

**Dr. David Geeslin**  
*President*  
Superintendent/CEO  
Indiana School for the Deaf  
1200 East 42<sup>nd</sup> Street  
Indianapolis, IN 46205  
Voice/Relay: 317-550-4807  
VP: 317-550-1983  
Email: [DGeeslin@isd.k12.in.us](mailto:DGeeslin@isd.k12.in.us)



**Barbara Raimondo, Esq.**  
*Executive Director*  
P.O. Box 116  
Washington Grove, MD 20880  
Voice: 202-999-2204  
VP: 202-866-6248  
Email: [ceasd@ceasd.org](mailto:ceasd@ceasd.org)  
[www.ceasd.org](http://www.ceasd.org)

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Pete Donovan  
Executive Director  
Montana Board of Public Education

By email: [PDonovan@mt.gov](mailto:PDonovan@mt.gov)

Dear Mr. Donovan:

On behalf of the Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf (CEASD), I write regarding the opening of the position of superintendent of the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind. I focus on the qualifications necessary for the superintendent of the deaf school. Similar qualifications are necessary for the leader of the blind school as well.

It is well documented that deaf students have diverse language, communication, and learning needs and as a result, require services from specialized professionals with experience with deaf students,<sup>1</sup> access to role models,<sup>2</sup> and support for families.<sup>3</sup>

To ensure high quality services typically a school or program for deaf students is administered by a professional with a credentialed deaf education background. CEASD believes that any such superintendent should:

- Know the demographics of the deaf and hard of hearing population. It is estimated that up to 40 percent of deaf and hard of hearing children have an additional disability, over half come from ethnic minority backgrounds,

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<sup>1</sup> Knors, H. & Marschark, M. (2014). *Teaching deaf learners: Psychological and developmental foundations*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

<sup>2</sup> Oliva, G. A., Lytle, L. R., Hopper, M., & Ostrove, J. M. (2016). From social periphery to social centrality: Building social capital for deaf and hard-of-hearing students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In M. Marschark, V. Lampropoulou, & E. Skordilis (Eds.), *Diversity in deaf education* (pp. 325–354). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Yoshinaga-Itano, C. (2013). Principles and guidelines for early intervention after confirmation that a child is deaf or hard of hearing. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 19, 143-175.

and 38 percent experience low socio-economic status.<sup>4</sup> The superintendent must understand the interplay of all these factors, the unique challenges they present to schools, and evidenced-based approaches to address them.

- Be well versed in the research on how deaf and hard of hearing students learn. It is said that “deaf children are not hearing children who cannot hear.”<sup>5</sup> Rather, they have unique learning needs and styles based on the fact that they are deaf. The superintendent must be familiar with teaching methods and strategies that have proven to be effective with deaf and hard of hearing students.
- Be aware of the critical role of early access and exposure to a natural language on language learning, literacy development and subsequent academic progress. Many deaf children in school today were identified late (after age 6 months) and/or did not receive language-based appropriate early intervention in a timely manner from knowledgeable professionals. This leads to language delays and gaps that impact learning. The administrator must be aware of the impact of these delays and gaps on the child’s cognitive growth.
- Understand appropriate evaluation of deaf and hard of hearing students and of the schools that serve them. Assessments that have not been normed on deaf children have not been shown to be valid or reliable for them. Therefore, any assessment data on deaf and hard of hearing children should be approached with extreme caution.
- Understand the importance of addressing the whole child and the role that social-emotional development plays in helping deaf and hard of hearing children develop self-esteem and self-confidence. Very often deaf and hard of hearing children are deprived of age-appropriate peers and deaf role models, which can have a devastating effect on their social emotional growth. Direct communication with many adults and peers is important to learning and social-emotional development. The superintendent needs to be knowledgeable about ways to promote whole child growth.
- Value the key role of the deaf community and of parents in supporting deaf and hard of hearing students. Members of the deaf community bring their own life experience to educational systems, making these systems more responsive in culturally competent ways. Parents bring their own strengths to their child’s education, and at the same time, require their own specialized resources and services. Both of these groups are integral to deaf children’s success. The superintendent must be experienced in working with these communities.

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<sup>4</sup> Gallaudet Research Institute (April 2011). *Regional and National Summary Report of Data from 2009-10 Annual Survey of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children and Youth*. Washington, DC: GRI, Gallaudet University.

<sup>5</sup> Marschark, M. (2018). *Raising and Educating a Deaf Child, third edition*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

- Be able to establish strong relationships with other key education providers in the state. Personnel in many education settings are not aware of the needs of deaf and hard of hearing students and how they can be met. "They don't know what they don't know." The new superintendent will have a role in educating the educators, so that they know when to ask for expertise and support.

If there is any way CEASD can be helpful in the search for a new superintendent, please do not hesitate to ask.

We wish you the best as you move forward in this endeavor.

The Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf is an association of schools and educational programs involved with the education of deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Barbara Raimondo".

Barbara Raimondo, Esq.  
Executive Director