



Executive Summary

Arkansas Deaf Education Task Force Report

In the summer of 2004, a group of individuals came together to address issues related to the education of students who are deaf/hard of hearing in the state of Arkansas. The group included individuals who are deaf/hard of hearing, parents of children who are deaf/hard of hearing, and professionals. Everyone present at the first meeting of what would become the Arkansas Deaf Education Task Force wanted to see educational and communication outcomes improve for students who are deaf/hard of hearing statewide. This common goal helped to unify a group that represented many points along the communication modality continuum. The primary issue they identified was the right and necessity to develop communication and language - the foundation for any educational growth.

The Task Force is proud that Arkansas is only the fourth state to develop a comprehensive plan to address the educational needs for children who are deaf/hard of hearing statewide. The reports from the states of Colorado and New Mexico served as a foundation and springboard for the Arkansas plan.

The Task Force created the following set of core beliefs, vision, and mission for their work:



Core Beliefs

We believe that every child who is deaf/hard of hearing in the state of Arkansas:

- has the right to a high standard education that prepares them for postsecondary education and/or successful careers as adults.
- deserves the earliest possible intervention that provides a highly qualified support system composed of parents, medical personnel and other professionals.
- has the right to a learning environment that utilizes highly qualified educational personnel and is communication rich, peer supported, and parent involved.

Vision

We envision a statewide learning network where all children who are deaf/hard of hearing will have a critical mass of communicating peers, a communication rich learning environment, highly qualified educational personnel, state of the art technology, parental support and involvement, and academic achievement at or above state proficiency levels.

Mission

We commit to identify and advocate for the necessary resources including funds, training for personnel, support systems for children and parents, and continued evaluation and improvement of education for children who are deaf/hard of hearing until our vision is a reality.



During the months of July, 2004 through February, 2005 the Task Force met and delved deeply into the current status of services for children from birth to 21 years of age. The Task Force met face-to-face many times during this time. In addition, Task Force members worked individually, as well as in small groups outside of these meetings to help accomplish the goals of the group.

The members of the Arkansas Deaf Education Task Force are:

Betty Abrams, Parent, Services Coordinator, Telecommunications Access Program, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services
Sherrill Archer, ABC Program Coordinator, Div. of Child Care and Early Childhood Education
Dr. Pamela Broadston, Program Coordinator for Deaf Education, UALR
Barbara Caldwell, Parent, Junction City
Louise Cremeen, State Coordinator, Self Help for Hard of Hearing People
Dr. Marcella Dalla Rosa, Interim Superintendent, Arkansas School for the Deaf
Idela Davis, Parent, Services Coordinator for Early Intervention, DHS
Dr. Donna Fisher Smiley, Audiologist/Assistant Professor, UCA
Debra Goldman, Parent, Pine Bluff
Marcia Harding, Associate Director, Special Education, Arkansas Department of Education
Dr. Terri Hardy, Education Policy Advisor to the Governor
Ray James, OSEP Project Coordinator, Interpreter Education Program, UALR
Holly Ketchum, VR Counselor for Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Little Rock, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services
Traci Ketchum, Parent, Little Rock
Patti Freemyer Martin, Director, Audiology and Speech Pathology, Arkansas Children's Hospital
Daryl McJunkins, Special Education Supervisor, Nashville/Mineral Springs School Districts
Jan Sims, Program Manager, Family Counseling, Centers for Youth and Families
Dr. Susan Skinner Holt, Program Director, Learning and Evaluation Center, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services
Cassandra Steele, Coordinator of Speech & Hearing Services, Little Rock School District
Myra Taff-Watson, Associate Professor, Interpreter Education Program, UALR
Gillis Ward, State Coordinator, ESHI, Arkansas Department of Education

Statement of the Problems Identified

"Communication impacts all aspects of human functioning, from academic to social, from work to pleasure, from social-emotional to intellectual. The ability to understand and produce language defines us as humans and provides us with the means to become literate adults. The unique nature and consequence of deafness or hearing loss is that it can separate deaf or hard of hearing children/students from communication with others, and subsequently starve the student from active and passive learning of both academic and social skills. Our laws need to recognize communication as a fundamental human right, and to make it a priority in our educational system."
(Colorado Department of Education, 2002, pg. 11)

This commentary and the National Deaf Agenda helped to identify areas of concern in Arkansas. The Task Force studied the continuum of services available for children/students who are deaf/hard of hearing and their families in the following areas:

- **Early Identification and Intervention**
- **Language and Communication Access**
- **Collaborative Partnerships**
- **Accountability, High Stakes Testing and Standards Based Environments**
- **Placement, Programs and Services**
- **Technology**
- **Professional Standards and Personnel Preparation**
- **Research**

Brief Overview of Current National Profile

It is well documented that the academic achievement for individuals who are deaf/hard of hearing is much lower than that of their hearing peers as evidenced by the following data:

- ✓ Thirty percent (30%) of all children and youth who are deaf/hard of hearing leave school functionally illiterate as compared to 1% among hearing children and youth (Conrad, 1979; Marschark, 1997; Waters & Doehring, 1990)
- ✓ Between the ages of 8 and 18, children and youth who are deaf/hard of hearing gain only 1.5 years in reading skills (Allen, 1986; Traxler, 2000)
- ✓ Children and youth who are deaf/hard of hearing graduate from high school with average reading skills ranging from a 2.8 to 4.5 grade level as compared to a 10th grade (or higher) reading level for their hearing counterparts (Allen, 1986; Traxler, 2000)
- ✓ Less than one-half of 18 year old students who are deaf/hard of hearing leaving high school reach a 5th grade level in reading and writing (Traxler, 2000)
- ✓ Only 8% of students who are deaf/hard of hearing graduate from college (COED, 1988)
- ✓ Approximately 1/3 of all adults who are deaf rely on some form of governmental assistance and the average income of adults who are deaf is 40-60% of their hearing counterparts (NDEP, 2000). It is clear that the problems associated with the lack of appropriate education of children who are deaf/hard of hearing eventually become society's problems compounded by long-term monetary implications (Siegel, 2000).

Current Status of Education for Children/Students who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing in Arkansas

In order to understand the need for the proposed recommendations of the Task Force, a clear picture of the current status of education for children/students who are deaf/hard of hearing in Arkansas is needed. In light of evidence that suggests that early intervention potentially holds the key to success for children/students who are deaf and hard of hearing (e.g., Yoshinaga-Itano, 1998), the discussion of the current status of education will include the provision of services to children/students from birth through graduation from high school.

Problem Statement #1: Despite a successful newborn hearing screening program through the Arkansas Department of Health, the missing piece of the early identification process continues to be infants who do not pass the hospital hearing screening and do not return for follow up testing.

*When we were on our way out of the hospital, after my husband had the car pulled around and I was on my way out the door, they said that our baby didn't pass her hearing exam and that I needed to take her to a specialist to make sure her hearing was fine. They said that since she was a c-section baby, she probably had fluid in her ears and that caused her to fail...when I got home with my baby, I thought surely she could hear.... she had us fooled for a good long while. **Parent of a child with a moderate to severe hearing loss***

Problem Statement #2: Early intervention services (birth to 3 years) to families of children who are deaf/hard of hearing are fragmented and inconsistent and often are provided by personnel with little to no expertise in working with infants/children who are deaf/hard of hearing.

*We had to travel to several different places in the United States to learn about different opinions and options—we were very confused as to what to do. **Parent***

Problem Statement #3: Required transitions at age 3 years and at kindergarten are not seamless and interrupt the flow of services.

*When he turns three, he is no longer under the health co-op program and they'll send him to something like a pre-school. That's what I'm trying to still figure out myself. **Parent***

Problem Statement #4: There is a lack of reliable, realistic data regarding children/students who are deaf/hard of hearing in Arkansas.

It is difficult to determine what is needed if we have no idea of the current status. Task Force Member

Problem Statement #5: There are limited program options around the state.

I moved to St. Louis with our child for two years to get appropriate services, and my husband and other children remained in Arkansas. Parent

Problem Statement #6: Personnel who work with infants/children/students who are deaf/hard of hearing lack experience and expertise.

If a parent prefers for their child to go to school in their hometown, just make sure that the kids have good interpreters, certified interpreters that can really interpret in school—that can understand what the teachers are saying and what the friends are saying-- so the child is not isolated with no interpreter and the teacher talking and everyone talking. Student, Arkansas School for the Deaf

Problem Statement #7: The academic expectations for children/students who are deaf/hard of hearing are substandard as compared to the academic standards for children/students with typical hearing.

I had one teacher tell me that although my daughter was making A's in first and second grade the I should expect C's and D's by the time she was in fifth or sixth grade because children who are hearing impaired just cannot handle the vocabulary and rigor of some courses. But, my daughter proved them wrong! Parent

Problem Statement #8: Families of children/students who are deaf/hard of hearing do not receive the support/education that they need.

The most important teacher for the child early on is the parent...so the parents need to educate themselves and then they can educate their child. Parent

Action to Be Taken in 2005

Children/students who are deaf/hard of hearing in Arkansas and their families deserve more. The current status of education for these children/students in Arkansas raises several concerns including, but not limited to, a lack of quality standards for provision of services to children/students who are deaf and hard of hearing as well as a lack of appropriately trained personnel to provide services to children/students who are deaf/hard of hearing. After identifying these major problem areas, the Task Force determined that there are two areas that need the most immediate attention during 2005: ***Early Intervention and Collaborative Partnerships***.

Detailed action plans have been developed and will be available in the report to be published in March 2005. A new group, the Arkansas Coalition for Education of Children who are Deaf/Hard Of Hearing (ACED), will begin to implement the action plans set forth by the Task Force. This group will consist of some of the existing Task Force members as well as additional stakeholders who will be able to assist in the accomplishment of the action plans until there is a statewide learning network where all children/students who are deaf/hard of hearing have a critical mass of communicating peers, a communication rich learning environment, highly qualified educational personnel, state of the art technology, parental support and involvement, and academic achievement at or above state proficiency levels.