



Council on Education of the Deaf

Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf (A.G. Bell)
Association of College Educators – Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ACE-DHH)
American Society for Deaf Children (ASDC)
Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf (CEASD)
National Association of the Deaf (NAD)
American Sign Language Teachers Association (ASLTA)
The OPTION Schools
National Consortium for ASL/English Early Childhood Bilingual Education

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To the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education:

I am writing on behalf of the Council on Education of the Deaf (CED), a national accrediting body made up of eight major national organizations and devoted to the education of D/deaf and hard of hearing students. Programs accredited by CED meet or exceed the highest national CAEP and CEC standards in our field. In addition, CED-accredited programs meet an additional DHH-specific knowledge and skill standards that document their high quality preparation.

This letter is to describe a national crisis that we are experiencing in deaf education. There is a significant shortage of qualified teachers due to a long-term trend which has been intensified by high rates of retirement. A study by Dolman (2010) documented a nationwide reduction in deaf education teacher training programs over the past 20 years. A high point occurred in 1985 when there were 81 programs. This number has decreased recently to 62 with more programs announcing their likely closure. The result has led to a substantial reduction in numbers of deaf education graduates. The largest group of 1,680 graduated in 1982 which decreased to 737 in 2009 representing a 56% decline (Dolman, 2010). A recent google poll of deaf education programs showed that approximately 450 graduated for the past two years with 300 anticipated for 2020. This represents just 10.8% of the graduating class size of 1982.

In contrast, enrollment of D/deaf and hard of hearing students has remained quite stable at 1.3 – 1.1% of the special education population since 1993 (U. S. Department of Education, 1995; 2016). Available IDEA data show that services were provided to 64,110 D/deaf and hard-of-hearing students during 1993-94 with 64,812 students being served in 2017-18 (U.S. Dept. of Education, 1995, 2017). An important instruction impact is seen in the increasing ratios of D/deaf and hard-of-hearing students to teachers. In 1976 this ratio was at its lowest of 30:1 but has increased every year thereafter with the most recent data (2006) showing a ratio of 56:1 (Dolman, 2010). Given the current number of D/dhh students and the number of graduates being only 54% to 43% of the 1994 levels, these ratios could be expected to rise to 144:1 this year.

These trends are exacerbated by current retirement rates with the largest impacts to be on health care and education professions (Dohm, 2000). Employment demographics indicate that baby-boomers made up approximately 40% of the labor market in 2008 with retirements between 2010 and 2020 expected to be the largest since WWII (Aaronson & Meckel, 2008). The overall stability of the D/deaf and hard-of-hearing

student population also suggests that use of cochlear implants, improved hearing aids, interpreters and captioning services in classrooms, and access to the general education curriculum are not substantially reducing the numbers of these students who continue to experience substantial, negative, disability-related effects on their academic performance, a requirement to receive special education services (IDEA, 2004).

These data suggest that many D/deaf/hard- students are unserved or underserved, despite needing specialized instruction delivered by qualified teachers of the deaf. Retention of existing teacher preparation program is an extremely important step in stabilizing and reversing these patterns in that there are comparatively few programs nationwide. The federal Office of Special Education Programs requires that D/deaf and hard of hearing students have programming that addresses their unique language and communication needs (IDEA, 2004) which can only be provided by well-prepared teachers such as those that graduate from CED-accredited deaf education programs: Each graduate must pass DHH-specific performance-based standards across language/communication and curricular content areas. Graduates of these programs are highly sought after by districts in order to meet IDEA requirements.

The Council on Education of the Deaf recognizes the administrative difficulties in supporting deaf education programs which are relatively small compared to many other degree programs. CED is taking aggressive action to address these patterns of decreasing enrollment trends. Our candidates are typically guaranteed a job upon graduation, a critical selling point to program candidates and their families. Until these enrollment trends are mitigated, we ask for your assistance in continuing your support of existing programs in order that D/deaf and hard of hearing students across the country continue to have access to the highly qualified teachers that they need, and that the federal government requires.

Sincerely,

Pamela Luft

Pamela Luft, Ph.D.
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