

# Seven Agreements for Closing Colorado's Gap in Deaf Education

**Recommendations from the Blueprint for Closing the Gap Revisioning Task Force, conducted by the Colorado Association of the Deaf, Colorado Hands & Voices, and Rocky Mountain Deaf School.**

**A grant from The Colorado Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Department of Human Services made this project possible.**

## A NOTE ABOUT “DEAF” VERSUS “DEAF / HARD OF HEARING”

The Blueprint Revisioning Task Force supports the use of the term “deaf” for all children who have any degree of hearing loss. This choice is, perhaps, surprising.

The current terms in vogue in the Deaf, educational and even the medical community today are “deaf/hard of hearing” and have been since the World Federation of the Deaf voted to use these terms in 1991. The National Association of the Deaf and Gallaudet University use these terms. Support is widespread. So why suggest a different definition?

In our discussions, we have come to think that the use of the dual terms “deaf” and “hard of hearing” reinforces an arbitrary distinction between the two, discounts their shared experiences, and encourages mistaken assumptions about individual students’ needs. While we could separate children who are deaf from those who are hard of hearing, have a unilateral loss, those who have Microtia or a particular syndrome, or those who access the world through visual language from those who listen with cochlear implants, hearing aids, or other technology, all children who are deaf share differences from typically hearing children in how they receive and process linguistic information. While each child certainly has unique needs, this document is designed to outline general principles to meet those needs. When referring to specific issues related to learning with audition, the phrase “hard of hearing” is used. Otherwise, the term “deaf” means deaf, hard of hearing or any degree of hearing loss in this document.



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## SUPPORT

### **THE FOLLOWING INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS AGREE TO SUPPORT THE VISION OF THIS DOCUMENT AND LOOK FORWARD TO EFFORTS TO BRING ABOUT THESE AGREEMENTS FOR OUR STUDENTS WHO ARE DEAF IN COLORADO.**

Alain Navartne, Parent of a deaf child  
Alisha Pattavina, Parent of a deaf child  
Amber Duffy, Parent  
Amy Novotny, Deaf representative  
Angel Trevino, Teacher of the Deaf  
Ann Gavin, Parent of deaf children  
Balinda Price, Professional  
Barbara Coffan, Interpreter  
Bethany Ann Smart-Bolling, Professional  
Brenda Elliott, Parent of deaf children  
Carmela Roybal, Deaf professional  
Cathy Bowles, Professional  
Cheryl Johnson, Professional, former CDE Consultant  
Chris Dietrich, Parent of deaf children  
Christie Yoshinaga-Itano, Professional, Professor and Researcher, CU Boulder  
Christopher Martinez, Relative of a deaf child  
Chuck Walker, Parent of a deaf child  
Cindy Woehle, Teacher of the Deaf  
Courtney Williams, Professional  
Cruz Martinez, Relative of a deaf child  
Cynthia Moore, Parent of a deaf child  
Cynthia Stephens, Professional  
Danelle Jansen, Professional  
Denisse Perez, Parent of a deaf child  
Diana Martinez, Parent of a deaf child  
Donna Massine, Teacher of the Deaf, Educational Audiologist



Elizabeth Marglin, Parent of a deaf child  
Emily Gvestang, Parent of a deaf child  
Frank Johns, Parents of a deaf child  
Gina Straight, Parent of a deaf child  
Hesmelda Amador, Parent of a deaf child  
Janet DesGeorges, parent of a deaf child  
Jennifer Pfau, Deaf representative, parent of a deaf child  
Jennifer Vargas, Relative of a deaf child  
Jeremy Duffy, Parent of deaf children  
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Kathryn Johnson, Teacher of the Deaf  
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Libby Robinson, Parent of a deaf child  
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Lonnie Burkholder, Parent of a deaf child  
Lynne Canales, Teacher of the Deaf  
Mah-rya Proper, Professional and parent  
Maria Navaratne, Parent of a deaf child  
Maria Rodriguez, Parent of a deaf child  
Marion Collins, relative of a deaf child  
Marissa Rivera, Professional  
Martha Fydrich, Parent of a deaf student  
Megan Murillo, Parent of a deaf child  
Michael A. Thomas, Parent of deaf children, professional  
Mindy Mitchell, Parent of a deaf child  
Molly McDonald, Deaf professional

- Nicki Schroeder, Parent of a deaf child
- Pamela Sewell, Parent of a deaf child
- Peggy Hecker, Parent of a deaf child
- Pippi Howard, Parent of deaf children
- Rebecca Novinger, Professional and Deaf adult
- Robin Getz, Deaf professional
- Sandra Gabbard, Professional
- Sara Kennedy, Parent of a deaf child
- Sarah Wedekin, Professional
- Shana Bokelman, Professional, and deaf adult
- Shelley Hanson, Parent of a deaf child
- Stacy Claycomb, Audiologist
- Stephanie Olson, Deaf professional
- Steve Hardin, Parent of a deaf child
- Susan Elliott, Teacher of the Deaf, deaf representative
- Susie Broderick, Professional
- Susie Martinez, Relatives of a deaf child
- Tammy Johns, Parent of a deaf child
- Tracy McGurran, Parent of a deaf child
- Trinity Martinez, Relatives of a deaf child
- Valerie Walker, Parent of a deaf child
- Vickie Thomson, Professional
- Victoria Douglas, Parent of a deaf child

Organizational Letters:

See letters from The Colorado Department of Education, the Commission for Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Minnesotans , Peak Parent Center, University of Colorado at Boulder, Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences, University of Colorado School of Medicine, Department of Otolaryngology, and Cued Speech of Colorado.

Colorado Registry of Interpreters of the Deaf (CRID)

Marion Downs Center



**COLORADO**  
Department of Education

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Sara Kennedy  
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March 17, 2015

To the Core Team of the Revisioning Task Force:

Thank you for the opportunity to participate on the Blueprint for Closing the Gap Revisioning Task Force. I was present for a few of the meetings and appreciated the passion of the attendees for the field of deaf education. I have read the document, *Seven Agreements for Closing Colorado's Gap in Deaf Education* that is a product of the discussions during task force meetings. Please allow me to acknowledge the effort of the Revisioning Task Force in developing this document.

I am sharing with you my thoughts regarding this document at your request. While not able to endorse all of the suggestions in the document, there are specific elements that the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) can fully support. Please see the list below outlining our points of agreement.

- I'm confident that we can agree that deafness is a unique and highly complex field in the education arena. The relatively low numbers of students with hearing loss enrolled in special education in Colorado's school system, coupled with the variety of student communication modes requiring distinct and varied programming methodologies, create a substantial challenge for public school systems. The content of the *Seven Agreements* attempts to address this challenge. I applaud the grassroots effort to brainstorm solutions that will encourage appropriate programming for Colorado's Deaf/Hard of Hearing students.
- The rationale behind the committee's endeavor is indisputable. The eight statements listed on page 8 are tenets of deaf education and offer another point of agreement which we share.
- The CDE agrees that stakeholders represent a variety of perspectives and should have an arena in which to contribute their areas of expertise. As the core committee was informed several months ago, the CDE has formed a Deaf Education Advisory Board to offer recommendations to the department to improve practices for students with hearing loss in Colorado. The CDE concurs that there is a need for continued conversation by members who have training, experience, or interest in the area of deaf education for children in a wide variety of placements. To that end, the CDE's Deaf Education Advisory Board has been created and has met to begin this work.
- A portion of "Agreement 3" is a proposal to update the *Colorado Quality Standards for Programs and Services for Students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing*. This plan coincides with the CDE's plan to update said document in response to recent requests from school district administrative personnel who are exploring the possibility of establishing regional deaf education programs in their districts to service their geographical area. The project to update the *Quality Standards* document is tasked to the CDE's Deaf Education Advisory Board in direct response to the welcome interest in this information from specific school districts.
- The topic of data and student assessment is discussed in "Agreement 4." Acknowledging the mandate for a statewide instrument that assesses all students with a common evaluation, the CDE also recognizes the need for a test battery that is specific to deaf and hard of hearing students for the purpose of identifying

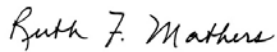


areas of concern related to children with hearing loss. The CDE is in agreement with the list of ten types of information to be gathered and to which our field needs ready access to appropriately inform IEP goals, design targeted professional development, and drive classroom instruction. To illustrate the CDE's commitment to the same idea mentioned in "Agreement 4," the READ Act Task Force was formed in the late fall of 2014 to address the need for deaf and hard of hearing students to be assessed with a battery of tests which would accurately identify the presence or absence of a significant reading deficiency. This assessment battery will provide more accurate information to educators to assist in designing individualized instruction based on need for students. This is a strong start in addressing appropriate assessments for our students.

While the effort given to community discussion and the creation of the document should be acknowledged as an indication of the passion and interest in the *Agreement* issues, taken as a whole, I believe that the *Seven Agreements for Closing Colorado's Gap in Deaf Education* is not a realistic plan for changing deaf education in Colorado. Authentic collaboration cannot be mandated. Deaf and hard of hearing students cannot and should not be deprived of the rigor and expectations found in general education when appropriate. The academic system exists to educate children to become productive, independent adults - not to promote a culture requiring consistent exposure to adults who are not credentialed educators. Professional development formats should be research-based and designed to change practice - not to provide social interaction among participants or convenience for developers.

As the Consultant for Deaf Education at the Colorado Department of Education, I can support the spirit of this document. I agree that the community should continue to examine the needs of deaf education. I encourage you to be part of the on-going discussion and decision-making by being available to serve on a committee or task force where these issues will continue to be addressed and your voice will be heard.

Sincerely,



Ruth F. Mathers M.S.  
Principle Consultant for Deaf Education







## Letter of Support from Commission of Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Minnesotans

June 1, 2015

**To:** Revision task force members

**From:** Anna Paulson: Coordinator of Educational Advancements and Partnerships

**Re:** Response to your Seven Agreements for Closing the Gap

The “Seven Agreements for Closing the Gap” is truly a gift to the school age children who are deaf and hard of hearing. The task force of authors have put great time and effort in ensuring that all areas of child and student development are represented in this document. I applaud your thorough examination of the on-going barriers to measurable outcomes for students. From a national perspective, this document is aligned with the National Bill of Rights for Deaf Students- with the assurance that the vital stakeholders maintain the spirit of the bill. From the perspective of professionals in Minnesota, it is an admirable step in the right direction. Educating your legislators opens doors for policy change.

As the Coordinator of Educational Advancements and Partnerships with the Minnesota Commission, I can absolutely support the tenants of this document. I would like to note that the legislative mandate for multi-agency collaboration is not in the spirit of true collaboration. I read in your introduction that voluntary collaboration has been tried and has failed. That is very disappointing. Consistently across states, the low-incidence disability group of students who are deaf/hard of hearing is rarely a priority in local district initiatives. The demographic numbers of students with hearing loss are further diminished when they are separated by “degree of hearing loss” and “mode of communication”. Without numbers, our students are easily overlooked. Your “Seven Agreements” are a valiant effort to bring the spotlight back to those who deserve a free and appropriate education to ensure that they too can meet their full potential as students and community members.

We support this statement and intend to mirror the tenants within.

Anna R. Paulson

Coordinator of Educational Advancement & Partnerships

Commission of Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Minnesotans (MNCDHH)

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## Letter of Support from Peak Parent Center



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To Whom it May Concern,

June 2, 2015

PEAK Parent Center, Colorado's Parent Training and Information Center, supports the Seven Agreements for Closing Colorado's Gap in Deaf Education report. Employment and adult success depends on quality pre-services education programs.

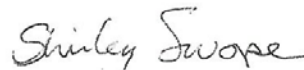
PEAK Parent Center believes that every child with a disability is a quality learner, and PEAK supports the efforts of groups and individuals who share the belief that ALL means ALL in education. Students who are DHH have a unique communication need that impacts their ability to learn. As a state that seeks to lead the nation in education, it is our responsibility to support a statewide strategic plan to include coordinating services so that our students have access to a range of supports of options as the IDEA requires, updating the aged Quality Standards and aligning with pre-service education programs, thoughtful, systemic professional development across disciplines, and considering the unique needs of every child who is deaf or hard of hearing to create communication-driven programs. It is important that communication-driven programs for DHH are available to students across the state and not just available to students in urban areas.

Quality Education is an essential factor for the chance to have a quality life and meaningful employment.

Sincerely,



Barbara E. Buswell,  
Executive Director



Shirley Swope  
Parent Advisor



**Letter of Support from Christine Yoshinaga-Itano, Ph.D., Professor of Speech, Language, & Hearing Sciences, University of Colorado Boulder**



May 30, 2015

Sara Kennedy  
Hands & Voices  
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Dear Sara:

I was involved in the original drafting of the Blueprint for Closing the Gap now over a decade ago and still feel that the principles from that document are as applicable today as they were when they were drafted many years ago. For a variety of reasons, there has not been as much progress towards meeting these goals as we had hoped would occur, especially over the many years that have now transpired.

Colorado has led the nation with respect to the system developed after the establishment of universal newborn hearing screening. The education/habilitation follow-through in the first three years of life after confirmation that the child is deaf or hard of hearing is, in my opinion, the best in the world. It is equitable, offering the same level and quality of service to all families with early-identified children. It is an accountable system, as the developmental outcomes of the children are monitored every six months and it is of exceptional quality because of the training of the Co-Hear coordinators who provide “train the trainer” support to all of the early intervention providers regardless of where they live in the state of Colorado.

Additionally, Colorado is only one of two states with educational audiologists in every local education agency or board of cooperative educational services, assuring that the children have auditory access to the learning environment. This service compliments the work of the teachers of the deaf through the state providing comprehensive services that are unique.

However, even with these systemic characteristics, there have been some significant challenges. The primary purpose of universal newborn hearing screening has been to prevent the significant educational, cognitive and social-emotional delays that were common among children who were deaf or hard of hearing prior to early identification in the newborn period. However, the special education system is not designed for “prevention” but has been based on a “deficit” model that requires children to fall significantly below the normal range in order to receive services. Because of local educational agency jurisdiction, it is often difficult to assess children longitudinally on common assessment tools and the annual school testing from third through 10<sup>th</sup> grades does not include information about the child’s hearing status, so it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for school districts to access the developmental outcomes of their entire system of children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Across the United States, there is a growing movement for states to develop coordinated state systems of collaboration for children who are deaf or hard of hearing. This coordination is extremely challenging because it often requires collaboration between state departments of health, state departments of education and Part C agencies. In addition, a unique collaboration between schools for the deaf, local educational agencies, and state department of education administrators is essential.

In an ideal world, such collaboration would occur naturally with all partners willing to meet on a regular basis and collaborate across agency boundaries. However, significant administrative barriers often exist and changes in directorship across the many partners often impacts whether such collaboration can occur. While there are many pros and cons to legislation, there are times when accomplishing a logical and needed goal can only be accomplished through legislation. I believe that although there have been many efforts over the past 13 years to accomplish this collaboration, the challenges have been so great that the lack of the formation of such collaboration has prevented us from accomplishing the significant goals from the original Blueprint for Closing the Gap.

While true collaboration cannot be mandated, systemic supports that assure the development of a state plan that includes an action plan would be a step in the right direction and would begin to assure that another decade does not pass by without the accomplishment of these goals. I fully supported the legislation for universal newborn hearing screening and the fact that 87% of our children can now be educated within the regular classroom is testimony to the success of that legislation. I also fully supported the hearing aid legislation which has resulted in early access to amplification assuring that, as soon as possible, children who are identified as deaf or hard of hearing have access to appropriate amplification technology and over 80% of our children are now entering kindergarten with intelligible speech. I supported the Deaf Child Bill of Rights that has provided families with legislation that should assure access to the language and learning environment of the classroom, as well as to both hearing and deaf/hard of hearing peers and adult role models. In each of these situations, legislation has dramatically enhanced the lives and outcomes of our children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Therefore, I wholeheartedly support the Seven Agreements document and I believe that it is an appropriate plan to assure that children who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families receive appropriate education.

Sincerely,



Christine Yoshinaga-Itano, Ph.D.

Professor

**Letter of Support from Vickie Thomson, PhD. Principle Investigator,  
Department of Otolaryngology, School of Medicine, University of Colorado**



 University of Colorado  
Anschutz Medical Campus

May 12, 2015

Colorado Hands & Voices

Sara Kennedy, Director

RE: Seven Agreements

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Dear Sara,

I enthusiastically endorse the Seven Agreements as a much-needed opportunity for stakeholders in the state of Colorado to move forward in creating educational excellence for our young students.

As the previous director of the Colorado Infant Hearing Program at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, it was well documented that infants who were identified and enrolled into early intervention had near normal developmental outcomes in language, cognition, and social development. Sadly, research has shown that due to inadequate education the same children begin to fall behind as soon as they enter Part B services.

I appreciate the committee utilized critical stakeholder feedback from a wide variety of professionals, parents and the Deaf community gathered from the *Inspiring Change* 2013 meetings coupled with important documents in the past to highlight critical areas. The committee proposed concrete, actionable, substantive improvements in the here and now.

Through the work of Colorado Infant Hearing Advisory Committee, we see firsthand that it is not one or two agencies/groups that can affect “moving the needle” towards more positive student outcomes, just as one or two agencies can’t create a seamless identification to early intervention trajectory for a diverse set of parents living across Colorado. Instead, it is the efforts of many who must be engaged to improve our pre-service education, resources for parents and teachers, utilize data not currently available to measure outcomes, provide mentoring and just in time support, and set rigorous quality standards based on evidence for districts to follow.

We applaud the work of the core committee and look forward to seeing the Agreements come to life through stakeholder collaboration at the highest levels. Colorado has been a recognized leader in newborn hearing screening and we hope Colorado becomes a leader in deaf education.

Sincerely,



Vickie Thomson, PhD  
Principle Investigator

## Letter of Support from Cued Speech of Colorado



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Sara Kennedy  
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Boulder, CO 80307

March 25, 2015

To the Core Team of the Revisioning Task Force:

Cued Speech of Colorado thanks the Core Team for the opportunity to contribute to the Blueprint for Closing the Gap Revisioning Task Force. I attended many of the meetings and observed the different groups represented from parents to professionals to consumers as well.

Cued Speech of Colorado supports the intentions behind the “Seven Agreements for Closing Colorado’s Gap in Deaf Education” document as well as the vision laid out for reforming deaf education in the state of Colorado. We believe more could be included when it comes to cued language services. However, this document is a start as we acknowledge the inclusion of Cued Speech in Communication Plans within Individualized Education Plans in Colorado.

We recognize that this document may not serve well as a realistic plan for reforming deaf education, yet it does serve as a means of guiding community discussion and collaboration on improving services for children with hearing loss, regardless of their location in the state of Colorado.

Cued Speech of Colorado hopes that this document will help guide reforms in deaf education driven by research-based practices and data-driven decisions.

Aaron Rose, M.S.D.E.



President, Cued Speech of Colorado



## Statement from the Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind

January 8, 2015

The Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind (CSDB) is committed to providing services of excellence to children who are Deaf/hard of hearing and children who are blind/visually impaired statewide. The services we provide each child, or are requested to provide, are identified through the Individual Education Program (IEP) process and aligned with procedures and practices identified in state and federal law.

CSDB is always ready to collaborate in discussions specific to the provision of quality services for children who are Deaf/hard of hearing and children who are blind/visually impaired. Our willingness to collaborate has been demonstrated through our participation in every meeting of “Inspiring Change” as well as the committee meetings which followed.

The Committee process utilized did not encompass the elements of effective strategic planning. There are avenues currently in place (i.e. CSDB Strategic Plan) which can provide opportunities for dialogue and the development of an action plan to address identified educational needs of children statewide.

The contents of the attached document, Seven Agreements for Closing the Gap, does not reflect our preferred approach to continued conversations regarding “closing the gap” in achievement of children who are Deaf/hard of hearing in Colorado. We do not support the continuation of collaboration through mandated legislation, and therefore cannot support this document. We request the names of our staff members be removed from the Acknowledgements page of the document.

CSDB remains strongly committed to a child-centered approach, when working with parents and school districts, in order to meet the individual needs of children.

Carol A. Hilty  
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CSDB...Learning, Thriving, Leading  
*Celebrating 140 Years of Excellence*

UNIVERSITY of  
NORTHERN COLORADO



*School of Special Education*

May 4, 2015

Sara Kennedy  
Hands & Voices  
P. O. Box 3093  
Boulder, CO 80307

To the Core Team of the Blueprint Revisioning Task Force,

Thank you for the opportunity to review the document titled, "Seven Agreements for Closing Colorado's Gap in Deaf Education." We applaud the Colorado Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing for providing funding for this project. We also appreciate the willingness and the ability of the Task Force members to collaborate as well as to dedicate the time needed to develop this document.

The document summarizes many of the issues that exist throughout the United States related to the challenges of providing appropriate services for the heterogeneous population of students who are deaf or hard of hearing. It also addresses the unacceptable educational, vocational and quality-of-life outcomes that many adults who are deaf or hard of hearing experience.

We are fully in favor of and in support of endeavors to improve school, career and living outcomes for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. However, we are uncertain that Agreement 1 – "mandate a Deaf Education Steering Committee to carry forward and implement the six remaining agreements from the 'Blueprint for Closing the Gap Revisioning Task Force,' including developing and implementing a comprehensive state plan for deaf education" is the appropriate starting place.

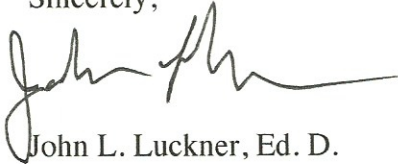
Examination of the content and research cited to support the suggestions provided are (a) dated, (b) anecdotal, and (c) not from Colorado. The truth of the matter is that we really do not know the status of students or adults who are deaf or hard of hearing in Colorado. Without knowing how well students or adults are doing, how can the Deaf Education Steering Committee develop interventions? How will the Committee be able to determine if an intervention has been effective or not, without having a baseline to compare it with? It would seem essential to know, at a minimum, (a) what percentage of students who are deaf or hard of hearing are reading below grade level, (b) what percentage of students who are deaf or hard of hearing are performing below grade level in mathematics, (c) what percentage of students who are deaf or hard of hearing feel isolated and do not have friends, (d) what percentage of students who are deaf or hard of hearing go to and complete a postsecondary education program, (e) what percentage go to and do not complete a postsecondary education program, (f) what percentage of adults who are deaf or hard of hearing are unemployed or underemployed, (g) how many school districts have positions for teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing that are not filled, and (h) how many school districts have positions for educational interpreters for students who are deaf or hard of hearing that are not filled?



In closing, we want to communicate our support for planning and implementing actions that will improve the lives of students and adults who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families. However, we do not think that can be done without getting a clear picture of how students are performing, how adults are functioning and what the existent professional workforce is. This undertaking could be the initial task of the Deaf Education Steering Committee. We think that without collecting these types of data, the Committee will not have a good "Blueprint" to develop and implement their plan.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to share our professional opinions. We are very appreciative of the hard work of the Core Team of the Blueprint Revisioning Task Force and hope they will consider our suggestion of adding an eighth agreement.

Sincerely,



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## Statement from the Colorado Chapter of the Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

To the members of the Revisioning Task Force:  
Colorado Association of the Deaf,  
Colorado Hands & Voices,  
Rocky Mountain Deaf School



Dear Task Force,

The Colorado Chapter of the Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (CCAGB) openly acknowledges the Revisioning Task Force for their extraordinary efforts and commitment to the betterment of statewide public educational programming of our children who are deaf/hard of hearing.

The CCAGB regretfully does not support this document as it reads in its current state. The areas of most concern contained in this document are as follows:

1. Colorado Chapter of AG Bell does not agree with the change in terminology from “deaf and hard of hearing” to “deaf”. We do not believe that the current term “deaf and hard of hearing” denies “shared experiences, and encourages mistaken assumptions about individual student’s needs.” The degree of hearing loss does not automatically create shared experiences. Likewise, this mind set is harmful to individuality and listening and spoken language outcomes of the current generation.
2. When referring to specific issues related to learning with audition, the phrase “hard of hearing” is used. “Hard of hearing”, as it is used in this document, appears to be marginalizing those families who choose this communication option. Cochlear Implant users may be functionally hard of hearing, but that accomplishment is the result of hard work and dedication of families and professionals. The school districts in the state do need to actualize the needs of these children because their hearing loss is educationally significant. Many families have been denied appropriate services, because their child’s functional level is high, as a result of their many hours dedication to teaching their child listening and spoken language.
3. While we agree with the task force that every child should be provided with access to their family’s chosen mode of communication, the document does not explicitly mention that schools should provide listening and spoken language as a viable communication mode and specific instruction to develop these skills.
4. Lastly, the proposed committee does not represent the spectrum of service providers and interest groups. Therefore, it is possible that the needs of children who are learning to listen and speak may not be met through these seven agreements.

Again, we agree that the education of children with hearing loss is of great importance and we thank you for your efforts and commitment. We regret that we are unable to support this document in its current state.

Respectfully,

Marti Bleidt  
President  
Colorado Chapter of Alexander Graham Bell

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

These seven agreements for closing Colorado's gap in deaf education would not have been come to exist without the thoughtful input and frank discussions of the members of the Revisioning Task Force. The task force members began working in December 2013 through December 2014 with ten in-person facilitated meetings, hundreds of email and phone conversations, and quite a few Google and VP chats. Individuals may have knowledge of the school district or agency where they work, but were in most cases not permitted to represent their district or agency.

- Janet DesGeorges, Executive Director, Hands & Voices, (H&V), parent of a deaf adult\*
- Laura Douglas, Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind (CSDB), Director of Outreach
- Susan Elliott, Teacher of the Deaf, Douglas County Schools District, deaf representative
- Sara Kennedy, Director, Colorado Hands & Voices, (CO H&V) parent of a deaf student\*
- Donna Massine, Teacher of the Deaf, Educational Audiologist, Douglas County School District
- Ruth F. Mathers, M.S., Principle Consultant for Deaf Education, Colorado Department of Education
- Tracy McGurran, Parent of a deaf student using ASL
- Julie Moers, Colorado Association of the Deaf, Rocky Mountain Deaf School (RMDS), deaf representative\*
- Amy Novotny, Principal of RMDS, deaf representative\*
- Jennifer Pfau, President of Colorado Association of the Deaf, (CAD) deaf representative, parent of a deaf student\*
- Aaron Rose, Teacher of the Deaf, deaf representative, native cuer
- Jaclyn Tyrcha, Teacher of the Deaf, Boulder Valley School District, deaf representative
- Tera Wilkins, Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind, Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment; deaf representative
- Cliff Moers, Colorado Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, (CCDHH), deaf representative
- Lisa Weiss, parent of a deaf student, CCDHH Commissioner

\* Members with an asterisk represent the three organizations making up the core team for this grant project.



**LISTEN FOUNDATION**  
HELPING CHILDREN HEAR, LISTEN, TALK

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April 6, 2015

Ms. Sara Kennedy  
Hands & Voices  
P.O. Box 3093  
Boulder, CO 80307

**Re: Statement from the Listen Foundation**

To the Members of the Revisioning Task Force:

The Listen Foundation is grateful for the opportunity to provide comment and feedback on the draft version of the “Seven Agreements for Closing Colorado’s Gap in Deaf Education”. It is clear that much thought was put into this document. After careful consideration, the Listen Foundation is unable to endorse this plan as it is not inclusive of the listening and spoken language (LSL) community. Support for our decision is reflected in the following:

1. **Restricted Classification:** This document begins by defining all students with a hearing loss as ‘deaf’. Many of the auditory learners we work with, especially cochlear implant recipients do not identify themselves as deaf and take exception to this labeling. In fact, the current culture in the U.S. places a significant emphasis on self-identification. Therefore, we are very sensitive to the suggested classification as we believe this type of grouping is in stark contrast to that trend. Additionally, to place all students in one category disregards their individuality and the fact that they will require vastly different classroom/educational support based not only on type/degree of loss, but chosen communication method as well.
2. **More Inclusiveness:** To ensure an effective State Plan, we believe it is critical for the task force and proposed steering committee to include and address all interest groups equally. This would include professionals and individuals representing LSL to ensure that the needs of all students are met.
3. **Enhance Use of Current System:** From a practical standpoint, working from within the educational system to effect change versus creating another body seems more realistic. This especially makes sense when the goals of the current and proposed groups are the same: to improve educational outcomes for children who are deaf and hard of hearing in Colorado. The addition of the task force gives the

impression that yet another layer is being added producing a competing entity with CDE's Deaf Education Advisory Board.

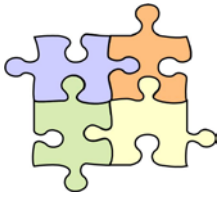
We have kept our response brief but are willing, if it would be helpful, to expand upon our comments or provide additional information in support of our decision to not endorse the plan detailed in this document.

Thank you again for the opportunity to give consideration to this plan and provide our opinion.

Sincerely,

Pat Greenway  
Executive Director  
Listen Foundation, Inc.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND THE SEVEN AGREEMENTS IN BRIEF



### Vision

Colorado education reform for deaf students will result in communication-driven educational programming that meets the state's high academic standards and supports the social and emotional development of learners.

### Why Revisit the Blueprint for Closing the Gap?

In the fall of 2013, the Colorado Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing awarded a collaborative grant to the Colorado Association of the Deaf, Colorado Hands & Voices, and Rocky Mountain Deaf School to re-imagine the *2002 Blueprint for Closing the Gap: Developing a Statewide System of Service Improvements for Students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing*. The grantee organizations convened a "revisioning task force" of a diverse array of stakeholders in deaf education to examine the original recommendations in turn and recommend updates in today's educational environment.

Each organization involved bears witness to deaf students who graduate from high school without college or career readiness skills, without a practical knowledge of the ADA and community supports, and without a fully developed language that allows for full inclusion in work or community life. We've learned that districts struggle to meet the diverse needs of students often not accessing the support available through CSDB and CDE. Teacher of the Deaf positions remain ominously unfilled, and limited opportunities for further education, the need to recruit new people into the field, and teacher retention problems cast a shadow over student achievement today. Families tell Colorado Hands & Voices that they prefer to rent rather than purchase a home within a district, and some move once or many times during a child's years in school to assist in meeting a child's needs. Districts are beginning to interpret the Deaf Child's Bill of Rights in their own ways, eroding the IDEA's intent on the Special Considerations requirement, and limiting or not even offering engagement of deaf role models to students.

The Colorado Association of the Deaf (CAD), a grassroots organization, learns continually of the struggles deaf adults face after deaf education. Of the 6,539 deaf students exiting high school in the 2007-08 academic year, 2,936 received diplomas, and 737 received the certificate of attendance through the IEP, and 466 dropped out. The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 found that 87.6% of deaf students had goals for post-secondary education of some kind, yet only 67.1% actually enrolled in post-secondary training or academic programs. According to a 2010 fact sheet based on IDEA data collection, between two-thirds and three-quarters of these students will not complete a degree program. We lack access to meaningful current data in Colorado, also addressed by this Blueprint revision, but these numbers point to a need for more proactive preparation and transition programming with students in K-12 and 18-21 year old transition programs focusing on their unique learning needs and the barriers to success. CAD also notes that there is hunger for a gathering where each deaf adult would identify themselves as just "being" with no labels attached. Deaf adults are not considered valuable consultants as outlined in the Deaf Child's Bill of Rights but only "products" of deaf education without degrees in the field. Colorado's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation lists a high number of deaf adults looking for gainful employment and for educational opportunities. Underemployment is a significant problem. In one nationwide study, 45% of deaf adults ages 21-65 nationwide were not in the labor force during 2009-2011. (Pepnet)

The original work of the 2002 taskforce languished because of changes in leadership, the economic climate, and perhaps a lack of true commitment to the concept of regional programs crossing districts and “local control.” The principles of quality deaf education were present in the plan, but that first recommendation proposing regional programs was a stumbling block, causing many professionals to disregard the rest of the Blueprint. Rather than let the vision disappear in Colorado, The Colorado Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing’s grant enabled a truly grassroots and comprehensive group of deaf education stakeholders to work together towards long term collaboration regardless of position, personality, or persuasion, through implementation of the first agreement on collaboration. This first agreement sets the foundation for the other agreements and for our goal of a communication-driven education for every deaf student in Colorado, from Cherry Creek to Cortez. What if we could create a truly seamless support system for students that was systematically offered to every deaf student in Colorado public schools? What if teachers and programs knew where to request guidance? What if we had access to multiple data streams to show whether or not a practice was effective? What if we as a community could work closely with our pre-service organizations and licensure entities to ensure quality standards are updated for training and entry into the field?

With the community perspectives of deaf adults and current parents raising deaf children in a wide variety of locations, and with the support of Rocky Mountain Deaf School and its leadership, we believe these agreements can make a measurable difference in educational outcomes for the next generation of students. All three of the core organizations that brought together this committee are committed to pursuing legislation to ensure that stakeholders come together to make the most of our shared resources for many years to come, though each agreement can stand alone should the Colorado legislature fail to share our Agreement One vision.

## **Seven Agreements for Closing Colorado’s the Gap in Deaf Education**

### ***Agreement 1: Mandating Collaboration***

Colorado should legislatively mandate a Deaf Education Steering Committee to carry forward and implement the six remaining agreements from the ‘Blueprint for Closing the Gap Revisioning Task Force,’ including developing and implementing a comprehensive state plan for deaf education.

### ***Agreement 2: Coordinated Statewide System***

A comprehensive state plan should be implemented to ensure a continuum of school placement opportunities that effectively and efficiently meet the needs of deaf children, as mandated by the IDEA. Each student’s individual needs will become the determinant for program and placement decisions. The Steering Committee should develop and implement a funding system that will provide sufficient resources for a quality education for deaf children, including for outreach to parents, schools, and districts. No school placement decision should be based on cost.

### ***Agreement 3: Quality Standards and Program Assessments***

The Colorado Quality Standards for communication driven academic and extracurricular programs for deaf children should be updated and implemented. Communication-driven programs serving deaf students should be subject to ongoing assessment to assure full access, student achievement, and high standards. Therefore, all programs serving deaf students should be reviewed against the Colorado Quality Standards every other year. In addition, a committee should be convened to update The Colorado Quality Standards, and the Standards should be revised every three years thereafter to remain relevant in today’s educational environment.

### ***Agreement 4: Data and Student Assessment***

Coordinate & improve the development and implementation of student assessment procedures to provide valid and reliable information about the achievement of every student according to established standards. Implement

supplemental, level appropriate assessment for deaf children. The current statewide assessment does not provide assessment in language, communication, or social and emotional areas, nor does it provide sufficient data for Individual Education Program goal development.

***Agreement 5: Professional Development***

A statewide strategic plan for training / mentoring should be developed for Colorado. On-going training, mentoring, and a full spectrum of professional development activities should be implemented statewide to support and improve proficiency for specialty providers, general educators, administrators, and families. Guidelines for the communication plan in the IEP should be revised, and a complete list of training, mentoring, and professional development activities available in Colorado should be maintained.

***Agreement 6: Quality Staff***

The Colorado Department of Education and all stakeholders should collaborate and contribute to efforts with national and state agencies and higher education programs to recruit, train, and encourage retention of staff providing services to deaf students.

***Agreement 7: Parents and Communities***

Continued development and implementation of a system for community and parent education, including deaf adults, that leads to meaningful involvement and collaboration in the education of deaf children should be enhanced, so that each child has opportunities to achieve.

“If we are only good at **describing** change, and not **implementing** it, we will never achieve **success**.”

- Anonymous



## INTRODUCTION

### Deaf Education Reform – is it still relevant?

Each organization involved in re-imagining the Blueprint for Closing the Gap bears witness to students who graduate from high school without college or career readiness skills, without a practical knowledge of the ADA and community supports, and without a fully developed language that allows for full inclusion in work or community life. Districts struggle to meet the diverse needs of students often not accessing the support available through CSDB and CDE. Teacher of the Deaf positions remain ominously unfilled, and limited opportunities for further education, the need to recruit new people into the field, and teacher retention problems cast a shadow over student achievement today. Families tell Hands & Voices that they have to consider their options each and every year; some families prefer to rent rather than purchase within a district, and some move once or many times during a child's years in school. Charter schools and homeschools search for supports for our students. Districts are beginning to interpret the Deaf Child's Bill of Rights in their own ways, eroding the IDEA's intent on the Special Considerations requirement, and limiting engagement of deaf role models to one community outing per year, if that is offered at all.

The Colorado Association of the Deaf (CAD) as a grassroots organization learns continually of the ongoing struggles deaf adults face after deaf education. The Colorado Association of the Deaf (CAD), a grassroots organization, learns continually of the struggles deaf adults face after deaf education. Of the 6,539 deaf students exiting high school in the 2007-08 academic year, 2,936 received diplomas, 737 received the certificate of attendance through the IEP, and 466 dropped out. The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 found that 87.6% of deaf students had goals of post-secondary education of some kind, yet only 67.1% actually enrolled in post-secondary training or academic programs. According to a 2010 fact sheet based on IDEA data collection, between two-thirds and three-quarters of these students will not complete a degree program. We lack access to meaningful current data in Colorado, also addressed by this Blueprint revision, but these numbers point to a need for more proactive preparation and transition programming with students in K-12 programs focusing on their unique learning needs and the barriers to success. CAD also notes that there is hunger for a gathering where each deaf adult would identify themselves as just "being" with no labels attached. Deaf adults are not considered valuable consultants as outlined in the Deaf Child's Bill of Rights but only "products" of deaf education without degrees in the field. Colorado's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation lists a high number of deaf adults looking for gainful employment and for educational opportunities. Underemployment is a significant problem. In one statistic, 45% of deaf adults ages 21-65 nationwide were not in the labor force during 2009-2011(Pepnet).

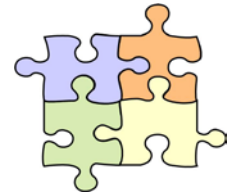
The original work of the 2002 taskforce languished because of changes in leadership, the economic climate, and no doubt a lack of true commitment to the concept of regional programs crossing districts and "local control." The principles of quality deaf education were present in the plan, but that first recommendation was a stumbling block causing many professionals to disregard the rest of the Blueprint. Rather than let the vision disappear in Colorado, The Colorado Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing offered collaborative groups the chance to apply for funding to revise the Blueprint with today's deaf education in mind. We share a vision with the Commission to ensure long term collaboration of stakeholders regardless of position, personality, or persuasion, through implementation of the first agreement on collaboration. This first agreement sets the foundation for the other agreements and for our goal of a communication-driven education for every deaf student in Colorado, from Cherry Creek to Cortez. What if we could create a true seamless support system for students that was systematically offered to every deaf student in Colorado? What if teachers and programs knew where to request guidance? What

if we had access to multiple data streams to show whether or not a practice was effective? What if we as a community could work closely with our pre-service organizations and licensure entities to ensure quality standards are updated for training and entry into the field?

With the community perspectives of deaf adults and current parents raising deaf children in a wide variety of locations, and with the support of Rocky Mountain Deaf School and its leadership, we believe these agreements can make a measurable difference in educational outcomes for the next generation of students. All three of the core organizations (CAD, RMDS, COH&V) that brought together this committee are committed to pursuing legislation to ensure that stakeholders come together to make the most of our shared resources for many years to come, though each agreement can stand alone should the Colorado legislature fail to share our Agreement One vision.

## Vision

Colorado education reform for deaf students will result in communication-driven educational programming that meets the state's high academic standards and supports the social and emotional development of learners.



## Rationale

1. Communication access is a fundamental human right.
2. Every deaf child must have full access to all educational services and school sponsored activities.
3. Families are paramount in a child's success and must be involved in their children's education programs.
4. A child's needs determine service delivery; needs must be monitored as they are continually changing.
5. Deaf children must have the opportunity to maximize their potential, including graduate from high school ready for college or further career preparation.
6. Deaf children must have opportunities to interact directly with their peers and with adults.
7. Deaf students must develop age-appropriate self-advocacy skills.
8. Least Restrictive Environment is communication-driven and reflected in accessible, language-rich surroundings.

*Recognizing that deaf children are in some ways different and in some ways the same as hearing children is an important step for both parents and teachers... We can have high expectations for deaf children without pretending they are something they are not... It is therefore important to keep in mind that methods for understanding the abilities of hearing children might not always be appropriate for deaf children. Deaf children are not hearing children who cannot hear, but differences should be not equated with deficiencies.*

*Marc Marschark, Ph.D., How Deaf Children Learn, 2012*

## IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

Activity	Timeline
Develop 1-2 bills for legislature, seek champions, sponsors	March 2015 – November 2015
Seek funding to support Task Force	March 2015 – November 2015
Bill/s moving through legislature	January-May 2016
Establishment of Task Force	July 2016 (or through voluntary agreement earlier)
First Task Force Meeting	September 2016 (or through voluntary agreement earlier)

In recognition that the success of new agreements two through seven rely heavily on the establishment through the legislature of a Deaf Education Steering Committee (Mandating Collaboration, or Agreement 1), the Blueprint Revisioning Core Team (Colorado Association of the Deaf, Colorado Hands & Voices, and Rocky Mountain Deaf School) volunteered to lead the effort to accomplish Agreement 1 during the 2015 legislative session. This will include identifying and engaging the right entity to “chair” the Deaf Education Steering Committee, building support for the Committee, developing the legislation, and seeking funding to support the Steering Committee.

# FULL AGREEMENTS

## AGREEMENT 1: MANDATING COLLABORATION

***Colorado should legislatively mandate a Deaf Education Steering Committee to carry forward and implement the remaining six agreements from the 'Blueprint for Closing the Gap Revisioning Task Force', including developing and implementing a comprehensive state plan for deaf education.***

A state plan for deaf education, developed through a collaborative Deaf Education Steering Committee with expertise and understanding of children who are deaf, will increase accountability for student outcomes and optimize resources for this low incidence group of students. A comprehensive state plan for deaf education will also be an important first step by which the existing complicated patchwork of policy, regulation, and de facto implementation of deaf education can coalesce in a single comprehensible whole.

A legislatively mandated steering committee on deaf education shall consist of at least seven members and no more than 13, with specific seats mandated for each interest group. Members appointed to the committee shall have training, experience, or interest in the area of deaf education for children in a wide variety of placements. The Steering Committee will report regularly to stakeholders, and seek input from the larger community, through regular open Committee meetings.

Agency/ Interest groups to be represented on this committee should include:

1. Colorado Association of the Deaf
2. The Colorado Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
3. Colorado Department of Education
4. Colorado Families for Hands & Voices
5. Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind
6. Rocky Mountain Deaf School
7. A Special Education Director
8. The University of Northern Colorado
9. Others, such as a member of the public and a representative from the University of Colorado, as determined by a consensus of the 8 named seats.

In 1996, the Colorado Deaf Child Bill of Rights (DCBR) was enacted (HB 96-1041: Concerning the Education of Children who are Deaf). Section J of the bill endorses the concept of state and regional program development: *Given their unique communication needs, deaf and hard-of-hearing children would benefit from the development and implementation of state and regional programs for children with low-incidence disabilities.*

The DCBR resulted in the use of an individual communication plan for each deaf or hard of hearing student with an IEP in Colorado and is still in use. When implemented appropriately, this has been very effective in determining individual needs of students. However, due to the low-incidence population of deaf children, the use of a comprehensive statewide plan is needed to ensure that vital resources are available and utilized in the most beneficial model possible.

Unfortunately, since the first inception of the *Blueprint for Closing the Gap* document was published in 2002, and the *Colorado Quality Standards* in 2004, little cohesive and collaborative work among agencies and stakeholders has taken place to enact a comprehensive statewide plan for the delivery of services to the unique population of deaf students. This mandated Deaf Education Steering Committee will enable equal participation amongst the most critical participants in ensuring educational excellence for deaf children.



The Blueprint Revisioning Task Force is aware that the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) is launching a Deaf Education Advisory Board. The Advisory Board's charge will be to make recommendations to CDE on navigating the best path through the many new and existing initiatives, beginning with literacy, that impact deaf children in mainstream educational settings.

The Blueprint Revisioning Task Force applauds the creation of the CDE's board, and recognizes that the board has great potential to improve deaf education in Colorado. While membership in CDE's Deaf Education Advisory Forum is likely to overlap with the proposed membership of the Deaf Education Steering Committee proposed by this Agreement, and while joint strategic planning between the two groups would be highly beneficial, the Deaf Education Steering Committee's broader charge of developing a comprehensive state plan for deaf education extends beyond the purview of the CDE Advisory Board alone.

## AGREEMENT 2: COORDINATED STATEWIDE SYSTEM

***A comprehensive state plan for deaf education should be implemented to ensure a continuum of school placement opportunities that effectively and efficiently meet the needs of deaf children, as mandated by the IDEA.***

Students become successful learners by building a strong language foundation, but students come from a variety of communication, language, cultural, and educational backgrounds. This fact makes it doubly necessary to honor American Sign Language and English equally, so that a fully accessible, language-rich environment with direct communication is available to all students.

However, deaf students do not currently have equal access to such an environment--the current system in Colorado is fragmented, with school district boundaries and local control impeding practical education opportunities for deaf students. A comprehensive state plan for deaf students will provide eligible students with access to a continuum of placement options as outlined by the IDEA, including neighborhood schools, center-based schools, special day classes, state-sponsored special schools (such as CSDB), regional programs accepting students from out of district, charter schools, non-public programs, and collaborative placements between programs emphasizing meaningful inclusion and/or immersion. Such a plan would allow schools to meet the needs of each student based on individual assessments and social histories. ***Each student's individual needs will become the determinant for program and placement decisions, in fact, as they are in law. No school placement decision should be based solely on cost or what is available in a district.***

Because of frequent issues with meeting a student's individual needs via careful school placement within districts, the Task Force notes that our state system must consider the permissible factors in determining placement as described in the IDEA and listed by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) Questions and Answers regarding Least Restrictive Environment. We have seen an erosion of the Least Restrictive Environment, Placement, and the Special Considerations principles of the IDEA in the manner that individual school districts interpret the IDEA, and we seek a return to this foundational law (see below in brackets for the permissible factors in determining appropriate placement for children with disabilities from the 1994 OSERS Memo about the Least Restrictive Environment from IDEA. The memo's content has remained current through both the 1997 and 2004 revisions of the IDEA).

The state plan should also explore funding models that consider various cost-sharing options between school districts, the state, Rocky Mountain Deaf School, the Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind, and any other educational programs currently available serving deaf students. Additionally, the state plan should explore expanded models of outreach service delivery to all deaf students in public schools and address statewide transition needs for high school students.

The Deaf Education Steering Committee should also develop and implement a funding system that will provide sufficient resources for a quality education for deaf children, including for outreach to parents, schools, and districts.

## Q&A on the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) Requirements of the IDEA

**QUESTION:** What are the permissible factors that must be considered in determining what placement is appropriate for a student with a disability? Which factors, if any, may not be considered?

**ANSWER:** The overriding rule in placement is that each student's placement must be individually-determined based on the individual student's abilities and needs. As noted previously, it is the program of specialized instruction and related service contained in the student's IEP that forms the basis for the placement decision. In determining if a placement is appropriate under IDEA, the following factors are relevant:

- The educational benefits available to the deaf student in a traditional classroom, supplemented with appropriate aids and services, in comparison to the educational benefits to the deaf student from a special education classroom;
- The non-academic benefits to the deaf student from interacting with typical students; and
- The degree of disruption of the education of other students, resulting in the inability to meet the unique needs of the deaf student.

However, school districts may *not* make placements based solely on factors such as the following:

- Category of disability or disabilities;
- Severity of disability;
- Configuration of delivery system;
- Availability of educational or related services;
- Availability of space; or
- Administrative convenience.



## AGREEMENT 3: QUALITY STANDARDS AND PROGRAM ASSESSMENTS

***The Colorado Quality Standards for Programs and Services for Students Who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing (2004) outlining communication driven academic and extracurricular programs for deaf children should be implemented.***

Existing programs may meet the requirements of the [Colorado Quality Standards](#). These programs should serve as models for the region. Communication-driven programs serving deaf students should be subject to ongoing assessment to assure full access, student achievement, and high standards. Therefore, all programs serving deaf students should be reviewed against the Colorado Quality Standards every other year.

A committee should be convened to update The Colorado Quality Standards, and the Standards should be revised every three years thereafter. The Blueprint Revisioning Committee recommends that the following ideas be addressed in the Standards:

### 1. Philosophies to embed / topics to address in the Colorado Quality Standards:

- Direct communication should be the highest standard for teaching children who are deaf. Direct communication is defined as consistent and accessible social and academic communication that flows interchangeably between sender and receiver without the assistance of a third party. Direct communication supports language equality and the individual needs of the student.
- Incorporate an Expanded Core Curriculum for deaf students in The Colorado Quality Standards. The revision committee should also explore adding an expanded core curriculum, addressing mastery of skills in self-advocacy, the ADA, career and college exploration and independent living skills from a deaf perspective into law.
- Address the impact of technology on deaf pedagogy.
- The standards should align with the updated IDEA (when the update becomes available) and CEASD. The NASDSE guidelines should also be used as a model for the quality standards.
- Address the READ Act and accessibility of online assessments.
- Address how deaf student education will be impacted by the Colorado Education Reform Initiatives such as SB 08-212, SB 09-163, SB 10-191. See Appendix C.
- The standards should define rigorous content and performance standards in all areas of instruction, including communication, self-advocacy skills, school-to-career preparation and transition, consistent with state and local frameworks and content standards.
- The standards should include guidelines about who is qualified to administer assessments to deaf children. Qualified assessment administrators should have the expertise and some authority to decide, within the parameters of existing law, which assessments are most appropriate for the particular child. The standards should also include guidelines on how all student assessments (including online assessments) should be made accessible to deaf children *in a consistent manner*.
- Guidelines for completing the Communication Plan in the IEP should be updated.

### 2. Recommended revisions to the layout of the Colorado Quality Standards:

- Key pieces of the Standards should be extracted into short, succinct, readily available documents. For example, the Colorado Quality Standards Appendix D could be disseminated to programs to check for quality programming.

## AGREEMENT 4: DATA AND STUDENT ASSESSMENT

The current statewide assessment cannot provide data in language, communication, or social and emotional areas, nor does it provide sufficient data for Individual Education Program goal development. The Deaf Child's Bill of Rights requires identification of each child's primary mode of communication and language use. Students need to be assessed for full access to the complete range of education offered by the school throughout the school day, i.e. announcements during passing periods, captioning, and access to peers. More comprehensive assessment in these areas will direct IEP goal development towards increasing the levels of student achievement over time.

***Coordinate & improve the development and implementation of student assessment procedures to provide valid and reliable information about the achievement of every student according to established standards.***

Require schools / districts to report student achievement results and progress annually. Establish a management information system to aggregate, analyze, and report student assessment information over time. Determine types of information to be gathered and reported to school, staff, students, parents, administrators, the Colorado Department of Education, and the community, including, but not limited to:

1. Current levels of achievement based on multiple assessment measures.
2. Level of communication proficiency, including expressive and receptive spoken and written English and ASL skills, preschool through graduation.
3. Statewide achievement tests by grade, including alternative tests
4. ACT scores
5. Number of deaf students on an IEP
6. Number of deaf students on 504 plans
7. District-wide assessments
8. Number of students graduating from high school
9. Number of students attending and/or graduating from college and vocational school
10. Number of students receiving educational interpreting versus numbers receiving direct instruction

***Implement supplemental, level-appropriate assessment for deaf children.*** Using comprehensive assessment results, develop, implement, and monitor goals for addressing a child's initial and ongoing communication needs. The goals should address academic and social communication, academic language and literacy skills, expressive and receptive language, and self-advocacy skills.

## AGREEMENT 5: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

***A statewide strategic plan for training / mentoring should be developed for Colorado. On-going training, mentoring, and a full spectrum of professional development activities should be implemented statewide to support and improve proficiency for specialty providers, general educators, administrators, and families.***

The quality of educational programs serving deaf students depends on the specialized knowledge, skills, and attributes of administrators, teachers, teachers of the deaf, support service personnel (e.g., psychologists, audiologists, speech/language pathologists, educational interpreters, transliterators, notetakers, real-time captionists, ASL specialists), and other staff. Activities to support this goal include recruitment, pre-service training, ongoing inservice training, and mentoring activities. A complete list of training, mentoring, and professional development activities available in Colorado should be maintained.

Guidelines for each of the following audiences should be developed or updated. Guidelines may take many forms, including presentations, booklets, in-person trainings, online trainings (recorded videos or recorded webinars), but should address each of the points listed below.

### **Educators of the Deaf**

1. Collaborate with institutions of higher education and the Colorado Teacher Certification/Licensing Board to develop and implement professional standards and evaluation procedures for teachers serving deaf students. Standards should include the skills required to meet the unique educational, communication, and diverse multicultural needs of deaf students, some of whom have additional disabilities or problems, particularly in the areas of language development, literacy, college or career readiness, and transition skills.
2. Collaborate with institutions of higher education to ensure that standards are a core part of professional preparation and graduation requirements. Teacher preparation programs should have education certification standards as stringent as the standards set by the appropriate professional organizations, including the Council on Education of the Deaf and state certification agencies.
3. Work with teacher preparation programs to assure that personnel are knowledgeable about all modes and languages used by deaf students and that personnel maintain an objective, philosophically neutral position on specific modes and languages.
4. Support pre-service and in-service training for teachers who serve deaf students to enhance student achievement. The use of technology, such as distance learning, videoconferencing, and networking through computers, to enhance ongoing inservice opportunities and support teacher preparation programs should also be promoted.
5. Enhance opportunities to develop proficiency in signing skills for those children using sign language.

### **Administrators**

Because of the low incidence of students who are deaf in education, orienting administrators to the needs of our students is an ongoing need. Currently, Colorado has a "Deaf Ed 101" presentation and similar guides for administrators through the Daylight Partner Project, CSDB, and the CDE Mentor program. Also, the administrator's copy of the NASDSE guidelines is recognized by the organization of special education directors, and is available at: <http://www.nasdse.org/publications-t577/meeting-the-needs-of-students-who-are-deaf-or-hard.aspx>.

(This guideline costs \$25 to download.) The Quality Standards document needs a significant update to be useful for school administrators but has served as an educational tool in the past.

**Current needs:**

1. Collaborate with institutions of higher education to develop leadership training programs to assure administrators in general education programs and educational programs for deaf students are appropriately prepared and trained to oversee and manage programs for the deaf.
2. Provide professional development to administrators to assure they are knowledgeable about all modes and languages used by deaf students, knowledgeable about placement considerations, and maintain an objective, philosophically neutral position on specific modes and languages.
3. Assign teachers with skills appropriate for the population they are serving.

**Support Service Personnel (SSPs)**

Currently, the CDE Mentor program addresses SSPs in a presentation available to districts. Current needs:

1. Collaborate with institutions of higher education and the Colorado Teacher Certification/Licensing Board to develop and implement professional standards and evaluation procedures for support service personnel serving deaf students. Standards should include the skills required to meet the unique educational, communication, and diverse multicultural needs of deaf students, some of whom have additional disabilities.
2. Provide professional development to support service personnel to make them knowledgeable about all modes and languages used by deaf students and to assure they can support a student’s IEP. Provide pre-service and inservice training for support service personnel who serve deaf students. Use technology, such as distance learning, videoconferencing, and networking through computers, to increase access to inservice opportunities and to support teacher preparation programs.
3. Develop proficiency in signing skills for use with those children using sign language.
4. The Deaf Education Steering Committee may want to consider developing guides and ongoing training and evaluation for SSPs where they don’t exist.
5. Educational Interpreters: A guide for educational interpreters, including Cued Speech transliterators and oral interpreters, exists on the CDE website. Additionally:
  - a. Work with educational interpreter training programs to assure that personnel are knowledgeable about all modes and languages used by deaf students, and that personnel maintain an objective, philosophically neutral position on specific modes and languages.
  - b. Work with consumers, professionals, and staff in educational interpreter training programs to support established standards, and to assure that educational interpreters meet these standards.

**General Educators**

Currently, CSDB and CDE have portions of training that address general educators. Future needs:

1. Support pre-service and in-service training for general and special education classroom teachers who serve deaf students to enhance their understanding of the needs of deaf students. The use of technology, such as distance learning, videoconferencing, and networking through computers, to enhance ongoing inservice opportunities and support teacher preparation programs should also be promoted.
2. Whenever possible develop proficiency in sign skills to be able to communicate directly with those children using sign language.

3. Update the Quality Standards document with an emphasis on one or two page pull out sections focused on general education, i.e. typical accommodations used in a classroom.

## AGREEMENT 6: QUALITY STAFF

***The Colorado Department of Education and all stakeholders should collaborate and contribute with national and state agencies and higher education programs to recruit, train, and encourage retention of staff providing services to deaf students.***

More trained staff with higher level skills and deaf role models are needed to work with deaf children. With the advent of universal newborn hearing programs, more children are being identified with hearing loss at a younger age. In addition, it is now known that even mild and unilateral hearing loss may negatively impact a child's ability to learn. We are currently experiencing a shortage of providers to work with deaf children. Due to the special needs of the children and their relatively low numbers in programs, it is critical for the Colorado Department of Education and all stakeholders to spearhead collaboration with national and state resources in order to increase the numbers of properly prepared professionals, including but not limited to:

1. Updating the accreditation and licensure standards for special education/deaf education teachers;
2. Collaboration amongst agencies to host a statewide EHDI conference in Colorado expanding this as possible;
3. Encouraging more universities to provide coursework in bilingual education, teaching deaf culture, raising the level of teachers' ASL skills, incorporating more focus on 21st century skills training, and focusing on English language acquisition (reading and writing), and tying improvements to higher education programs directly back to performance outcomes of students in K-12.

Specifically:

1. Training programs need to attract greater numbers of qualified individuals by strategic recruiting of:
  - a. Teachers
  - b. Interpreters
  - c. Speech/Language Pathologists
  - d. Audiologists
  - e. Psychologists
  - f. Counselors
2. Training programs need to recruit larger numbers of deaf individuals and ethnically diverse individuals from all areas of Colorado.
3. Training programs and school programs need to infuse the parent perspective into their pre-service and inservice training to better prepare professionals to partner with parents.
4. Training deaf role models:
  - a. School-based, home-based and/or parent support programs need to create and maintain a unified system to recruit, orient, promote and supervise deaf role models.
  - b. Role models need to be knowledgeable about all modes and languages used by deaf students and maintain an objective, philosophically neutral position on specific modes and languages.

## AGREEMENT 7: PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES

***Continued development and implementation of a system for community and parent education, including deaf adults, that leads to meaningful involvement and collaboration in the education of deaf children should be enhanced, so that each child has opportunities to achieve.***

Parents of deaf children need practical information about deafness, support services, and training so that they can participate in and monitor their children's language and academic growth. More than 90 percent of deaf children have hearing parents, and historically these parents have limited knowledge regarding deaf culture and/or communication and language development.

Parents need to be recognized as equal partners and full participants in the Individual Family Service Plan, the Individualized Education Program (IEP), and the individual transition plan process as required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Parents must have a say and participate in the choices they and others are making on behalf of a child's education. Professionals must respect each family's unique perspective and must understand and respond to the issues and concerns most important to each family. Parent education is particularly important in a communication-driven education system.

Greater use should be made of itinerant deaf counselors to work with students and parents particularly in mainstream settings. General education counselors are often not equipped to counsel deaf children or parents. In addition, more ASL training for parents is needed so that hearing parents of deaf students can achieve the fluency needed to communicate fully with their children. Parent education should include the following:

1. At least one staff member assigned the responsibility of facilitating parent/community education.
2. Guidelines and procedures to assure that appropriate, unbiased, and realistic information are provided to parents about hearing level, communication and language development, and available services. Information should be disseminated in a variety of ways and from a variety of sources including reading materials, oral communication, webinars, workshops, professional lectures, and research-driven material, and should be available in a family's native language.
3. Ongoing parent support and parent training should include parents' rights, advocacy strategies, grade-level expectations for student achievement, knowledge of assessments, the importance of communication and language development, awareness of program options, support services available for students from birth to age 21, and the opportunity to learn and develop fluency in sign language and other means of visual communication
4. A process that assures that parents are full and equal participants on the IFSP or IEP team and in other decisions made regarding the education and placement of deaf students. Emphasis should be placed on understanding the parent's role and rights in the IFSP, IEP and 504 eligibility process, plan development, Communication Plan, placement options whether supported by a district or not, and where to go for support and further information.
5. Opportunities for parent involvement should include volunteer activities, participation in education and training, use of deaf role models, the establishment of a network of community-based job sites, and a connection with post-secondary education resources and adult service agencies.
6. IEP team leaders should be required to ask if parents have received information on their rights to training.
7. A list of resources, webinars, training, events, opportunities, and education available for parents should be made available and kept updated on the CDE website. Such a list would be useful both for parents,

especially those looking for programs in neighboring districts, and for educators and other staff so that they can refer parents appropriately.

8. A system that promotes parental access to local, state and national organizations for parents of deaf children, adult education programs at community colleges and universities, state special schools, and other programs that provide parent support.
9. A system that provides the opportunity for meaningful parent input at the state and local levels regarding the implementation of educational reform.
10. Guidelines and procedures to assure parent perspectives are represented in professional forums (e.g. publications, conferences, workshops, and media).
11. Parents of deaf children need access to information, support services, and training to help their children from a variety of sources. Parents must be informed in the communication plan about all placement options for their child, whether or not such placements are supported by the district. .
12. There is a connection between outreach and parents knowing enough about what is available so they can advocate in an informed way for their children’s interests. **Parents need equal information.**
13. Parents need to be empowered as full participants in developing the Individualized Family Service Plan or the Individualized Education Program required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
14. For parents needing ASL, Cued Speech, SEE, PSE, Listening and Spoken Language development, or training in how to better support a child’s IEP goals, information should be shared about how to access this training or made available to parents to attend.

*Parents have a specific “role and responsibility” in their child’s education, and rights to participate fully as a member of their child’s IEP team. From the time of identification to their child’s graduation from high school, parents are encouraged to be actively engaged in developing, facilitating, and monitoring the IEP and its process. IDEA in spirit and letter supports this, and “parental involvement is an essential component in deaf child’s academic success.”*

*Marschark, 2007*



## What about Colorado Hands & Voices?

Colorado Hands & Voices currently provides parent-to-parent support through the Guide By Your Side Program from the time of identification to age 21 statewide. CO H&V also maintains a Colorado Resource Guide for Parents, listing many of the resources available in Colorado as a beginning primer for families, the Bridge to Preschool, on the change from Part C to Part B services, the Parent Funding Toolkit, Beyond the IEP (directed at building positive relationships with schools), the Parents Need to Know Series, the Educational Advocacy for Students Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing through Hands & Voices HQ, a monthly, free e-news blast on regular parent trainings or family support provided by both H&V other local/regional/statewide organizations, and the quarterly print newspaper, *the Communicator*, featuring parent stories, insight into current research and practices, covering all methodologies, placements and communication options.

Colorado Hands & Voices is available to school districts and community groups to present on a variety of topics of interest to families, from supporting language development, connecting with deaf role models, understanding child behavior, advocacy, and transition to preschool or from high school. The chapter provides regional parent gatherings and publicizes events for interested families to connect with each other.

Parents need access to unbiased information regarding options on communication in order to meaningfully participate in the development of a Communication Plan, a required part of the child's IEP. However, not all parents access H&V. Parents currently have an "opt in" potential to connect with the organization and/or an experienced parent guide through the Guide By Your Side Program, from the time of identification to age 21. Referrals to Hands & Voices are primarily made through early intervention providers. Some parents search out the support of the chapter, but families who move to Colorado, have children who develop hearing loss later in childhood, or are not offered the referral information often do not connect with the parent resource group on their own.

*For over 12 years, I have felt completely and utterly alone while navigating how to best serve my son. That all changed when my new audiologist gave me a referral to H&V. When I looked over the information the parent guide sent after our contact, I began to cry. My son is not alone. I am not alone. The things I ask for from his school are not absurd or far-reaching. They are quite normal. The 'quirks' that my son has are related to his hearing loss. I honestly saw a light at the end of a very dark tunnel that I had been in since moving to Colorado.*

*Libby Robinson, parent*

## APPENDIX A – GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Term	Definition
Assessment	The way in which service providers document a child’s progress and determine his or her developmental level. The methods used can be formal or informal.
Communication	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. An activity by which we assign and convey meaning in an attempt to create shared understanding. This process requires a vast range of skills in intrapersonal and interpersonal processing, listening, observing, expressing, questioning, analyzing and evaluating. Use of these processes is developmental and transfers to all areas of life: home, school, community, work, and beyond.</li> <li>2. Used in lieu of such terms as communication options, methods, opportunities, approaches, etc.</li> <li>3. The exchange of information with intent (can be verbal, nonverbal, gestural, primitive, or iconic) to share common experiences or gather new information.</li> </ol>
Communication Driven	IEPs should be designed around a child’s unique communication needs, with the use of the Communication Plan and parent input into that plan, in order to create a language-rich environment, and one that provides direct communication as the preferred method.
Core knowledge or skills	The expertise needed to provide appropriate EI that will optimize the development and well-being of infants/children and their families. Core knowledge and skills will differ according to the roles of individuals within the EI system (e.g., service coordinator or EI provider).
Deaf	Inclusive of all children with congenital and acquired hearing loss, unilateral and bilateral hearing loss, all degrees of hearing loss from minimal to profound, and all types of hearing loss (sensorineural, auditory neuropathy spectrum disorder, permanent conductive, and mixed).
Direct Communication	Consistent and accessible social and academic communication that flows interchangeably between sender and receiver without the assistance of a third party. Direct communication supports language equality and the individual needs of the student.
Early Intervention	According to Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004, Early Intervention is the process of providing services, education, and support to young children and their parents within their natural environment who are found eligible through an identified disability or the probability of developmental delay), those who have an existing delay, or those who are at risk of developing a delay or special need that may affect their development or impede their education.
Language	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. All spoken and signed languages.</li> <li>2. The systematic and rule-governed, conventional method of communicating. More sophisticated than “just” communication, language inspires cognition and cognition inspires language. They are intricately intertwined.</li> </ol>
Language Modality	The sensory channels (that is, vision, touch, or hearing, or a combination of these) through which the family will communicate.
Language Model	Anyone who provides a good demonstration of the family’s chosen language(s) to communicate with the child.
Low-Incidence Disability	Individuals with disabilities that make up a small percentage of the population. Some examples of these might be having a visual impairment, hearing loss, a deaf-blindness disability, or significant cognitive impairment. The definition of low-incidence disability varies from state to state.
Hard of hearing	For this document, this term is used to specify the unique issues particular to students using amplified, prosthetic-based or residual hearing. Otherwise, the term “deaf” is used throughout the document to include students with all hearing levels. (See A Note about “Deaf” versus “Deaf / Hard of Hearing”, P. 3.)

Some definitions taken from the Joint Committee on Infant Hearing Early Intervention Document, and from Making a Plan for Your Child: IFSP Considerations for Children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing (2011). See full citation in the references appendix.

## APPENDIX B – ACRONYMS

Acronym	Full Name
ASL	American Sign Language
AU	Administrative Unit
CAD	Colorado Association of the Deaf
CCDHH	Colorado Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
CDE	Colorado Department of Education
CO H&V	Colorado Hands & Voices
CHIP	Colorado Home Intervention Program (early intervention for children who are deaf)
CSDB	Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind
CST	Cued Speech Transliterator
DCBR	Colorado Deaf Child Bill of Rights
IEP	Individualized Education Plan
LRE	Least Restrictive Environment
MCE	Manually Coded English (Signed Exact English is a synonym)
RMDS	Rocky Mountain Deaf School
SEE	Signed Exact English (Manually Coded English is a synonym)
SLP	Speech Language Pathologist
TOD	Teacher of the Deaf

## APPENDIX C – THE DEAF CHILD’S BILL OF RIGHTS AND OTHER LAWS REGARDING DEAF CHILDREN

The Joint Committee on Infant Hearing Early Intervention Document outlining critical aspects of quality early intervention, from <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/131/4/e1324.full>

<http://www.ceasd.org/child-first/child-first-campaign> (also check old blueprint appendix J): Child First Campaign

<http://www.ceasd.org/child-first/alice-cogswell>: A bill currently in the legislature seeking to reform deaf and blind education (2014).

The Colorado Department of Education incorporates the nine features of The Deaf Child's Bill of Rights along with other rules into the Rules for Administration of the Exceptional Children's Education Act each year.

Three additional laws, while not specific to deaf education, also impact service provision and school achievement for our students statewide.

1. **Senate Bill 08-212:** Colorado’s Achievement Plan for Kids (CAP4K). This law supports focused, coherent and rigorous academic standards for preschool to postsecondary, with assessments to align with the new standards. Also included are definitions of school readiness and postsecondary and workforce readiness.
2. **Senate Bill 09-163:** The Education Accountability Act. This law creates shared accountability measures for districts and schools, with a value placed on growth and postsecondary readiness. The law outlines a cycle of support for any struggling schools or districts with structured emphasis placed on school and district improvement efforts.
3. **Senate Bill 10-191:** The Great Teachers and Great Leaders Act or “Teacher Effectiveness”

This law outlines annual performance evaluations for all educators based on statewide Quality Standards, with a shared percent graded on professional practices and multiple other measures of student learning for teachers and principals. Student outcomes are considered for specialized service professionals. To date, guidance has not yet been developed for teachers of the deaf, educational audiologists or speech language pathologists working in the schools.

The power of these education improvement efforts lies in their integration: in the intersection of rigorous academic standards, informative assessments, outstanding educators, and high-performing schools all committed to continuously improving and preparing students for success in a globally competitive world. See more at <http://www.cde.state.co.us/communications/coloradoeducationreform101>

## APPENDIX D – ACHIEVEMENT & ASSESSMENT DATA

- CDE TCAP 2012 Achievement Data  
<http://www.cohandsandvoices.org/resources/inspiringchange/files/CDE%20TCAP%20Achievement%20Data.pdf>
- Colorado Student Assessment Program: Summary of CSAP Scores- Deaf and hard of hearing students
- CU Boulder longitudinal study for 4-6 year olds: 2008 *Speech and Language Growth and Predictors of Successful Outcomes* <http://jdsde.oxfordjournals.org/content/8/1/11.full.pdf+html>
- Original Blueprint Appendix H – 1998-2001 Colorado Student Assessment Program: Summary of CSAP Scores- Deaf and hard of hearing students

## APPENDIX E – STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM FROM 2004 BLUEPRINT FOR CLOSING THE GAP

### Statement of the Problem

*Susie is an active 3rd grader with above-average intelligence, but her language delay has resulted in an inability to read. As a result, she is not progressing with her classmates and may be held back. This will make her older and physically larger than any of her classmates and likely not accepted by them.*

*Johnny, a kindergartner, has difficulty communicating verbally with classmates. He often displays aggressive behavior and is disruptive in class. His general classroom teacher doesn't feel comfortable communicating with him and sends him to the principal regularly, because she doesn't know what else to do.*

*Ben is a high school sophomore making good grades who's been recommended for advanced coursework. Since he shares the only available sign language interpreter with two other deaf students who aren't at that academic level, he won't be able to pursue the opportunity. And since he's making good grades, his school district's position is that he is receiving an appropriate education.*

In 1975 the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandated that children with disabilities were entitled to be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE), e.g., the environment where their typical peers were educated. With the goal that children with disabilities were not to be isolated, inclusion has been the conceptual basis of an educational system designed to provide equal opportunity for all students, with or without disabilities. Over time, it has become clear that while inclusion has served many children with disabilities very well, that is not always the case for many children who are or hard of hearing.

Communicating “differently” or without direct conversation with teachers and peers can create the most restrictive environment for many students in a classroom of hearing peers. Legally, “LRE” has been interpreted and implemented without sensitivity to, or acknowledgement for, the special communication needs presented by D/HH children that often go unmet in the “least restrictive environment.” The outcome has been isolation and academic underachievement. Until the conceptual basis of education (and all supporting mandates) is understood to be communication-driven for D/HH students, the system will continue to discriminate against this population. In fact, it is the inequity of our present educational system that has resulted in the further disabling of D/HH children.

At the federal level, the importance of communication as a starting point for identifying appropriate services for a child was first acknowledged in “Students Education Services: Policy Guidance” 57 Fed. Reg. 49274 (1992) (reprinted in Appendix I). This report stated that “The (U.S. Department of Education) Secretary believes that communication and related service needs of many children who are have not been adequately considered in the development of the IEP.” Moreover, it points out that the child’s communication needs should drive what is considered the least restrictive environment for each child.

The general classroom does not adequately serve all students because it frequently denies full communication access. As long as communication is perceived as secondary to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act’s (IDEA) “core” concept of LRE, the specific and systematic problems that are unique to educating D/HH children will continue. The intent of IDEA is to decrease, not increase, a child’s isolation.

In 1989, a performance review and management study of the Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind was conducted by the Colorado Department of Education and the Colorado State Legislature (H.B. 91-1171) ) (CDE/CSDB, 1990). The performance audit recommended that the school re-examine its role and staffing pattern

to better support students in local school districts. In 1991, legislation was passed that gave the school statutory authority to expand its role as a statewide resource center and provide outreach services. In addition, this study identified several issues and recommendations that have still not been sufficiently addressed and are, therefore, incorporated into this report (see Appendix J, CDE/CSDB Statewide Plan, Executive Summary).

In 1996, the Deaf Child's Bill of Rights (DCBR Public Law 96-1041, Appendix A) recognized the unique needs of children who are deaf and hard of hearing. The bill requires that the Individual Education Program (IEP) team consider the child's communication needs, including communication with peers, and the proficiency of the staff in the child's communication mode or language. Drawing largely from the Policy Guidelines for Deaf Students published by the U.S. Department of Special Education Programs in 1992, it spelled out areas for specific consideration in the case of students who were deaf or hard of hearing. The DCBR's implementation guidelines established the creation of a "Communication Plan" that is an additional document included with every IEP for D/HH students in Colorado.

In 1997, the Colorado legislature passed HB 1146, which established minimum qualifications for interpreters who work with D/HH children (Appendix A). This bill responded to children who were denied communication access in their educational environment because of poor interpreting quality.

### *Problems associated with lack of communication access include the following important areas*

**Academic Success.** The most glaring indications of problems in deaf education are the academic achievement scores of this student population (Appendix B: Assessment Summary, Appendix C: CSAP Summary). Statistics alone cannot report a child sitting alone in a classroom struggling to form ideas and express feelings with language. Statistics cannot explain the struggle to learn concepts while hampered by inadequate communication skills. However, statistics do reveal how profound and widespread this problem is. In the state of Colorado, which has emphasized performance-based educational outcomes for all children, research shows that D/HH children --even those with normal or above-average potential--fall far behind their hearing peers in academic achievement. In the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP), scores for students with hearing loss are poor. Overall, the 2000 scores indicated that, at the seventh grade level, less than 20 percent of the D/HH students were rated as proficient. By comparison, nearly 60% of the overall student population was rated proficient or above. An analysis of the 2001 CSAP scores indicated that the number of D/HH students scoring in the unsatisfactory category increased in 6 of the 8 assessments where more than one year's data was available, and the number of D/HH students in the proficient and advanced categories decreased in 4 of these 8 assessments.

These statistics are not unique to Colorado. The academic achievement for students at a national level is no better and hasn't changed significantly over time:

- Between the ages of 8 and 18, D/HH children gain only 1.5 years in reading skills (Allen, 1986)
- 30% of D/HH children graduate from high school functionally illiterate (Waters & Doehring, 1990)
- The average performance on tests of reading comprehension is roughly six grade equivalents lower than hearing peers at age 15 (Allen, 1986; Traxler, 2000)
- Less than half of 18 year old D/HH students leaving high school reach a 5th grade level in reading and writing (Traxler, 2000). Clearly, these problems are not the result of a single school district failing its children.

Rather, the statistics reveal systemic problems evident in the majority of schools. Behind these statistics are real children becoming adults with poor literacy and academic skills. Approximately one third of all D/HH adults rely

on some form of governmental assistance, and the average income of D/HH adults is only 40-60% of their hearing counterparts (Siegel, 2000). In addition, D/HH adults have a higher rate of mental illness and other health difficulties (Scheslinger, 1972). Therefore, it is clear that the problem associated with the education of D/HH children eventually become society's problems compounded by long-term monetary implications (Siegel, 2000).

Access to learning for all D/HH students is a complex process, based on individual communication needs that involve a wide spectrum of communication options (e.g., American Sign Language, Pidgin Signed English, Simultaneous (Total) Communication, Cued Speech, Auditory-Verbal, Auditory-Oral. D/HH students utilize a variety of devices and technologies, including amplification systems, communication devices, assistive devices, and computerized notetaking. Educational interpreters (sign language and oral) are necessary for some students. Considering the variety of communication options and technologies available and/or required, it is often impossible for each school district or administrative unit to provide all of them. However, because by law services must be delivered according to individual student needs, school districts or administrative units are inadvertently forced to compromise quality in order to provide the range of services along with the necessary supports.

*Communication Proficiency.* Communication impacts all aspects of human functioning, from academic to social, from work to pleasure, from social-emotional to intellectual. The ability to understand and produce language defines us as humans and provides us with the means to become literate adults. The unique nature and consequence of deafness or hearing loss is that it can separate deaf or hard of hearing children from communication with others, and subsequently starve the student from active and passive learning of both academic and social skills. Our laws need to recognize communication as a fundamental human right, and to make it a priority in our educational system.

Early access to communication has lifelong impacts. Research has shown that when a child is denied early access to communication, the impact can be felt long into adulthood. Studies have shown that delayed language skills in D/HH children also delay thinking skills (Marshark, 2001; Sacks, 1989). A student cannot easily overcome the effects of poor communication access early in life.

*Assumption that current performance is acceptable.* For too long, the performance of D/HH children has been measured within the context of other D/HH children. This practice has resulted in low expectations for D/HH children. We must recognize that D/HH children are not mentally disabled and, given proper tools and instruction, have enormous potential to succeed commensurate with their hearing peers.

*Application to children who are hard of hearing.* Children who are hard of hearing are not deaf; they have partial hearing and they are able to use the auditory skills they have to participate to some degree in daily communication. The perception, therefore, is that they *are* hearing and, as such, they are asked to compete with classmates with normal hearing. Typically, hard of hearing children are not provided with the accommodations necessary for them to access communication fully. Because they must work harder, they experience more fatigue, more isolation, and more depression than their hearing peers. As a result, these children are the least understood and the most disadvantaged among all those with hearing loss (Ross, 2001).

### *Unique Educational Concerns*

Many factors unique to deaf education must be considered when developing an educational program.

- *Limited Program Options.* It is difficult, particularly in smaller school districts, to provide quality programs for each D/HH child. Typically, a school is able to provide perhaps only one communication option (e.g., oral, American Sign Language, or English-signing), and the child must comply with that option. If the school is able to offer multiple options, rarely is the district capable of maintaining quality due to lack of funds.



Providing a full range of educational options for a small number of children represents a financial hardship for even the best endowed districts.

- *Lack of Administrative Support & Expertise.* Curiously, special education administrators with the responsibility for services to students who are D/HH often lack expertise with this population. As a result, standards and continuity of programming across grade levels lack consistency. Teacher evaluations are ineffective because frequently they are conducted by administrators unfamiliar with D/HH students. In-service opportunities are not always relevant for teachers of the D/HH.
- *Additional 'Labels'.* Data indicate that more than 40% of children with a hearing loss also have another disability (Gallaudet Research Institute, 2002). This situation compounds the challenges of educating these youngsters. Staff members need special training to be able to address the unique needs of this group of students.
- *Unqualified, Under-staffed Interpreter Support.* At least 87 percent of D/HH children in Colorado attend classes in regular public schools, and most of these students receive at least part of their education in the general education classroom (OSEP, 2002). For many of these children, this practice is possible only with the use of an interpreter. However, research shows that the interpreters sometimes lack the proficiency to provide students with a competent interpretation of the classroom content. A study conducted in the state of Colorado showed that fewer than half of the interpreters had even the minimal level interpreting skills required by law (Schick, Williams & Bolster, 2000). The Colorado interpreters were communicating less than 60 percent of the classroom content according to the report. If the interpreters perform at a minimal level, it is unlikely that they are conveying all the information occurring in the classroom. In addition to interpreting tasks, interpreters often are expected to tutor D/HH students, even though they are not trained as educators.
- *Lack of Direct Communication.* Deaf adults also report that an interpreted education is a poor substitute for direct contact with teachers and peers. Every time the child wants to communicate with anyone in the classroom, he or she must do so through an adult interpreter. This interferes with the educational dynamic - the give and take that stimulates learning. And, when children do not communicate directly with one another, the social experience suffers as well.
- *Staffing Challenges.* The low incidence of hearing loss affects the ability of a school district to hire and retain qualified professionals to work with these children. Colorado is currently experiencing serious shortages of teachers and support staff to work with D/HH children in rural areas. The knowledge required to teach D/HH children is specialized and not easily acquired, even if a teacher is trained in special education. Further, the communication methodologies that are available to teach D/HH children involve many different skills, making it difficult to find a single professional who is capable of offering the full range of communication methods. This problem becomes even more difficult when a school district has only a few D/HH children, and when the ages range from preschool to high school.
- *Family Support.* Research shows that parents of children often do not receive the training and support they need to become communication and language role models for their children. Eighty four percent of children with hearing loss are born to hearing parents (Gallaudet Research Institute, 2002). About 72 percent of families with children who use sign language do not sign with their children (Gallaudet Research Institute, 2002). Further, families are often ill-prepared to fulfill their role as an equal member of their child's educational planning team and lack the knowledge of what constitutes appropriate, effective, educational programs. As the long term "case managers" of their child's academic experience, this can result in a loss of quality control over their child's program and progress.

- *Deaf Insensitivity.* Professionals who can hear normally generally do not understand how non-hearing persons function in a hearing society. Moreover, D/HH students often graduate without knowing the basic technology and services available to all deaf people.
- *Failure-Based Education Model.* Special education is built on a system where children must first demonstrate that they are not succeeding in their education program. In addition, many children receive services from professionals who are not qualified to serve children with hearing loss. As a result, they may not recognize the child's needs until it is too late for support services to succeed in keeping the student at grade level. This hampers a student's progress and may prevent him or her from ever reaching full potential.
- *Acoustical Accommodations.* The acoustical characteristics of a classroom can play a major role in a D/HH student's ability to access communication. The invisible barriers created by noisy air exchange, heating, and refrigeration systems, along with reverberating sound from walls and ceilings that distorts speech, are exacerbated by the busy noise of the classroom. Standards exist (ANSI, 2002) that need to be implemented to assure that classroom acoustics do not interfere with a D/HH student's ability to learn.
- *Current Technology.* Technology options are increasing at such a fast pace that many school districts simply cannot afford to keep up. Yet, for students who are, technology plays a key role in supporting both auditory and visual learning. Reliance on technology—including assistive listening devices, classroom captioning units, distance video equipment, and computers—can spell the difference between success and failure

In summary, children with deafness or hearing loss are not receiving an adequate education. They do not have access to a full range of program options nor educational opportunities that match their needs. School districts are trying, but the combination of low incidence and high cost is derailing even the best intentions. Academic outcomes statewide and nationwide prove that the present system is failing these students. It is time to rethink education for D/HH children in order to close the gap.

## APPENDIX F – REFERENCES

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