

The Importance of Critical Mass in the Education of Children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing

The goal of discussions related to appropriate services to students who are deaf and hard of hearing is to ensure the appropriate leveraging of available resources and to maximize students' potential for success. A critical issue related to this goal is whether a student has access to a program that provides a critical mass of communication, age and cognitive peers, and whether the student has access to language proficient teachers and staff who communicate directly in the student's language and communication mode. [See National Agenda Goal #2]

The IDEA regulations require that a student's IEP team consider the following when developing an IEP for students who are deaf or hard of hearing: [34 CFR 300.324(a)(2)(iv)]

- Language and communication needs
- Opportunities for direct communication with peers and professionals
- Academic level
- Full range of needs including opportunities for direct instruction in the child's language and communication mode

In general an ideal critical mass of students would be approximately 100 but in rural areas of the state that number might be lower and in urban areas of the state a number much higher is likely to greatly improve the opportunities to reach the desired goal. Because of the low incidence of severe to profound hearing loss in the general population it is likely that a shared services arrangement (SSA) that serves districts with a total population of less than 100,000 students will not be able to provide the critical mass needed to reach this goal. In rural areas of the state it may be unrealistic to look for a total of 100,000 students but in urban areas of the state a number closer to 200,000 might be ideal. In order to maximize access to critical mass, an SSA that serves more than 200,000 students is more likely to meet the desired goal than two smaller SSAs with 100,000 students in each SSA.

Resources

[The National Agenda: Moving Forward on Achieving Educational Equality for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students](#)

Goal #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.

Goal Statement #2.7: Deaf and Hard of Hearing children will have as an integral, required part of their educational program, access to a critical mass of age, cognitive, and communication/language peers and teachers and educational staff who are proficient in the individual child's language and communication mode.

Rationale: No child should go to school without access to a sufficient number of age and language peers, role models, and educational staff who can communicate directly with them. No children in this nation should go to school wondering whether they will have such access. Teachers, peers, and other adults in the school environment should therefore provide deaf and hard of hearing students with rich and on-going opportunities for direct communication in a manner that supports meaningful participation and interaction, across all components of the educational program. It is not always possible, of course, to provide a large enough numbers of age and language peers for many deaf and hard of hearing children, especially those who use ASL or signing systems or who live in rural areas. It is because of this fact that the educational system must be sensitive to alternative ways to provide such access.

IDEA Regulations

34 CFR 300.324 Development, review, and revision of IEP.

(a) Development of IEP--

(2) Consideration of special factors. The IEP Team must—

(iv) 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 communications 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;

Statistics

<http://www.asha.org/public/hearing/disorders/children.htm>

<http://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/statistics/quick.htm>

Texas Education Code

Sec. 29.305. LANGUAGE MODE PEERS. If practicable and not in conflict with any admission, review, and dismissal committee recommendations, a student who is deaf or hard of hearing must have an education in the company of a sufficient number of peers using the same language mode and with whom the student can communicate directly. If practicable, the peers must be of the same or approximately the same age and ability.

Added by Acts 1995, 74th Leg., ch. 260, Sec. 1, eff. May 30, 1995.