wings for a chance to contribute to the success of deaf and hard of hearing youth in their area. Whether these supporters are individuals, organizations, or corporations, get out and find them. See how they can work together for your students.

Second, know that the result of having a team is more than academic excellence



and achievement. You will discover the same kind of opportunities for growth in your teens that we have experienced—chances for deaf and hard of hearing youth to expand their awareness of their own capabilities, to realize that they are members of a great deaf community, and to understand better their relationship to the world at large. Having a high school Academic Bowl team creates many opportunities.

Keep Up  
with the Latest  
Clerc Center Happenings,  
Sign Up for  
*News and Notables*  
E-Mail Updates at:

**clerccenterpress@gallaudet.edu**

