

CONFERENCE OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATORS OF SCHOOLS AND PROGRAMS FOR THE DEAF (CEASD)

A Position Paper On

The Full Continuum of Educational Placements for All Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

The Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf (CEASD) believes that students who are deaf and hard of hearing should have access to schools and classrooms in which both equity and excellence are persistent and shared goals for each learner. Equity refers to the opportunity of every learner to have access to an inclusive high quality education. Excellence refers to the need of every learner for quality education programs, high expectations and the highly qualified teachers and support staff necessary to maximize his or her potential while achieving positive educational outcomes.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that children with disabilities be provided with a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment (LRE). The latter has often been interpreted as the environment where their typically developing peers are educated or the school closest to their home – the emphasis being on place. With the goal that children with disabilities should not be isolated, a goal which CEASD supports and shares, mainstreaming, integration and inclusion in their various forms have been the conceptual basis of the special educational system. While these approaches have served many children with disabilities very well, this has not always been the case for children who are deaf or hard of hearing. All too often, mainstreaming, integration and inclusion are confusing and do not equate to a true inclusive educational placement.

Children who are deaf and hard of hearing have unique communication needs that directly affect their academic, social, personal and cultural development. At the national level, the importance of communication as a starting point for identifying appropriate services was first acknowledged the U.S. Department of Education in its “Deaf Students Education Services: Policy Guidance” 57 Fed. Reg. 49274(1992) and reaffirmed by many national deafness-related organizations in the National Agenda for Achieving Educational Equality for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students (2005) and by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) in its Educational Services Guidelines for Meeting the Needs of Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, (2006). While CEASD believes that communication access is indispensable to achieve a truly inclusive placement for children who are deaf and hard of hearing, access alone is not sufficient. In order to experience membership and sense of belonging both in the classroom and beyond the school day, deaf and hard of hearing students must be accepted and valued by others in their learning community.

Each of these entities affirms that the deaf child’s communication needs, linguistic needs, and social, personal and cultural needs must be the primary factors in considering the provision of appropriate educational services in least restrictive environment. They further affirm that in order to provide this LRE, deaf and hard of hearing students must have access and inclusion in all placements including neighborhood schools, center-based programs, special day classes, state supported or operated special schools, regional programs, etc.; in other words, the full continuum of alternative placements required by IDEA.

IDEA also specifically recognizes the unique communication needs of deaf and hard of hearing students. Section 300.324(a) (2) (iv) states that the IEP team “*must consider the communication needs of the child and in the case of a child who is deaf or hard of hearing consider the child’s language and communication needs, opportunities for direct communication with peers and professional personnel in the child’s language and communication mode, academic level, and full range of needs including opportunities for direct instruction in the child’s language and communication mode.*” Of special interest here is the notion of direct communication with peers and staff. Among the features and benefits of special schools for deaf and hard of hearing children is that direct communication with peers and staff is present in all aspects of the child’s educational program, both during the school day and in a residential setting. This language rich environment is truly the least restrictive and most enabling for many deaf and hard of hearing students.

CEASD finds the recent trend in our nation to remove special schools from the continuum to be unacceptable, potentially harmful to the child’s human development and clearly counter to the spirit of IDEA. This includes recommendations to combine historically separate schools for the deaf and blind based solely on demographic variables, economic factors or ideological factors without consideration of the unique needs of these sensory impaired but very different learners. When and if consolidation of services to deaf and blind students is considered for reasons of efficiency based on demographics, a comprehensive plan including broad stakeholder representation from both communities must be developed with consideration of the "special factors" identified in IDEA 34 CFR 300.324). Deaf children, like all children with disabilities, are entitled to a free and appropriate educational experience. In order to realize this goal for students who are deaf and hard of hearing, all LEAs and SEAs must provide the full continuum of alternative educational placements, including special schools for children who are deaf. They must be further committed to ensuring that the deaf and hard of hearing student receives a quality, inclusive education in a placement in which he or she experiences a sense of belonging and is an authentic participating member.

[Founded in 1868, CEASD is committed to the promotion of excellence within a continuum of equitable educational opportunities for all children and adults who are deaf or hard of hearing. CEASD advocates on behalf of individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing and supports the efficient and effective management of schools, programs, program service centers, and governmental units offering educational and related programs and services. CEASD's membership consists of over 100 member schools and programs serving over 12,000 deaf and hard of hearing children and their families.]

A CALL TO ACTION

The CEASD urges state governmental leaders, state departments of education, administrators, teachers, support personnel, parents and students to unite for the purpose of preserving the continuum of educational placements and ensuring equity and excellence for students who are deaf and hard of hearing.

State and Local Education Agency Personnel Should:

1. Publicly affirm your support for a full continuum of alternative placements for deaf and hard of hearing students.
2. Provide leadership and develop collaborations to ensure that the full continuum of educational placements is available and that choice of program is guided by the student’s unique language, learning, communication, classroom/school community membership needs and parent/family preference.

3. Encourage consistent collaboration among educational programs for students who are deaf and hard of hearing to ensure that the full continuum is maintained.
4. Develop a state wide written plan with wide stakeholder input to guide the education of deaf students in your state which relies on the use of the National Agenda and the NASDSE Deaf Education Guidelines.

Educational Administrators, Teachers, and Education Support Personnel Should:

1. Advocate strongly for communication and language driven educational options for deaf and hard of hearing students.
2. Embrace the notion that a truly “least restrictive environment” is not a generic concept or a “one-size fits all”, but rather a concept where the child’s individual communication, language and educational needs determine LRE, not the other way around.
3. Understand that the full continuum of alternative placements is fundamental to the provision of a free and appropriate education in the LRE.
4. Act upon the notion that LRE for deaf children means a Language Rich Environment.
5. Actively participate in and provide leadership in encouraging your state to develop a statewide plan for the education of deaf students based on The National Agenda and NASDSE Guidelines.

Parents, Deaf Community Members and Advocacy Groups Should:

1. Be knowledgeable and in touch with the role of the special school in your state.
2. Understand and contribute to the state’s understanding of the importance of the continuum of educational placements for deaf and hard of hearing students.
3. Be advocates to ensure that their unique language, communication, and classroom/school community membership needs are addressed.
4. Actively participate in and provide leadership in encouraging your state to develop a statewide plan for the education of deaf students based on The National Agenda and NASDSE Guidelines.