



Illinois State Board of Education

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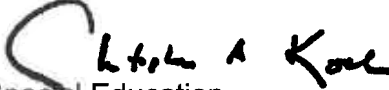
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MEMORANDUM #05-3

TO: District Superintendents
Directors of Special Education
Other Interested Parties

FROM: Christopher A. Koch, Ed.D. 
Assistant Superintendent for Special Education

DATE: June 10, 2005

SUBJECT: Guidance: Services and Placement Determination for Students
Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide guidance regarding the services and placement of students who are deaf or hard of hearing. The provision of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) for a student with hearing loss can only occur with full communication access to education. Full communication access depends upon a language-rich environment that fosters age-appropriate communication and language development, utilizes language-proficient educational staff, and provides for direct communication with staff and peers. Children and youth who are deaf or hard of hearing face unique and significant barriers related to language and communication that profoundly affect most aspects of the educational process. Attending to a student's communication needs and language development is a vital prerequisite for access to educational opportunities that lead to literacy and academic achievement. Therefore, ***placement determinations for students who are deaf or hard of hearing must be based upon meeting each student's language and communication needs.***

Reasons for Focus on Student's Language and Communication Needs

Several outcomes for students who are deaf or hard of hearing have raised concerns about the placement and services of these individuals. Obviously, these statistics are not due to the problems of a single district or cooperative program. Instead, they reveal systemic problems in our approach to education of students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

- On average, students who are deaf or hard of hearing graduate from high school graduate with reading levels ranging from 2.8 to 4.5, compared to 10th grade reading levels for their hearing peers (Allen, 1986; Traxler, 2000).
- Thirty percent of all students who are deaf or hard of hearing leave school functionally illiterate, as compared to less than 1% of their hearing peers (Marschark, 1997).

- Students who are deaf or hard of hearing gain only 1.5 years in literacy skill between the ages of 8 and 18 (Allen, 1986; Traxler, 2000).

Students who are deaf or hard of hearing have a college graduation rate of only 8% (COED, 1988).

Approximately 40% of deaf adults are unemployed and 90% are underemployed (National Deaf Education Project, 2000).

Free Appropriate Public Education

In 1992, the U.S. Department of Education published a policy guidance concerning appropriate programming and least restrictive placement for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. That policy was re-issued in 1994. The language from this policy guidance was later incorporated into IDEA in 1997. Included in the policy were the following statements:

Meeting the unique communication and related needs of a student who is deaf is a fundamental part of providing a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to the child...Any setting which does not meet the communication and related needs of a child who is deaf, and therefore, does not allow for the provision of FAPE, cannot be considered the LRE for that child. The provision of FAPE is paramount, and the individual placement determination about LRE is to be considered within the context of FAPE...The Secretary is concerned that some public agencies have misapplied the LRE provision by presuming that placements in or closer to the regular classroom are required for children who are deaf.

Because hearing loss is a low incidence disability, there is limited understanding about its impact among educators, even special educators. This lack of knowledge contributes to the educational barriers for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Most deaf children enter school at a significant language disadvantage to their hearing peers, because they do not have access to their parents' spoken language. Yet school systems often develop programs and curricula based on the assumption that all children enter school with basic language skills. The result is to compound the already considerable barriers to educational access for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. This lag in language skills between students who are deaf and their hearing peers increases through the school years.

"Deaf and hard of hearing students have one thing in common: their universal need for communication, from which all...educational determinations should flow." (Siegel, 2000) Without full access to communication, the general education classroom is not the least restrictive environment for a child who is deaf or hard of hearing. Full communication access depends upon a language-rich environment that fosters age-appropriate communication and language development, utilizes language-proficient educational staff, and provides for direct communication with staff and peers. **Placement determinations for students who are deaf or hard of hearing must be based upon the student's communication and language needs.**

Technical Assistance

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) recognizes that districts may need access to technical assistance to ensure communication and language-driven programming and the provision of FAPE for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. The Department of Special Education has staff available to provide technical assistance in the area of service provision for students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Local Technical Assistance

Your local technical assistance supervisor of programs for students who are deaf or hard of hearing should be contacted. For a list of supervisors, contact the website of the Illinois Supervisors of Programs for Hard of Hearing/Deaf Individuals (ISHI) at www.morgan.k12.il.us/isd/ishi.

Future Directions

The ISBE is committed to becoming a leader in the education of students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Throughout the 2003-2004 school year, the ISBE convened a task force to develop recommendations regarding qualifications for educational interpreters. Those recommendations have been developed into proposed rules for approval of educational interpreters. To view these proposed rules, please visit our website at www.isbe.net/rules. In the coming years, the ISBE will work collaboratively with parents, consumers and professionals to review of Illinois' educational service delivery for students who are deaf or hard of hearing with a goal of providing each child with full access to educational opportunity and high academic achievement.

Should you have any questions about the information in this memorandum, please contact Barbara Sims (bsims@isbe.net), Principal Consultant, Special Education Services at 217/782-5589 (voice) or 217/782-1900 (TTY).

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