

**Addressing Challenges to the Pool of IDEA-qualified  
Teachers of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students  
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The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 requires that each deaf/hard-of-hearing (DHH) student's Individualized Education Plan address "special considerations" regarding their unique language and communication needs. A review of states' IEPs indicated that across the 50 states and the District of Columbia, few states addressed this issue. The mean score across states was 1.56 out of 4 possible points (Luft & Amirazzuman, 2018). Twenty-eight states scored with a mean of less than 1 point indicating that a majority of DHH students are at risk of not having educational programs that address their unique needs. Two states had no IEP elements that address these "special considerations."

A survey of states licensure requirements for teachers of DHH students (Luft, Fischgrund, Waxman, Alexandrino, & Jordan, 2018) showed that 43 states required some type of disability-specific licensure test but only 8 required communication proficiency, in many cases some type of sign language. Nineteen states did not list requirements for licensure or endorsement specific to working with DHH students. This reaffirms a concern that in many states, teachers of DHH students do not have the foundational instructional skills specific to work with DHH students and/or have not graduated from programs requiring them to demonstrate proficiencies in addressing their students' unique language and communication needs. Of further concern is that none of the national accrediting bodies review Deaf Education programs to ascertain the outcomes-based and proficiency measures that indicate the skills of their candidates in meeting this expectation.

The Council on Education of the Deaf has a specific standard and rubrics that require accredited programs to document the procedures and candidate scores that demonstrate their proficiency.

***Standard 1.2.2 Language and Communication:*** *The specialized portion of curriculum prepares candidates to meet the unique language and communication needs of D/HH students. The curriculum should include, as appropriate to program objectives, experience, coursework and training in skills that optimize language development, learning and literacy.*

A growing issue is the need to fill the increasing shortages in the supply of teachers of DHH students. Dolman (2010) documented a nationwide reduction in deaf education preparation programs over the past 20 years. A high point occurred in 1985 with 81 programs, decreasing recently to 62 programs with more announcing their upcoming closures. The largest group of deaf education graduates was in 1982 with 1,680 which decreased to 737 in 2009, and representing a 56% decline (Dolman, 2010). A recent google poll of deaf education programs showed that approximately 600 are expected to graduate each of the next two years, representing just 36% of the graduating class size of 1982.

In contrast, enrollment of DHH students has remained quite stable at 1.3 to 1.1% of the special education population (U. S. Department of Education, 1995; 2016). IDEA data indicate that services were provided to 64,110 DHH students during 1993-94 and to 64,812 students in 2017-18 (U.S. Dept. of Education, 1995, 2017), suggesting relatively stable and ongoing needs for disability-specific services for DHH students. The closure of programs has led to substantially increasing ratios of DHH students to teachers, with the lowest occurring in 1976 at 30:1. This has increased every year thereafter with recent data (2006) showing a ratio of 56:1 (Dolman, 2010). Given the current number of DHH students and the shrinking number of graduates, these ratios could be expected to rise substantially.

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 reduction in teacher training programs and deaf education graduates on conjunction with the overall stability of the DHH student population indicates a substantial deficit in the number of teachers available to work with DHH students, verified by the number of requests for teachers. These outcomes regarding the significantly reduced pool of applicants in conjunction with state data on the relatively poor compliance in addressing the IDEA 2004 language and communication considerations on the IEP, and the frequent lack of state required communication proficiencies or disability-specific licensure suggests that many DHH students are not receiving the quality of instruction as mandated under the ESSA 2015 and IDEA 2004 legislations.

Districts can no longer rely upon state teacher preparation programs, licensed by the state given the growing number of program closures. Neither can they rely on state licensure requirements when reviewing candidates from out-of-state, for ensuring that applicants have the necessary training to meet the educational needs of DHH students and to write appropriate IEP plans that address the four “special considerations” required by IDEA 2004.

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