



Comprehensive Needs Assessment

Delaware Services to Deaf and Hard of Hearing
Children 0-21

A summary of findings from a needs assessment of stakeholders,
families and professionals who work with and on behalf of
Deaf/HH students in Delaware.

**Statewide Programs for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and
Deaf-Blind
6/30/2010**

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Children who attend the parent-infant, site-based program (2010)

I. Purpose of the Project

In terms of education for Deaf/Hard of Hearing children and their families, the state of Delaware has been in flux over the last five to seven years. The reasons for this flux is due, in part to several issues: federal mandates regarding newborn hearing screenings, early intervention and follow up to families, grade level expectations of inclusion for students with disabilities, medical advances and technological benefits, research based practices in education of the Deaf. These changes on a federal, state, legislative and implementation level occurred during a time of leadership change for the school as well as statewide programs.

In June, 2009, a new Director for the Delaware School for the Deaf, Statewide Programs for the Deaf/Hard of Hearing and Statewide Programs for the Deaf/Blind was hired. In November, 2009, a new Coordinator for Statewide Programs was hired. In an effort to consider all elements of programming for Deaf/Hard of Hearing students in the state, Dr. Della Thomas (the Director) and Tina Fredrickson (the Statewide Coordinator) created a series of surveys, interviews, group discussions, etc. with various stakeholders in the state.

The findings of this comprehensive needs assessment have been compiled and organized in the following summary. Furthermore, the findings have been compared to the most recent state-wide focus group results conducted by the Division of Public Health –Delaware Infant Hearing Assessment and Intervention Program Advisory Committee (2008) as well as a report circulated by a Delaware based advocacy group entitled CHOICES (Making Language Choices Available to Delaware Families of Children with Hearing Loss) (2010). Issues surfacing in Delaware were also examined in comparison to the National Agenda: Moving Forward on Achieving Educational

Equality for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students published by the National Deaf Education Project. Common themes and needs that have emerged in the three reports have been identified. Moreover, this summary includes a list of goals for the future that will begin to address those needs identified.

II. Prior Information Collected

Previous focus group results conducted by the Division of Public Health- Delaware Infant Hearing Assessment and Intervention Program advisory Committee in 2008 found the following:

There was pervasive satisfaction with services to children under the age of three, but frustration with consistency of services for children over the age of three. Many parents expressed concerns related to the public school system. In particular, these concerns involved communication related to the IEP and “lack of provision of appropriate accommodations and services” (page 5). Many parents responded that they were affected by significant shortages and high turnover of sign language interpreters and speech pathologists and therapists in the southern counties. Parents also expressed an interest in having a resource directory or information exchange with other families. Finally, there was concern related to insurance coverage of hearing aids and other assistive devices.

Moreover, a position paper authored by the CHOICES advocacy group (<http://choices-delaware.org/>) has identified several issues that exist in Delaware in terms of providing comprehensive education to students (0-21) who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. The group has identified that early intervention is a critical piece in assisting a family in navigating this process. CHOICES writes early intervention is “critically important in choice of communication modality and language” (page 4). This early intervention must also include educational environments that support the modality choice of the

family and are appropriate for the child. Language planning should keep in mind that for the success of the child's language development, parents and children should use the same modality. Lastly, the CHOICES paper also articulates that the current statewide approach to educating Deaf and Hard of Hearing students is inadequate and antiquated (CHOICES, 2010).

The third document considered was the National Agenda: Moving Forward on Achieving Educational Equality for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students. This document, developed by a steering committee comprised of professionals in the field of deafness/hearing loss, articulates eight goals:

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.

By examining research and conversations that have occurred previously as well as the research that we conducted in Delaware throughout the 2009-2010 school year, we were able to develop a

comprehensive picture of where Delaware is poised from a local and national perspective in its service provision.

III. Existing Delaware Code

Another important element to consider is legislative allocations of service provisions. Currently, education of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing is addressed in title 14 of the Delaware Legislative Code. The following items from the code articulate additional positions that are allotted in addition to teaching/paraprofessional positions:

§ 1331. Margaret S. Sterck School Delaware School for the Deaf; special staff.

(c) In addition to subsection (a) of this section, the Sterck School may employ an early intervention teacher who will work with parents and families in New Castle, Kent and Sussex Counties.

(1) The teacher shall work with parents/families and coordinate related services (such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy), as needed.

(2) The teacher shall be a certified teacher of the deaf/hard of hearing.

(3) Provision for salary of the teacher and for expenses required for this job shall be made a part of the appropriation for the Sterck School.

(d) In addition to staff otherwise authorized, the Sterck School for the Hearing Impaired may employ the following:

(1) Director;

(2) Statewide coordinator;

(3) Dean of students (assistant principal rank);

(4) One elementary school leader and one secondary school leader compensated at the assistant principal rank (in lieu of a principal allocated pursuant to § 1307(2) of this title);

- (5) *Educational audiologist;*
- (6) *Speech therapist (in addition to those employed pursuant to paragraph (a)(1) of this section);*
- (7) *Residential advisors not to exceed 6;*
- (8) *Residential monitoring aides not to exceed 4.*

These shall be considered state unit positions and paid according to this title, with appropriate local supplement.

60 Del. Laws, c. 628, § 1; 61 Del. Laws, c. 407, § 3; 61 Del. Laws, c. 409, § 106; 61 Del. Laws, c. 513, § 1; 62 Del. Laws, c. 68, § 42(e); 62 Del. Laws, c. 277, § 11; 63 Del. Laws, c. 80, § 11(f); 63 Del. Laws, c. 322, § 11(f), (g); 64 Del. Laws, c. 90, § 11(d)(xiii); 64 Del. Laws, c. 220, § 6(a); 64 Del. Laws, c. 334, § 11(j)(14); 65 Del. Laws, c. 87, § 11(k)(8); 65 Del. Laws, c. 348, § 12(r)(13); 71 Del. Laws, c. 132, § 352; 71 Del. Laws, c. 180, § 81; [73 Del. Laws, c. 74, §§ 366-368](#); [74 Del. Laws, c. 307, § 332](#); [75 Del. Laws, c. 89, §§ 369, 370](#);

The current provisions in Delaware code allot positions to work with students who are enrolled at the site based program of DSD, but do not address the purview of statewide programs to work with Deaf/Hard of Hearing students who attend their Local Education Agencies (LEAs).

IV. Needs Assessment Structure

In order to determine how Statewide Programs could best help support deaf education in the state of Delaware, anonymous surveys were sent to stakeholders across the state. Included stakeholders were the Delaware chapter of Hands and Voices, Hearing Loss Association of Delaware (HLADE), Delaware Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DODHH), parents, HHPD Specialists/Teachers of Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Special Education Directors, the Delaware-based advocacy group CHOICES, and Child Development Watch (CDW).

The survey was generated on Survey Monkey, but was also available in paper format. Special Education Directors and HHPD specialists were given a survey that focused on how Statewide could support the districts with actual services to students and professional development. The survey given to CDW was for parents of children birth to three and focused on needs related to that age group. All other stakeholders received a survey that focused on where services should originate and what services Statewide should be providing.

The surveys asked for quantitative as well as qualitative information. Participants were asked to choose from a closed set of answers, but were also given the opportunity to write-in comments pertaining to the questions and then general comments at the end of the survey. The Special Education Director and HHPD Specialist Surveys did give an option for self-identification but it was not mandatory.



Deaf/Hard of Hearing teen panel, Delaware's Still Listening Conference, 2010

V. Needs Assessment Results and Qualitative Comments

Itinerant Teacher Survey

Itinerant teachers in the state (10 professionals in 9 districts) were asked to participate. 7 individuals responded they would be **very likely** to receive the following support:

Professional development opportunities in the areas of hearing/vision loss	85.7%
Educational Interpreter Services	71.4%
Audiological testing, monitoring and amplification equipment lending	57.1%
Comprehensive language assessment and participation on MET teams	57.1%
Parent-child home-based services	42.9%

Respondents noted the following professional development topics as being of import:

Reading strategies in the context of the regular education classroom	71.4%
Transition planning (12 th grade – post secondary)	42.9%

Special Education Directors Survey

Special education directors (16/19 respondents) noted that they would be **very likely** to use the following supports:

Audiological testing, monitoring and amplification equipment lending	50%
Itinerant teaching services K-12	56.3%
Educational interpreter services	62.5%
Comprehensive language assessment and participation on MET teams	37.5%

Stakeholders Survey

Stakeholders in the state, members of advocacy groups, governor advisory councils, etc. (52 respondents) identified the following elements as **critical** for providing a Free and Appropriate Public Education for Deaf/Hard of Hearing students:

Comprehensive language assessment and participation on MET teams	80.8%
Parent education	73.1%
Audiological testing, monitoring and amplification equipment lending	67.3%
Resource classroom – preschool services ages 3-5	67.3%
Regular education teacher inservicing and training	65.4%
Itinerant teaching services K-12	64%
Parent-child home based services	63.5%

In addition, the following comments were made:

“The LEAs should be responsible for many of these items, but I do not trust they will do them right for the children to get FAPE. It will all need to be under the leadership of the statewide program... When a family’s needs are not getting met for a child to get educated, everything is important. Children downstate are at a significant disadvantage if diagnosed with HHPD.”

“The state is lacking in therapists trained in working with hearing impaired children 0-3 whose family’s goal is for them to learn to listen and speak. Most school districts as well do not have adequate services to support successful mainstreaming of hearing impaired students.”

“Education for parents that includes an emphasis on establishing long-term language acquisition goals for their child and a discussion about steps required in order to meet that goal.”

“[There needs to be] resource classrooms in the regular ed setting for these kiddos to help them mainstream into the regular ed setting.”

“FM systems that are specific to the child’s needs – many schools assume that every child can function if there is a microphone and do not always offer individual receivers for children.”

“It would be wonderful if each school district had a deaf/hard of hearing teacher regardless of the number of Deaf/HoH children in the district. Just one child should be reason enough to hire an itinerant teacher.”

Interviews and Qualitative Information

In an email correspondence with the ANSD/CI Program Coordinator from the AI DuPont Hospital for Children, the following areas were identified as barriers to service provision for children 0-3 and their families:

- Helping CDW coordinators and other early intervention specialists make early, consistent contact with families and learn how to guide and educate parents of children with hearing loss in an unbiased manner.
- Finding the providers for appropriate services - especially in Southern Delaware.

VI. Common Themes that have Emerged

Among the various sources of information, there are overt threads tying together the needs of DHH students and their families in the state of Delaware. These threads also echo the areas identified in the National Agenda (noted parenthetically):

- **0-3 parent education and therapies** (Goal One – Early Identification and Intervention, Goal Three - Collaborative Partnerships)
- **Early interventionists who have breadth and depth expert knowledge of the needs of DHH students and their families** (Goal One – Early Identification and Intervention, Goal Three – Collaborative Partnerships, Goal Five – Placement and Programs)
- **Audiological testing, monitoring and amplification equipment lending** (Goal Two-Communication, Language and Literacy, Goal Four – Accountability, High Stakes Testing and Standards Based Environments, Goal Six – Technology)
- **Itinerant teaching services K-12** (Goal Two-Communication, Language and Literacy, Goal Three – Collaborative Partnerships, Goal Four – Accountability, High Stakes Testing and Standards Based Environments, Goal Five – Placement and Programs, Goal Six – Technology, Goal Seven – Professional Standards and Personnel Preparation)

- **Comprehensive language assessment and participation on MET teams** (Goal Two-Communication, Language and Literacy, Goal Three – Collaborative Partnerships, Goal Four – Accountability, High Stakes Testing and Standards Based Environments, Goal Five – Placement and Programs, Goal Seven – Professional Standards and Personnel Preparation)
- **Educational interpreter services** (Goal Two-Communication, Language and Literacy, Goal Three – Collaborative Partnerships, Goal Five – Placement and Programs)

VII. Goals for the Future

Based on the needs of the children and families of the state of Delaware, the office for Statewide Programs for the Deaf/Hard of Hearing will concentrate on the following tasks:

- Creation of Statewide Advisory Committee (early Fall 2010)
- Publishing a state of Delaware Strategic Plan for serving students who are D/HH that coincides with the National Agenda (January, 2010)
- Creation of specific positions to work in Early Intervention – A Southern teacher, a Northern teacher, a Speech Language Pathologist and an Educational Audiologist (Fall 2010)
- Discussions with legislators regarding legislative changes to support a systematic, statewide approach to teaching DHH students, several models being considered (Ongoing)
- 2010-2011 Discussions with school districts regarding partnerships to provide teachers for classrooms that emphasize a range of communicative modalities that support language acquisition
- Annual Report to stakeholders issued October of each year to identify progress



VIII. References

Choices Delaware. (2010). *Expanding options for early deaf education in Delaware*. Retrieved from <http://choicesdelaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/Position-Paper-Part-1.pdf>.

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