The National Agenda:

Moving Forward on Achieving Educational Equality for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students

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April 2005

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Acknowledgments

The National Agenda Steering and Advisory Committees could not possibly have accomplished the work necessary to prepare this initial draft document without the support and involvement of many people and organizations. Since the National Agenda is a grassroots effort it would be impossible to name the thousands of professionals, parents and consumers who sent in their comments over the past three years.

Among those we owe thanks to are the members and staff of the Commission on the Education of the Deaf (COED) which published "Toward Equality in Education of the Deaf" in 1988 and the Steering Committee, staff of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE), the US Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services and the ten organizations that developed the "Deaf Education Guidelines". Our initial work was largely based on these recommendations.

We are also indebted to our colleagues in the Education of Blind and Visually Impaired for the inspiration provided by their National Agenda efforts. We were in search of a "call to action" that would unite us around critical goals aimed at eliminating the under-achievement of students who are deaf and hard of hearing. We recognized that there was no simple solution to the problem; however, we also recognized that we continued to lose ground as we separated ourselves from one another by philosophical, placement, communication and service delivery biases.

Our early work was made possible by the support of Arizona School for the Deaf and Blind with Ken Randall's leadership.

A special thanks goes to Harold Johnson and the staff at www.deafed.net for posting our draft document for public comment and organizing the comments from our stakeholders.

We also thank NASDSE for inviting us to make a presentation regarding the National Agenda to their Board of Directors (October 2004) and the strong encouragement we received following that presentation.

We want the National Agenda to significantly improve educational services for deaf and hard of hearing students by providing communication-driven educational programming that meets high academic standards and supports the social and emotional development of learners. Issues that have previously divided us are presented in the National Agenda from the perspective of achieving full access in language-rich environments.

This document is a work in progress. Far more important than the words on these pages will be the creative energy that states, programs, families, schools and professionals will assemble to implement the goals of the National Agenda.

Special thanks go to our original Steering Committee for their direction, persistence and commitment to this project when it seemed an impossible dream. We also thank our many Advisory Members and Goal writers representing organizations in CED and state departments of education. Listed on the following page, are the participating organizations and the individual steering and advisory committee members.

A special thanks to David Martin for serving as our editor and to the Texas School for the Deaf for their support in printing and graphics design for the National Agenda.

Steering Committee Members

Ms. Claire Bugen, Superintendent, Texas School for the Deaf

Dr. Jay Innes, Director, Gallaudet Leadership Institute

Mr. Dennis Russell, Superintendent, New Jersey School for the Deaf

Mr. Lawrence Siegel, Attorney, National Deaf Education Project

Advisory Committee Members

Alexander Graham Bell Association of the Deaf, Inc. (AGBAD)
Donna Sorkin, Kathleen Treni and Todd Houston

Association of College Educators-Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ACE-DHH)
Rich Lytle, Karen Dilka and Margaret Finnegan

American Society for Deaf Children (ASDC)
Cheron Mayhall, Natalie Long and Barbara Raimondo

Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf (CEASD)
Ed Corbett, Harold Mowl and Joe Finnegan,

Convention of American Instructors of the Deaf (CAID)
Carl Kirschner, Liz O'Brien and Robert Hill

CEC-Division of Communication Disorders
Carmel Yeager

State Departments of Education and Local Education Agencies
Marsha Gunderson, Iowa and Carol Schweitzer, Wisconsin

National Association of the Deaf (NAD)
Nancy Bloch, Kelby Brick and Roz Rosen

Foreword

The National Agenda for Moving Forward on Achieving Educational Equality for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students brings forward a set of priorities stated as goals that are designed to bring about significant improvement in quality and nature of educational services and programs for deaf and hard of hearing students. It is brought forward as an "agenda" or a list of things to be done in order to close the achievement gap that exists for our students. It was our belief that having an "agenda" would keep us focused on our priorities. Key to all the recommendations is the belief that communication access is a fundamental human right and that every deaf and hard of hearing child must have full access to all educational services.

The National Agenda is a unique document because it represents a collaboration of parents, professionals, and consumers working as equal partners to achieve a common vision. No single individual or school or organization created the National Agenda. The National Agenda Advisory Group received thousands of comments and suggestions during the period of public input and each had a voice in the development of the National Agenda.

The National Agenda is organized around eight goals—each with a goal area, a goal statement, background information about the goal and a series of objectives to achieve the goal. For each objective there is a rationale for its selection. It's time to move the National Agenda off the printed page and into the hands of local schools, agencies, special schools and organizations to begin to make changes that will effect the individual children and their families in this country. With enthusiastic leadership and collaborative efforts at the federal, state and local level, many of these goals can be translated into action plans and ultimately public policy and accepted practice in education of deaf students.

We hope that those of you who have become discontent with the "status quo" will use the National Agenda to finally and fundamentally improve educational programming for students who are deaf and hard of hearing.

Preamble to the National Agenda

"Never doubt that a small, group of thoughtful,
committed citizens can change the world.
Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."
Margaret Mead

"So runs my dreams, but what am I?
An infant crying in the night
An infant crying for the light
And with no language but a cry."
Alfred Lord Tennyson

In Tulsa (OK), Salem (OR), New York City, Sioux Falls (SD), and cities and towns throughout this nation, a deaf or hard of hearing child sits in a classroom, full of promise, energy, and intelligence. This child, like all other children in this nation, hungers to learn, has dreams to pursue, and has the native ability and determination to become a productive adult and participate in our American democracy. This student may be profoundly deaf and use American Sign Language (ASL) as her native language, or he may be hard of hearing and rely exclusively on aural/oral language.

Throughout the nation, families are devoted to these children, who work with them everyday and knock on the doors of every agency and institution for support and information. They, like all families, want their deaf and hard of hearing children to have a fair chance at success and an education that will open rather than close doors.

In addition, teachers, interpreters and administrators have devoted their professional lives to help those children grow emotionally, academically, and linguistically.

Yet, despite the best efforts of these very able children, their families, and professionals, deaf and hard of hearing children perhaps unlike any other children in this nation, continue to struggle academically, as reflected in 3rd grade reading scores, low high school and college graduation rates, alarmingly high rates of un- and – under employment, reliance on governmental assistance, and earning capacities that are 40-60% below those of their hearing counterparts.

These statistics comprise only dry evidence and do not tell of the deaf or hard of hearing child who sits alone in a crowded classroom, is isolated on the teeming playground, and feels the frustration of a languageless education which leads inexorably to an unfulfilled life.

At the heart of both the wonderful potential of these children and the systemic failure to serve them is a fundamental issue of human rights, one that illuminates the truly unique nature of deaf and hard of hearing children: the need and right of these children to develop fully and be exposed to communication and language. Without communication no educational growth and no personal, emotional, and social development are possible. The need and right to communicate must become the foundation of any educational system for deaf and hard of hearing children because it is so "tightly woven into human experience that it is scarcely possible to imagine life" without it.[2]

Is there a parent in this nation whose hearing child walks into a classroom and wonders whether there will be any other children and teachers to communicate with or any rich, varied, and brilliant language? Will they begin each school year no surer than the last that the doors of the schoolroom are truly open to them?

Would the parents of hearing children in this nation accept an educational system that says it will consider but cannot promise the provision of a reading program, and consider but not mandate an appropriate curriculum, even as laws governing special education require only a "consideration" of communication and language needs?

Why, then, do we have the opposite situation for deaf and hard of hearing children? The answer requires less an apportionment of blame and more an understanding of systemic and philosophical limitations and a clear plan to set our deaf and hard of hearing children free, regardless of the hearing loss or community in which the child flourishes. The basic issues before us have been addressed before. The wisdom of a rich variety of committees, commissions, political bodies, and policy-makers, has been collected, bound, printed, and then put away to gather the dust of time and inaction. The major treatises on the education of deaf and hard of hearing children, --the Babbidge Report, the Commission on Education of the Deaf (COED) Report, the U.S. Department Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services' (OSERS) "Guidance for Deaf Children," and the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) Guidelines--are all remarkable, and they were respectively, 36, 13, 9 and 7 years old, as of 2004 and have been largely ignored.

The National Agenda, a coalition of consumer, professional, and parent groups calls for a quality and diverse communication and language-driven educational delivery system for deaf and hard of hearing children. We ask for that which all other children in this nation simply take for granted--the right of a deaf or hard of hearing child to develop communication and language, to communicate, to become literate, and therefore to learn. We call for action so that our children start school with communication and language and are therefore ready to learn, and when they graduate, then they are ready to confidently stride into the world.

While the deaf and hard of hearing communities and the special education world in general have debated the meaning and reach of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA] for more than 30 years, it is beyond contention that deaf and hard of hearing children are entitled to a quality, literacy-focused, communication and language-driven educational program. Without such a right and a system, deaf and hard of hearing children will continue to lag seriously behind other children.

America is a pluralistic nation, and the National Agenda embraces diversity, choice, and equality. The rights to become literate, to develop a native language, to communicate, and to use one's language is not to be parceled out to only some deaf and hard of hearing children. Whether they go to school in a residential school, special class, regional program, or regular classroom, can there be any question of their need and claim to a communication-appropriate education? Could anyone deny that these rights are of equal value to the signing child, the oral child, or the child with a cochlear implant? We mean - plainly and without reservation - that all communication modes and languages are to be provided for and respected, whether oral/aural language or manual language, whether American Sign Language or English signing systems, and whether the child has a cochlear implant.

We see our collective mission and insist that communication and language are varied and rich and that a deaf or hard of hearing child's unique learning style, cognitive requirements, and individual communication and language needs must determine programmatic, fiscal, and educational decisions—and not the other way around. We have come together to work for a program that builds collectively on the knowledge, devotion, and expertise of families, educators, and consumers in the deaf and hard of hearing communities.

In that spirit, the National Agenda proposes a series of recommendations to bring our children into the world of learning, communication, and language. We ask of ourselves to unite as a community and work for what is common for all our children. We ask of our national educational system that it finally "listen" to the words of our children and those who know them best. Our nation has, for all its difficulties and conflicts, shown a remarkable and unique ability to do ultimately the right thing – to address and protect the fundamental rights of its citizens. Even if institutional change comes later rather than sooner, it has come. The National Agenda is determined that its recommendations and blueprint for change will not only be fully and powerfully expressed but will be transformed into specific actions leading to positive outcomes for our deaf and hard of hearing children.

Spanning all of the specific goals is the need for a fundamental, systemic change:

- Existing law, policy, and programmatic structures cannot provide that which all deaf and hard of hearing children need. A fundamental shift in the current system is required. Therefore each State Department of Education will implement a communication- and language-driven educational delivery system whereby every deaf and hard of hearing child will be provided with a quality, literacy-focused, communication- and language-rich education, that is consistent with the specific goals of the National Agenda. 3/
- The National Agenda, in addition to its 8 major goal areas, proposes a model federal law that will address the unique needs of deaf and hard of hearing students. 4/

1/ "Statement of Principle," the National Deaf Education Project, 2000, Gallaudet University.

2/ Steven Pinker, The Language Instinct 1994.

3/ See the National Deaf Education Project's "Statement of Principle," for a detailed description of a communication-driven educational delivery model and the historic reasons such a model is necessary. www.ceasd.org. as well as a model federal law are attached to this National Agenda.

4/ A Model Federal Bill for Implementing a Communication-Driven Educational Delivery System:

The National Agenda proposes the following goals for re-making the educational delivery system for deaf and hard of hearing children and thereby freeing them to learn:

1. **Early Identification and Intervention.**

   The Development of Communication, Language, Social, and Cognitive Skills at the earliest possible age is fundamental to subsequent educational growth for deaf and hard of hearing students.

2. **Language and Communication Access.**

   All children who are deaf and hard of hearing deserve a quality communication-driven program that provides education together with a critical mass of communication, age, and cognitive peers, as well as language-proficient teachers and staff who communicate directly in the child's language.

3. **Collaborative Partnerships.**

   Partnerships which will influence education policies and practices to promote quality education for students who are deaf and hard of hearing must be explored.

4. **Accountability, High Stakes Testing, and Standards-Based Environments.**

   Instruction for students who are deaf and hard of hearing must be data-driven and must focus on multiple measures of student performance.

5. **Placement, Programs, and Services.**

   The continuum of placement options must be made available to all students who are deaf and hard of hearing, with the recognition that natural and least restrictive environments are intricately tied to communication and language.

6. **Technology.**

   Accommodations, assistive and adaptive technologies, and emerging technologies must be maximized to improve learning for students who are deaf and hard of hearing.

7. **Professional Standards and Personnel Preparation.**

   New collaborations and initiatives among practitioners and training programs must address the serious shortage of qualified teachers and administrators.

8. **Research.**

   Federal and state dollars should be spent on effective, research-based programs and practices.

I Introduction

Background History

The National Agenda, a historic national effort to finally and fundamentally improve educational programming for children who are deaf and hard of hearing, began with a small group of individuals who were inspired by the success of the National Agenda for Blind and Visually Impaired. Through a variety of efforts and strategies, they generated national, state, and local plans to improve educational programs for Visually Impaired students. The *National Agenda for the Education of Children with Visual Impairments, Including Those with Multiple Disabilities*, serves as the foundation document for the implementation of national and state legislation, conferences, workshops, professional literature, and professional interaction.

The National Agenda is both a document and a process, organized around eight national goals and monitored by a National Agenda Steering Committee, Advisory Committee, and National and State goal leaders. The National Agenda has been utilized by different states to develop strategies for implementation, monitoring, and evaluating service delivery. The document is continuously reviewed and updated by the consumers, parents, and professionals that comprise the National Agenda, providing them with a common platform through which local, state, and national issues can be addressed. Over two hundred agencies, schools, and organizations serving individuals who are blind and visually impaired endorse the National Agenda.

The National Agenda for the Blind and Visually Impaired provided us with a wonderful “take-off” point as we pondered how to truly serve deaf and hard of hearing children. It inspired us to make the fundamental changes necessary to ensure that our children have a communication-driven educational system and become literate, productive, and creative citizens for our nation.

Development of the National Agenda for the Education of Students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Our colleagues in Education of the Blind did not have landmark documents designed to promote quality education for their students, such as the 1988 Commission on the Education of the Deaf Report (COED) and the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) Deaf Education Guidelines. On the other hand, our deaf and hard of hearing children face unique communication and language issues that distinguish our efforts from those in the Blind and Visually Impaired communities.

The goal for our National Agenda is to augment these documents, solicit new information regarding current effective practices and issues, and enable the Agenda to serve as an ongoing implementation plan.

We recognize that any effective implementation plan must include a critical analysis of, and recommended changes for, the basic legal, fiscal, and programmatic components of the special education system as it affects deaf and hard of hearing children.

Utilizing the content of the COED Report and the NASDSE Guidelines in a National Agenda format borrowed from the Education of the Blind and Visually Impaired, we introduced the broad concept of a National Agenda for our children. With an endorsement of this concept from the Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf (CEASD), we then shared the idea with the leadership in the National Association of the Deaf (NAD), the Convention of American Instructors of the Deaf (CAID), the American Society for Deaf Students (ASDC), the Alexander Graham Bell Association (AGBell), the Association of College Educators of Students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ACE-DHH) and the National Project on Deaf Education (NDEP). The interest was contagious, and before long a dialogue began. Recently, representatives from State Department Special Education Services as well as the Division of Communication Disorders for the Deaf (DCDD) from the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) have joined our effort.

Progress

Representatives of the above organizations comprise the inchoate National Agenda (NA) Advisory Committee. Since starting our work in January 2001, the Advisory Committee has met in cities across the country to review and refine its initial work and to incorporate the feedback on the NA collected by Kent State University at the www.deafed.net website. The Advisory Committee authorized a steering committee, comprised of Ms. Claire Bugen from the Texas School for the Deaf, Dr. Jay Innes from Gallaudet University, Mr. Larry Siegel from the National Deaf Education Project, and Mr. Dennis Russell from the New Jersey School for the Deaf, which has also met to work on the development of a truly nationwide National Agenda for deaf and hard of hearing children. That Steering Committee has expanded to include Ms. Carol Schweitzer from the Wisconsin State Department of Special Education and Ms. Marsha Gunderson from the Iowa State Department of Special Education.

To date, members of the Advisory Group of the National Agenda have:

- Drafted a preamble outlining the unique communication, language, literacy, and other educational needs of deaf and hard of hearing children
- Proposed a broad paradigm shift in the educational delivery system for deaf and hard of hearing children, specifically a communication-driven system that mandates meeting the communication, language, and general education needs of our children
- Identified the specific and critical areas that the National Agenda believes it must address in order to achieve equality of education for students who are deaf and hard of hearing. Those areas are *Early Identification and*

Intervention Services; Communication, Language and Literacy; Collaborative Partnerships; Accountability; Language Rich Environment (LRE); Technology; Personnel Preparation; and a National Agenda for Research.

- Posted the above National Agenda information for nationwide input at www.deafed.net
- Conducted an extensive review process of the comments and made appropriate revisions in the Goals and Issues.
- Identified sources for an editorial review of the content of the NA.

The current draft of the National Agenda was posted on www.deafed.net to allow our constituents to note how their comments were incorporated. Throughout our document we refer to students who are deaf or hard of hearing. We believe that it is critical to stipulate that this category includes students with multiple disabilities -- to address the issues in education of the deaf and not include students with multiple disabilities would be a grave oversight. We must never forget that the work of the Steering Committee and the Advisory Committee is only the starting point. The National Agenda must and will belong to everyone. Parents, professionals, and consumers will ultimately craft the full National Agenda, and together we will implement it. We are now at an exciting yet challenging time in the evolution of the National Agenda. We must develop an action plan to ensure that the National Agenda serves as a forum and process for a dialogue about the major educational issues impacting on our children and a structure through which specific goals are developed and implemented through coordinated national and local strategies.

1 Goal One: Early Identification and Intervention

The Development of Communication, Language, Social, and Cognitive Skills at the Earliest Possible Age is Fundamental to Subsequent Educational Growth for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students.

Goal Statement

Families of deaf and hard of hearing infants will be provided, at the earliest possible moment after the birth of the child, appropriate identification, screening, information, and services to ensure age-appropriate communication, linguistic, social development, and cognitive development. Such options and services will be child-centered and family-focused to ensure that families fully understand the meaning and consequences of a hearing loss and all of the linguistic, social, psychological, emotional, and educational consequences, and are aware of all services and programs so that they can appropriately provide for their deaf or hard of hearing child. Such options and services must be "deaf-friendly," reflecting an understanding of the communication, technological, and environment issues that are so important to deaf and hard of hearing infants and children.

Background

It is well established that the critical intervention time for a baby who is deaf or hard of hearing is the first three years after birth. More specifically, research confirms that the first six months after birth are crucial for the development of appropriate and full communication and linguistic skills. Drs. Yoshinaga-Itano and Mah-Rya found that 26 month-old infants who were identified and provided services between birth and 6 months had "significantly higher" measures of language growth and personal-social development than children who were provided services only after 6 months of age ("The Development of Deaf and Hard of hearing Children Identified Early Through the High-Risk Registry," Christine Yoshinaga-Itano and Mah-Rya L. Apuzzo, American Annals of the Deaf, Dec. 1998, Vol. 143, pp. 416, 421-422).

"Early intervention" must take place beginning at birth and include newborn screening, toddler, and pre-school programs under IDEA, as well as all other services/programs in the child's home area, county, and state. Early intervention must include an understanding and provision of services and programs that address the linguistic, communication, social, and cognitive needs of deaf and hard of hearing children.

Proposed Goals

1.1 In order for newborn deaf and hard of hearing children to develop appropriate linguistic, communication, social, and cognitive skills, parents must have newborn screening, follow-up services after the screening, and other early intervention services to ensure that they have all the tools necessary to help their children develop appropriately and reach all important milestones.

Rationale: Families are the initial, primary, and most important resource for a deaf or hard of hearing newborn or infant and therefore must be fully informed about hearing loss, its consequences, and the services and programs available to them and their child.

1.2 Families will have information about, and complete access to, a full array of services and programs, which lead to the earliest possible, age-appropriate development of linguistics, visual and/or auditory communication, and cognitive, social, and emotional development of the individual child. Such services may include "in-home" and "out-of-home services," the latter including specialized schools and programs. The goal of such services is to ensure that deaf and hard of hearing infants, toddlers, and children will develop age-appropriate language, social skills, and cognitive skills.

Rationale: Families with newborn deaf and hard of hearing children must have information and referral services so they can quickly and easily access effective medical and other support services and programs that provide educational, communication/language, assistive technology, and other relevant services. Families of newborns, infants, and toddlers with hearing loss must be referred to existing support groups, receive detailed information about hearing loss and communication/language development, and be provided with specific and immediate programs for the family and/or caregivers. These family and child-centered programs should focus on the development of a communication-appropriate home environment for the child, including assistance for the development of an appropriate and immediate communication mode and language for the child, as well as services so that family members can communicate fully and effectively with their child. The family is the most important resource for a deaf or hard of hearing child.

1.3. Families of deaf and hard of hearing infants, toddlers, and children must receive complete and unbiased information about hearing loss, communication development, the central relationship between communication development and educational growth, and other matters unique to deaf and hard of hearing individuals, as well as information about all services and programs that provide assistance to them and their children.

Rationale: Perhaps unlike any other group in the broad world of special education, deaf and hard of hearing children and their families have been subject to diverse, often contentious, and not always accurate information and notions about communication, language, and education for children with a hearing loss. Historically, debates and disputes have taken place about what is the "best" or only way to provide communication and language to deaf and hard of hearing children. As a result, families have been confused, misled, and provided with an insufficient number of communication/linguistic or educational options for their children. More recently, families, educators, and consumers have realized that deaf and hard of hearing children, like all children, require and should have a number of options for the selection and development of communication and language and educational programs. The provision of unbiased, detailed, and numerous options for families is crucial to the development of their children.

1.4. Families of deaf and hard of hearing infants and toddlers should have available training and advocacy services to ensure that they can help their children develop appropriately and meet their communication, linguistic, social, and emotional milestones.

Rationale: Families of newborn and infant deaf and hard of hearing children are often overwhelmed by and un-prepared for raising a child with a hearing loss. They may have had little, if any, contact with adults with a hearing loss, know nothing about the communication options available, and rarely know where to turn for help. Accordingly, training about these issues must be made available to families, as well as advocacy services, so that when faced with difficult and even adversarial matters, they will have the necessary support to best provide for their children.

1.5 In order to appropriately serve deaf and hard of hearing infants, toddlers, and children, the medical community must be fully informed regarding all early interventions, including newborn screening and the development of language and communication for children who are deaf or hard of hearing. The medical community must also be fully informed about all support agencies, institutions, and other entities that serve deaf and hard of hearing newborns and infants and provide information about them in a standardized manner to their families.

Rationale: In order to provide families with accurate information and helpful advice and to assist them in finding appropriate services and programs, medical professionals must have a comprehensive understanding of how hearing loss impacts on a child's linguistic, communication, social and cognitive development and the programs and services available to assist families. The infant's or toddler's physician is often the key professional available to the family and can and must serve as an appropriate source of full and accurate information, services, and programs.

1.6. The medical, educational, and related professionals and institutions must collaborate among themselves to ensure that they can provide complete, unbiased, and useful information and services and programs to families of deaf and hard of hearing infants, toddlers, and children.

Rationale: Historically the individuals and institutions that can provide information and services and programs for newborns, infants, and toddlers who are deaf and hard of hearing do not, in a systemic and synchronized way, collaborate and/or share information. Such collaboration is essential to ensure that deaf and hard of hearing newborns, infants, and toddlers and their families have all the information and services and programs they require.

1.7. Families with deaf and hard of hearing newborns, infants, and toddlers are entitled to work collaboratively with and treated as equal partners and decision-makers by appropriately trained professionals so that they can all prepare the child to function at his/her highest level of communication/language, social, and cognitive development. Such collaboration is essential to the

development of all infant and toddler services and programs and in particular the Individualized Family Services Plan (IFSP) that determines the early intervention services which the child receives and where services are provided.

Rationale: The promise of all early intervention testing, services, and programs can only be realized if families are recognized as the earliest and most important resource for the deaf or hard of hearing child and therefore must be treated as fully informed, equal, and collaborative partners by professionals who have appropriate training and experience.

2 Goal Two: Communication, Language, and Literacy

The fundamental importance of, and human right to, the development of appropriate communication and language skills.

Goal Statement

Deaf and Hard of Hearing children will develop age-appropriate expressive and receptive communication and language skills which are commensurate with their hearing peers and will become fully literate and productive adults.

Background

The development of age-appropriate communication and language skills is fundamental to a child's academic, social, cognitive, and linguistic development, as well as mental and physical well-being; they will determine to a large degree whether that child can become a productive, fulfilled, and capable adult. Historically, the failure to provide early, on-going, and rich opportunities for the development of age-appropriate communication and language skills has had devastating impact on these children.

Proposed Goals

2.1 Deaf and hard of hearing children, like all children in this nation, must have access to and be part of educational programs that provide three fundamental components: communication assessment, communication access, and communication development.

Rationale: Educational growth and general human growth require that a child develops age-appropriate communication and language skills and has access to an appropriate, rich, diverse, and on-going communication environment. Historically, American educational policy and specific programs have not formally and systemically provided communication assessment, development, and access for deaf and hard of hearing children. Without such access, deaf and hard of hearing children cannot grow or achieve educationally in a way that is commensurate with their individual talents and dreams.

2.2 Deaf and hard of hearing children must have rich, on-going, and appropriate opportunities, including communication access and development, to exchange thoughts, opinions and information, and in essence to “learn” in a positive, nurturing environment.

Rationale: The ability to receive and express individual thoughts and to be part of an environment with rich, appropriate, and on-going communication opportunities is both essential to the growth of deaf and hard of hearing children and a fundamental programmatic

component that has not frequently been available to these children. Historically and in particular since the passage of IDEA, educational programs do not have as a priority or a mandate the provision of communication-rich programs for deaf and hard of hearing children.

2.3. Deaf and hard of hearing children must be provided with full communication and language clearly and consistently in all educational environments and with all peers and professionals. Appropriate access can occur in many forms, most notably from educational staff that can communicate directly, proficiently, and in an on-going manner in the child's communication mode and language, through qualified sign or oral interpreters, note-takers, and other services required to provide that necessary access.

Rationale: The uniqueness of deaf and hard of hearing children is the varied communication modes, languages, and signing systems which they use. Whatever their preferred mode, language, or system, the child must have full and appropriate access to the communication and language in the school environment.

2.4. Deaf and Hard of Hearing children will have their individual receptive and expressive communication skills and language needs fully assessed as infants and throughout their educational experience. Such assessment must include the child's individual communication mode and language and specific recommendations for how to ensure that the child has age-appropriate communication and language skills in whatever mode and language that child uses.

Rationale: Natural and fluent language is central to the human experience and all successful education. Deaf and hard of hearing children must have access to programs and services that will ensure their development of age-appropriate communication, and language skills. They must have access to effective communication with language models and meaningful and shared communication with a variety of individuals in a variety of settings in order to enhance language development.

2.5. The development of age-appropriate communication and language skills for deaf and hard of hearing children requires that their educational programs teach social and pragmatic functions.

Rationale: Historically, educational programs have not systemically provided deaf and hard of hearing students with the type of early and in-depth help which establishes the building blocks for communication and language development. Their educational achievement and literacy depends on the development of such skills and requires specific focus on all aspects of language acquisition, development, and use.

2.6. Early, consistent, and meaningful communication between family and child is essential in fostering language competency and the development of literacy. Therefore it is essential that families are provided with support in developing their own and their child's communication and language skills.

They need to work educationally at home and with the schools to develop their child's communication and language skills.

Rationale: Ninety percent of deaf and hard of hearing students are born to hearing parents. Most of these students are language-delayed because they miss the early development of language that is typically acquired through hearing and speaking English or whatever the family's spoken language is. Families have historically not been provided with the support and services and programs necessary to help them develop communication and language competency and therefore help their children acquire such skills. Such services and programs must be available to all families of deaf and hard of hearing children so they can assist their children in understanding, interpreting, and communicating about the world around them.

2.7. Deaf and Hard of Hearing children will have as an integral, required part of their educational program, access to a critical mass of age, cognitive, and communication/language peers and teachers and educational staff who are proficient in the individual child's language and communication mode.

Rationale: No child should go to school without access to a sufficient number of age and language peers, role models, and educational staff who can communicate directly with them. No children in this nation should go to school wondering whether they will have such access. Teachers, peers, and other adults in the school environment should therefore provide deaf and hard of hearing students with rich and on-going opportunities for direct communication in a manner that supports meaningful participation and interaction, across all components of the educational program.

It is not always possible, of course, to provide a large enough numbers of age and language peers for many deaf and hard of hearing children, especially those who use ASL or signing systems or who live in rural areas. It is because of this fact that the educational system must be sensitive to alternative ways to provide such access.

2.8. All education decisions will be based on the deaf or hard of hearing child's communication/language needs, including but not limited to: the preferred mode of communication and language; linguistic needs, including current level of communication/ language skills; severity of hearing loss and the potential for residual hearing, including the use of cochlear implants; the child's academic level and learning style; social/emotional needs; placement preference; individual motivation; cultural needs; and level of family involvement.

Rationale: A hearing loss often results in significant and unique educational needs for the individual child which almost always relate to language and communication and in turn profoundly affect most aspects of the educational process. The special factors outlined above must be considered for all deaf and hard of hearing students.

2.9. Deaf and hard of hearing children are capable of and must develop age-appropriate literacy skills, including the ability to read and write.

Rationale: Deaf and hard of hearing children have tended to have their literacy skills plateau at the 2nd or 3rd grade level. However, literacy is a fundamental pre-requisite for educational growth and success and happiness in life. The educational system must recognize this need, acknowledge the historically dismal reading scores for deaf and hard of hearing children, and therefore develop program-wide strategies for helping deaf and hard of hearing children graduate from high school with the reading and writing skills necessary to grow educationally and develop into productive and capable adults.

2.10 A structured, early, and balanced program of activities for teaching reading and writing should be implemented consistently across the curriculum for deaf and hard of hearing students and should take into consideration individual differences, including an awareness of the communication modes and languages used by the students. Instructional approaches to developing literacy in deaf and hard of hearing students should provide creative and visual means to teach reading and writing.

Rationale: Deaf children need opportunities to develop literacy skills formally and informally in home, school, and community activities. Activities should vary according to the instructional goal and should include authentic reading and writing tasks. Knowledge of the student's degree of competence in communication and language will help guide the selection of formal instruction strategies.

2.11 The development of age-appropriate English skills is crucial to deaf and hard of hearing students.

Rationale: Mastering written English can be a lifelong struggle for many deaf and hard of hearing students, who in many cases are acquiring English as a second language. Reading and witting a phonetic language that they have never heard is a significant obstacle to literacy. Students at all levels of development need access to instructional approaches that are student-centered, incorporate and build on the child's individual language competence, and utilize visual and other means to ensure that they develop age-appropriate English skills.

2.12. Reading programs for deaf children should be research-based and involve core components of reading, e.g., phonemic awareness skills, phonics skills, reading fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension strategies, and thus allow the deaf learner to draw on syntactic, semantic, and phonological information to gain meaning.

Rationale: Reading programs, particularly those for deaf and hard of hearing children, must be based on quality research. In addition, the current federal law, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requires that all school districts and individual schools use effective, research-based reading programs so that all children are reading at grade level by the end of third grade.

3 Goal Three: Collaborative Partnerships

Goal Statement

Deaf and hard of hearing children require and are best served when effective and mutually respectful partnerships are established between and among educators, families, and the institutions and programs in the community that serve those children and their families. Given the importance of early and on-going communication, language, and educational development for these children, a seamless system of information and services and programs must be made available to the family and child throughout her/his educational career.

Background

Deaf and hard of hearing students and their families face many challenges, especially at critical transition points, including when the hearing loss is first discovered, when a decision must be made about the child's communication mode and language, and when the child moves from early education services to elementary school, elementary to high school, high school to college or employment, entering a post-secondary program, and/or deciding to live independently in the community. The success of each transition depends on collaboration and partnership among diverse agencies in the coordination of a variety of services.

Proposed goals:

3.1. The establishment of a seamless, complete, and cross-institutional collaborative system will ensure that families are fully informed as to all service and program options available for their children and are equal partners and the key decision-makers in the education of their child. Generally such a system will address the communication, language, cognitive, academic, social, emotional, psychological, and post-secondary, employment, and independent living skill needs of deaf and hard of hearing children and must be in place to serve these children from their birth to high school graduation and beyond.

Rationale: Historically families have not always been provided sufficient, clear, and unbiased information regarding the many needs of their deaf and hard of hearing children. Part of the difficulty has been that the various institutions and programs that provide services to deaf and hard of hearing children – from infancy through high school – have not effectively communicated with each other and therefore have not established a collaborative partnership among families and these institutions. Such a system is central to the effective growth of deaf and hard hearing children and their families.

3.2 Collaborative partnerships among families and the medical community, educators, policy-makers, researchers, business, community agencies, state organizations, and national organizations will be established and maintained in order to provide information to families and services to deaf and hard of hearing children and foster effective transitions for children and their families throughout their educational experience.

Rationale: The educational, medical, business, governmental, academic, and other communities can and must play a pivotal role in providing information to families and services to deaf and hard of hearing children.

3.3. The educational system that serves deaf and hard of hearing children, including the IFSP and IEP processes must work collaboratively and fairly with the families of these children and respect and follow the family recommendations of families as they relate to the communication, language, and educational goals of their children.

Rationale: Given the unique nature of a hearing loss, the complex communication and language issues involved, and the tendency over the years of many special education administrations to either misunderstand those issues or have insufficient knowledge about them, families have often represented the most important source of valid information about their children. It is therefore essential that those families are brought fully into the process and their opinions fully explored, respected, and as appropriate accepted. Only in this way can families be truly equal partners and decision-makers in a collaborative process.

3.4. Deaf and hard of hearing students are entitled to and can become independent, self-sufficient adults. All appropriate institutions, including State Education Agencies, intermediate educational service agencies, local educational agencies (LEAs), post-secondary programs, and all other pertinent governmental and community resources shall work together with deaf and hard of hearing students and their families to ensure that this goal is met.

Rationale: Schools are required to ensure that the independent living skills of deaf and hard of hearing students are developed. In order to accomplish this goal, they must develop effective relationships with post-secondary institutions, community, and business.

4 Goal Four: System Responsibility: Accountability, High-Stakes Testing, Assessment, and Standards-Based Environments

To ensure that the Education of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children is Based on Sound Systemic Procedures and Standards.

Goal Statement

Deaf and hard of hearing students are entitled to an educational program in which system-wide responsibility is clear and involves procedures for accountability, high-stakes testing, assessment, and standards. Accountability measures must include examination of programs and services on a local and statewide basis. High-stakes testing must be based on and fully incorporate the child's communication and language needs. Assessment of deaf and hard of hearing children must be comprehensive and include testing and evaluation of the child's communication, linguistic, academic, cognitive, psychology, physical, and all other areas pertinent to the child. The entire educational delivery system for deaf and hard of hearing children must be based on clear standards or "best practices," which reflects the best thinking regarding educational programs and services and the relationship of communication and language to literacy and educational growth.

Background

Deaf and hard of hearing children have not systemically been provided with an educational system that has a well-reasoned and clear accountability process, assessment procedures, equitable high-stakes testing, and well-articulated standards. Historically state educational agencies have not had sufficient resources and in some cases a complete understanding of the needs of deaf and hard of hearing children that are necessary to develop effective procedures for assessing and measuring all programs in their states. Because deaf and hard of hearing children have truly unique communication, language, and educational needs, all these areas of system responsibility must reflect the best thinking of educators, parents, and consumers and have sufficient resources to establish effective accountability and standards. Instruction for students who are deaf and hard of hearing must be data-driven, focus on multiple measures of student performance, including authentic assessment in a variety of disciplines, and lead to a diploma which is consistent with the student's IEP and/or all state graduation requirements.

Proposed goals

4.1. Assessments of deaf and hard of hearing students must be child-centered, focus on all areas of the child's profile, and employ multiple measures that include criterion-referenced tests, standardized tests, teacher and student accountability records, and other appropriate assessment tools. Assessments

must take into account and reflect the child's communication and language preference, need, and expressive and receptive skill levels.

Rationale: Like all children, deaf and hard of hearing students must have well-reasoned, child-centered and objective measures for determining their levels of cognitive, psychological, emotional, linguistic, educational, and other skills.

4.2. Assessment of deaf students who use ASL and English will include measures of competencies in both languages and will specifically measure expressive and receptive skills in both.

Rationale: Deaf students who use both ASL and English as languages of instruction must develop proficiency in both languages. Assessment of functional levels in only one language does not provide a complete profile of the student's language abilities.

4.3. Given the importance of age-appropriate communication and language, assessments for deaf and hard of hearing children must not only include information regarding current levels of skills, but also recommendations for how to improve communication and language skills.

Rationale: Since the development of communication and language skills is crucial to the subsequent development of all educational skills, it is essential that the assessment of deaf and hard of hearing children include specific recommendations for improving those skills.

4.4. Parents, consumers, and educators must be provided with appropriate and complete Information regarding accommodations, modifications, and adaptations to assessments for their deaf and hard of hearing children, as well as information regarding alternative assessments.

Rationale: Given the importance of communication and language to a child's development and educational growth, deaf and hard of hearing children must have equal access to testing without compromising the integrity of the test.

4.5. A guide should be developed by the U.S. Department of Education and disseminated regarding the testing deaf and hard of hearing students, how their individual and primary communication preferences and modes including ASL impact their testing outcomes, and what should be done to ensure that those children are fairly and fully tested.

Rationale: A resource guide is needed for practitioners that includes a range of options for accommodations, modifications, adaptations, and alternative assessment strategies and models, including use of ASL during assessments.

4.6 District and statewide testing programs must take into consideration the unique language and communication preferences, abilities, and needs of the students.

Rationale: District and statewide testing measures often unintentionally measure the English proficiency of deaf or hard of hearing students rather than their knowledge and acquired skills in reading, writing, math, and other content areas.

4.7. High-stakes testing programs must adhere to the guidelines issued by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, as noted in their publication entitled, "The use of tests as part of high-stakes decision-making for students: A resource guide for educators and policy-makers."

Rationale: Deaf and hard of hearing students must be afforded the same rights as their hearing peers, and schools must ensure equal access to all testing, including high-stakes testing.

4.8. Clear and effective accountability systems must be established in each state to ensure that programs for deaf and hard of hearing students are effective, fully funded, and developed consistent with legal requirements and best practices for teaching deaf and hard of hearing children.

Rationale: Too often in the past few if any state accountability procedures were in place to ensure consistent and effective educational programs for deaf and hard of hearing students; without such procedures, educational opportunities for those children will continue to lag behind other students.

4.9. Statewide accountability procedures and audits of educational programs for deaf and hard of hearing students must evaluate how local programs address the following:

- Language preference and use
- Degree of hearing loss
- Age of onset
- Etiology and additional disabilities that affect learning
- Ethnicity and home language
- Parental hearing status
- Cognitive abilities
- Early identification intervention
- Program design
- Education background
- School placement history
- Demographic information as to the number, age, and skill levels in all areas for all deaf and hard of hearing children in the state
- Detailed description of all programs and services currently available for deaf and hard of hearing children in the state.

4.10 Detailed demographic information is needed to ensure that accountability procedures are appropriate and further that educational programs for deaf and hard of hearing students are effective.

Rationale: Accurate demographic data will improve the quality of programming for all deaf and hard of hearing students.

4.11. A “best practices” guide is required to ensure that all programs serving deaf and hard of hearing students are effective and appropriate, and address all needs of those children and in particular their communication and language needs.

Rationale: Because deaf and hard of hearing students represent a unique educational community, it is crucially important that a “best practices” guide be established to ensure that their educational programs are current with all academic thinking and appropriate for those students.

5 Goal Five: Placement and Programs

Goal Statement

Deaf and hard of hearing students require a full continuum of placement options that recognize, provide for, and are based upon their language and communication needs. A determination of what constitutes the "least restrictive environment" for deaf and hard of hearing students must be determined by considering first and foremost these unique communication and linguistic needs and then the student's educational, social, emotional, cognitive, and physical abilities and needs.

Background

Too often IEP teams make placement decisions for the child who is deaf or hard of hearing without giving full regard to the communication, language, and educational (including literacy) needs unique to children who do not hear. Since the passage of IDEA, the IEP discussion of the least restrictive environment for deaf and hard of hearing students has been narrow in approach in which the participants are not fully informed or aware of the central role that communication plays in the determination of placement for the child. IDEA has been narrowly interpreted to say that all children are to be placed in the general education classroom with supplementary aids and services, creating a difficult legal barrier to overcome for deaf and hard of hearing children for whom a non-regular placement that is communication- and language-rich is truly the "least restrictive."

While the re-authorization of IDEA in 1997 as well as the U.S. Department of Education's 1992 "Deaf Students Education Services: Policy Guidance" (57 Fed. Reg. 49274) recognize the importance of communication in determining Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), IDEA still focuses on generic notions of mainstreaming rather than the unique communication needs in determining LRE for deaf and hard of hearing children.

This goal seeks to create a clear recognition of the information required to determine what is LRE for deaf and hard of hearing students and the nature of the educational continuum of placement options. The deaf and hard of hearing child's communication mode and language – whether manual or aural/oral – must determine what is truly a "least restrictive environment."

Proposed Goals

5.1 All IEP team participants will be provided all information, without any bias, about all educational options along the continuum of educational placements and in particular how the communication, linguistic, and educational needs and goals of the deaf or hard of hearing student will be addressed in those options.

Rationale: Too often school personnel do not inform families of all the educational options available in their state that provide educational support for children who are deaf or hard of hearing, including those with additional disabilities, and in particular how those options can address the communication, language, and educational needs of the child. Too often school personnel have a bias toward certain educational settings and against others – even without full knowledge of the full continuum of settings. This bias can run the gamut of favoring mainstreaming programs when a richer, non-regular program will serve the needs of the child to favoring a non-regular placement when indeed the child would benefit from a mainstreamed option.

5.2. Local educational agencies must have a full continuum of placement options that can provide for the unique communication, linguistic, and educational needs of deaf children and shall make all placement and LRE determinations based on all of those needs.

Rationale: All too often for deaf and hard of hearing students, a true, communication-rich, and full continuum of placement options are not available. This situation has historically limited and harmed these children and presented their families with inappropriate educational options.

5.3. As required under IDEA the provision of a full continuum of placement options and the further requirement that a child be placed in the "least restrictive environment", shall mean for deaf and hard of hearing students those environments that can address the student's communication, linguistic, and educational needs. The IEP team will make all placement/LRE determinations based on the abilities and needs of the child, including fundamental communication and linguistic needs, and not solely on a philosophy that one particular option on the continuum best serves all children.

Rationale: A truly "least restrictive environment" is not a generic concept or as often designated as a "one size fits all," but rather one in which the individual communication, language, and educational needs of the child determines what is LRE, not the other way around. The continuum of educational placements is a menu of options that are designed to meet the varied needs of children with disabilities, not a hierarchy that states that the regular classroom as the "better" or "only" option and that special schools for deaf and hard of hearing students are "more restrictive." For some deaf and hard of hearing children, a special school is truly "least restrictive," just as for others a regular classroom is LRE. In either case, the child's needs, not a generic concept of LRE, must determine what is truly LRE for each individual child.

5.4. A determination of what constitutes a communication and linguistically appropriate placement option and therefore LRE must be based on where the child is able to directly communicate with age and language peers and communicate directly and most easily with staff.

Rationale: A truly LRE is one in which the student can communicate directly and effectively with peers and staff. This concept is fundamental and indisputable. The educational needs of students are not limited to academic or "book work," but also include the social-emotional development that comes from building true friendships. Language and critical thinking skills develop with the use of classroom dialogue that is active and challenging. Students who demonstrate strong self-determination and self-confidence are those who are confident in who they are and have the communication and language skills and access needed to grow into productive and happy adults.

5.5: Deaf and hard of hearing are entitled to access the general curriculum, regardless of where their individual program is located or where on the continuum of placement options, their classroom is located.

Rationale: IDEA requires that all children have access to the general curriculum. Too often the concept of "general curriculum" is equated or confused with "least restrictive environment" or with placement in a regular classroom. The two concepts are separate and distinct. Every deaf and hard of hearing child, whether in a regular classroom or a special school or program for the deaf, should have full access to the general curriculum as consistent with his or her needs.

6 Goal Six: Technology

A Fundamental Tool for the Communication and Educational Enhancement of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students.

Goal Statement

Technology must be made available for and used by deaf and hard of hearing students to enhance their communication and language opportunities, enlarge their educational options, increase cognitive and academic skills, and enrich their lives now and in the future.

Background

Technology is of particular importance for deaf and hard of hearing students because it provides unique and necessary communication and educational access. Technology tools and resources must become an integral part of both the teaching and the learning process if they are to have an impact on the achievement of deaf and hard of hearing students. Within a sound educational system, deaf and hard of hearing students can effectively use technology as they seek information and widen their worlds, as they learn to evaluate and analyze, as they seek to solve problems and make decisions, and as they become creative communicators, collaborators, publishers, and producers as well as informed, responsible, and contributing citizens.

Deaf education must incorporate instructional and assistive technologies, telecommunication devices, and access to contemporary and emerging technologies.

Proposed Goals

6.1 All instructional and information technologies used in the teaching and learning process for deaf and hard of hearing children should be, as appropriate for each individual child, visually and/or aurally/orally accessible.

Rationale: "Full access" incorporates captioning, visual signaling and alert systems, telecommunication devices, LCD information displays, SmartBoards, and other technological accommodations.

6.2 Educational programs for students who are deaf and hard of hearing should integrate technology standards into the general curriculum at all developmental levels.

Rationale: Federal law including, IDEA and NCLB, emphasizes the importance of the power of technology in all areas of K-12 education, from reading to science to special education.

6.3 Accurate diagnosis of hearing loss and appropriate amplification and other assistive technologies, both acoustic and visual, is the right of all deaf children.

Rationale: Audiology is part of the education of deaf children. Information presented regarding the relative merits of any assistive technology, including cochlear implants, should be done by a knowledgeable and unbiased professional.

6.4 Technologies such as videoconferencing, distance learning, and video-relay services should be utilized to allow deaf and hard of hearing students the opportunity to communicate, collaborate, and interact with peers, experts, and other audiences.

Rationale: Innovative technology opens new doors for communication access, networking, and the sharing of resources.

6.5 Deaf students with additional disabilities or intensive educational needs may require specialized technology intervention.

Rationale: Special-needs students may require special augmentative communication devices and other technology applications to increase communication, environmental control, and mobility.

7 Goal Seven: Professional Standards and Personnel Preparation

Goal Statement

A collaborative partnership is needed among universities, schools, and communities to enable the preparation, recruitment, retention, and on-going professional development of an optimal supply of teachers, administrators, and related personnel with the demonstrated knowledge, skills, and experiences to meet the needs of a diverse population of deaf and hard of hearing learners.

Background

Highly qualified deaf educators are in short supply and high demand, and that shortage is expected to worsen at least until the year 2014. High-quality teaching is an important factor in the education that a deaf or hard of hearing child receives. Teachers of children who are deaf or hard of hearing require specialized training in order to obtain the skills necessary to meet those needs, including the communication and language skills required to communicate proficiently with students who have a hearing loss. Currently teacher-education programs are not preparing a sufficient number of teachers to meet replacement and growth needs. Over the past decade, 21 university deaf education teacher-training programs in the U.S. were discontinued while only 12 new programs were initiated. The status of teacher retention is equally dim. Currently 20% of teachers do not remain in their positions for more than five years.

Concurrent with this teacher shortage, the NCLB requires all teachers who provide instruction in core subjects, including special education teachers, to be “highly qualified” for the subjects they teach as of 2005-2006.

New and creative efforts to meet this challenge must be initiated. A new partnership of key stakeholders must develop a common understanding of the problem and develop action plans to remedy the problem.

Proposed goals

7.1 State certification standards should be aligned with the Council on the Education of the Deaf [CED] national standards to ensure higher quality and to provide more consistency and portability of certification across states.

Rationale: Deaf education certifications vary from state to state. Some states offer categorical certificates that certify teachers to teach children of all ages who are deaf or hard of hearing. Other states accept a more generic special education degree that certifies a teacher to teach children with all disabilities in a specific age range, while others hold

separate standards for elementary versus secondary grades. Many states offer a combination of these certification types. Inconsistent certification standards make it difficult to transfer certifications from one state to another. CED standards are research-based and are also linked to a national university accreditation process (the National Council on the Accreditation of Teacher Education—NCATE).

7.2 Teacher training programs for deaf and hard of hearing students need to offer additional coursework in general education curricular areas and instructional strategies in order to better prepare teachers for improving student achievement in relation to mandated state curricular standards.

Rationale: In addition to the specialized training required to teach deaf and hard of hearing students, university teacher-education programs need to offer teacher preparation courses that focus on aligning curriculum and instruction and implementing accountability measures that are uniquely suited to the needs of a variety of learners.

7.3 Teacher preparation programs should include more performance-based assessments that offer varying opportunities for observation, clinical practice, and mentoring which uses modern technologies and customized learning opportunities.

Rationale: Research indicates a strong relationship between teacher retention and adequate preparation, including background in subject matter, pedagogy, and meaningful induction and mentoring programs.

7.4 High-quality alternative pathways to credentialing teachers, administrators, and support personnel to work with deaf and hard of hearing students must be provided.

Rationale: Undergraduate and graduate preparation programs cannot be the only source for filling critical teacher, administrative, and support personnel vacancies, particularly with ethnic-minority and ethnic-minority deaf personnel. It is critical that alternative programs be available and held to high standards and ensures that their graduates demonstrate acquisition of critical knowledge and skills. It is also important that schools provide mentoring support for new professionals.

7.5 The unique circumstances of teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing who teach multiple core academic subjects in a variety of school settings must be addressed by IDEA, NCLB, and all other applicable federal laws.

Rationale: NCLB's teacher quality requirements define a highly qualified teacher as having state certification, as well as demonstrated competence or an academic major in the subject area which they are teaching. The critical shortage of quality teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing suggests that this standard may need to be achieved in creative and alternative ways. In areas where shortages exist, these alternatives may include hiring persons who are still in the process of making satisfactory progress toward completing coursework necessary to meet state certification standards within three years.

7.6 Policies focusing on recruitment and retention of qualified deaf education personnel must be addressed at the federal, state and local level.

Rationale: The teacher shortage is partly a symptom of the teacher-retention problem. One-third of new teachers leave the profession within three years, and almost one-half leave within five years. University training programs must better prepare teachers for both what to teach and how to teach. Schools must also do a better job of creating and providing incentives for teachers.

7.7 The level of proficiency of personnel proving educational interpreting services must be increased in accordance with state or national standards.

Rationale: One of the challenges in providing an appropriate education for students who are deaf and hard of hearing is the inadequate number of skilled educational interpreters. Many schools are using the services of uncertified persons who have only limited training in the role of educational interpreter. Interpreters should be evaluated and rated in the language used by the child, with the understanding that the child's age, additional disability, and level of prior knowledge have an impact on the child's process of comprehension.

7.8 All educational staff working with deaf and hard of hearing students must demonstrate adult-level proficiency in the communication mode and language used by the students with whom they work.

Rationale: Historically, teachers and other educational staff have not always been able to communicate directly and proficiently with their deaf and hard of hearing students. The obvious need for educators to communicate with their students is central to any successful educational program, particularly for those serving deaf and hard of hearing students.

8 Goal Eight: Research

Research is the foundation upon which quality educational practices for deaf and hard of hearing students is based.

Goal

Wide-ranging research is critical to the development of a quality, communication-driven education system for deaf and hard of hearing students.

Background

Deaf educators face broad and important issues: How does a child develop communication, how does it impact on all educational growth, and how should it drive educational planning for deaf and hard of hearing students? How can we provide families of deaf students access to objective information about educational choices? How do we teach reading to deaf children? How can we reach a diverse population of deaf students in a variety of different settings? What are the critical factors that impact deaf students' academic performance? Such questions are at the heart of deaf education, and we need all of our professional resources to answer them.

Scholarship in deaf education encompasses philosophy and history. It includes rich description of successful programs, explores new ideas about individual and group "best practices," and objectively tests the outcome of certain conditions, philosophies, and techniques. Diverse modes of inquiry are invaluable to research in deaf education when they are applied to important questions about what we want and need to know.

In the Research Goal, the National Agenda poses the following points as important areas for research as it relates to the education of deaf and hard of hearing students. They were developed with input submitted by a variety of professionals, parents, and consumers. The questions are divided into the seven other goal areas of the National Agenda. As with any viable research, the National Agenda invites our profession's reactions to, and involvement with, these proposed areas of research:

Early Intervention

- What are the necessary services for a child and his/her family to ensure age-appropriate communication, linguistic, social, and cognitive development?
- What has been the effect of universal newborn screening on early intervention systems?
- How knowledgeable is the medical community regarding the development of language and communication intervention for deaf and hard of hearing children?

- What practices are the members of the medical community engaging in during their association with families of deaf and hard of hearing children?

Language, Communication and Literacy

- What are and what should be the corresponding ASL and English levels of proficiency for Deaf Children?
- What is the impact of dual language programming on Deaf/HH children?
- How do we implement instruction for deaf and hard of hearing children who come from non-English speaking homes?
- Should ASL be recognized as the primary language of deaf people? To what extent is ASL recognition a research goal?
- What is the impact on language development of using a sign language interpreter as the only conduit for communication during the school day?
- What is the impact of different communication systems (e.g., Cued Speech, Signed English, etc.) on language development?
- How should literacy be defined for deaf and hard of hearing students?
- How are the various phonics-based reading approaches currently so popular in the US and supported at the federal and state levels impacting reading programs and ultimately deaf and hard of hearing students in the US?
- Which reading theories (top-down, bottom-up, or integrated approaches) produce successful deaf readers, and under what conditions?
- What are the research-based best practices in reading instruction for deaf students? (NCLB)
- What is the effect of language-based technologies (e.g., email, closed captioning, pagers, CART, etc.) on the literacy skills of deaf children?
- What will be the results of an analysis communication and language development programs across the nation?

Partnerships and Transition

- What successful partnership models are available for the profession? What are their practices?
- What are the elements of a successful partnership model for engendering shared responsibility of educators, parents, and community?
- How do schools and agencies providing a full range of services interact with each other to ensure that parents and families have access to ALL information and opportunities?
- What role does the teacher preparation program have in a successful partnership?
- What role does the community and deaf adult have in a successful partnership?

Accountability, High Stakes Testing, Standards Based Environments

- How are schools and programs for deaf and hard of hearing students being evaluated in high-stakes testing environments?
- What accommodations and/or adaptations are test administrators providing to deaf and hard of hearing students? What are the effects of these accommodations and/or adaptations?
- What has been the effect of high-stakes testing on the graduation rate of deaf and hard of hearing students?
- What alternative assessments are being offered to deaf and hard of hearing students? How many students are being evaluated under alterative assessment programs?
- How are standards-based curricula being integrated into schools and programs for deaf and hard of hearing children? What has been the impact of such curricula on content learning for deaf and hard of hearing children?
- What are the best measures of "adequate yearly progress" for deaf students as defined by the NCLB?

Placement and Programs

- Where are students currently being educated? What services are currently available?
- How are curricula selected for deaf and hard of hearing children? How early are children directed toward a standard diploma or an alterative diploma or certificate?
- What is the relationship between *language and communication access* to instructional setting and deaf students' achievement on state assessment standards?
- What is the impact of age-appropriate peers in meeting deaf students' social-emotional needs?
- How do the "special factors" to be considered in the development of a deaf student's IEP impact placement decisions?
- To what extent are communication development and communication access a fundamental and formal part of the continuum, and if they are not, then how might that access best become a programmatic mandate?

Technology

- What kind of technology training and materials are being provided to deaf and hard of hearing children?
- What role does assistive technology have in the education of deaf children?
- Are schools and programs utilizing technology as an integrated tool in learning situations? If so, how is this being done?
- What practices are software producers following in making their materials accessible to the deaf and hard of hearing students?
- What impact are instructional technologies having on deaf and hard of hearing students in K-12 programs?

Professional Standards and Personnel Prep

- What percentage of teachers and support personnel are deaf? At what level are individuals from ethnic minorities teaching in field? At what level of individuals from ethnic minorities certified as teachers of the deaf?
- What impact has state-mandated teacher testing had upon the teacher population?
- Are the current standards for teachers reflective of the current student population's needs?
- What types of personnel preparation programs are available? Geographically? Non-Traditional? Undergraduate? Graduate?
- What is the attrition rate in teaching of deaf and hard of hearing children?
- What in-service education models are most successful in assisting teachers and support professionals in the field of deafness?
- What are the strong and weak areas of personnel preparation programs?
- Does the current availability of interpreters in the educational setting address deaf children's needs for direct and meaningful communication with peers and teachers?

Research

- How are the requirements of the NCLB impacting deaf and hard of hearing children?

A Appendices

A new model federal law should include the following:

Congress finds the following:

A. In this nation as many as 1,053,000 individuals under the age of 18 have a reported hearing loss; anywhere from 60,000 to 80,000 children with a hearing loss were served in special education programs;

B. A hearing loss involves the most basic of human needs, the ability to communicate with other human beings. Many deaf and hard of hearing children use, as their primary communication mode, American Sign Language, while others express and receive language through English-based sign systems, or orally and aurally, with or without visual signs or cues;

C. The importance of developing early and effective language and communication skills is fundamental to the educational growth of all children; deaf and hard of hearing children are often denied early opportunity for, and enter school with, minimal communication skills;

D. Deaf and hard of hearing children on average graduate (if they graduate) from high school with substandard reading and other academic skills, have high rates of illiteracy, and have low rates of college attendance. Deaf and hard of hearing adults have significantly high rates of unemployment and under-employment and higher reliance on various forms of governmental assistance than hearing people;

E. In 1988, the Commission on the Education of the Deaf (COED) reported to the Congress and President of the United States that the status of education for deaf children was unacceptable and recommended fundamental changes in how educational services are delivered to deaf and hard of hearing children, including changes in the way the IDEA was applied to these children; the National Association of State Directors of Special Education in its 1994 "Educational Guidelines for Deaf and Hard of hearing Children," reported that because of the unique communication and cultural needs of deaf and hard of hearing children, significant changes in the educational delivery system should be made;

F. Existing law, particularly IDEA, provides significant assistance to deaf and hard of hearing children and as re-authorized in 1997 requires that the IEP team consider a deaf or hard of hearing child's unique communication needs; IDEA, however, because of its focus on the "least restrictive environment," is particularly limiting as written for many deaf and hard of hearing children;

G. Congress therefore recognizes that IDEA should and can be made compatible with the unique needs of deaf and hard of hearing children and by this Act assures that all deaf and hard of hearing children are provided a quality education in which:

   1. The educational delivery system for deaf and hard of hearing children is communication-driven to ensure that programs and services provided for those children address their unique communication needs;

2. A communication-driven educational delivery system will ensure that communication assessment, development, and access, and the various programmatic and other components described herein are fundamental to any educational delivery system for deaf and hard of hearing children;

3. In a communication-driven system all programmatic and fiscal determinations will be based on the unique communication needs of deaf and hard of hearing children

This Act is designed to be fully compatible with IDEA and in addition establishes standards and rules and procedures for educating children who are deaf and hard of hearing; such standards and rules are to be specifically incorporated into IDEA with all determinations made by an IEP team or any other educational unit to be fully consistent with the requirements described herein;

A child's individual communication and educational needs dictates all components of his or her educational program; this Act does not establish the requirement that one particular educational style or program or one particular communication mode or language is preferred over another, but rather that the child's individual communication needs will determine individual placement and service determinations. Deaf and hard of hearing children communicate in very different ways; what constitutes communication assessment, development, and access for an oral child will be very different for a child who uses sign language. Each communication mode and language or system will be recognized, respected, and provided for;

A deaf and hard of hearing child therefore is fully entitled to a free appropriate public education which meets his or her specific communication needs in the least restrictive environment as required by IDEA and consistent with the requirements herein.

The least restrictive environment for a deaf or hard of hearing child is specifically defined as that classroom and program which provides for the child's communication development and access as described herein at §9) and therefore may be a regular classroom, a special classroom or school, or residential placement. By this Act, the right to be educated in a regular classroom is not altered.

To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities who need alternative educational settings have an equal right to such settings. The burden to remove children from a regular educational environment or from an alternative environment rests on the LEA, which must demonstrate clear and convincing reasons why the child should be so removed.

Given the importance of a deaf and hard of hearing child's communication needs, the IEP team shall be formally designated as the "IEP/Communication Development Team" for those children;

9. A deaf and hard of hearing child is entitled to an education which provides:

- appropriate early and on-going communication **assessment**,
- early and on-going communication **development**, which includes specific educational programs and services to ensure
- that the child has age-appropriate communication (expressive and receptive) and other academic skills;
- appropriate, early, and on-going communication **access**, including a critical mass of age and language peers, staff proficient in the child's communication mode, and direct and appropriate communication access to all school activities;

10. There is recognition of the individual child's particular hearing loss and unique cultural and linguistic needs;

11. There is provision of appropriate programs, including all options on the "continuum of placement options" under IDEA, as well as regional centers, center schools and other placement options which can provide for the critical mass, language access, and development necessary for many deaf and hard of hearing children as required by 20 U.S.C. §1413(h);

12. There is provision of programs and program components, which are communication-accessible with professional staff appropriately trained, fully proficient in the child's individual communication mode and language, and who understand the unique needs of deaf and hard of hearing students;

13. There is development of age-appropriate English writing and reading language skills;

14. There is development of appropriate curricula, materials, and assessment instruments and the implementation of "best practices";

15. There is recognition of American Sign Language as a distinct language of deaf people and the development of standards for teaching it as a language; adopt American Sign Language as a foreign language in high school graduation requirements;

16. There is clear recognition of and provision for the unique needs of deaf and hard of hearing children who are oral/aural and require an educational environment and program that meets those needs, including, but not limited to a critical mass of oral/aural peers, appropriately trained staff, and such support services as required to provide for the development of the child's receptive and expressive speech skills, and the right to be in regular education under IDEA 1997;

17. There is the development of standards for teachers, sign language and oral interpreters, and other aides and professionals who work with deaf and hard of hearing students;

18. There is the development of the highest academic standards for deaf and hard of hearing children and the provision of services and programs to ensure they are provided a quality and rigorous educational experience;

19. State and local educational agencies will be responsible for developing communication-driven programs for deaf and hard of hearing children;

20. There is the development of programs and procedures to ensure that the responsible educational units, including state and local agencies, develop inter-agency agreements with appropriate health and other institutions and agencies in the various states regarding universal, early identification of hearing loss, and effective interface between medical and educational services;

21. There is the provision of parent and guardian training, reference to appropriate medical, educational, and community resources, and assistance in developing family language skills.


8 Goal Areas
1. Early Childhood Education
2. Communication, Language, and Literacy
3. Collaborative Partnerships
4. Accountability
5. Placement and Programs
6.Technology
7. Personnel Preparation
8. Research
Political Vehicle
Living Resource Document
NATIONAL AGENDA
DEAF HARD-OF-HEARING
NA
ACHIEVING EDUCATIONAL EQUALITY
Inclusive Unifying Structure
National, State & Local Strategies
Vision for the Future


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