

Education subcommittee report
Meeting 4-5-2022

The subcommittee welcomes three new members: Felicia Rutledge, Shawna Goldhammer, and Megan Johnson.

Subcommittee chairperson, Eric Wilcox, provided public comment at the meeting of the Interim Joint Legislative Subcommittee on Education in January 2022. His comment emphasized the elements of the State Plan for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Speech Impaired that are relevant to education: an inadequate number of interpreters in the state, the link between insufficient staffing in schools with experienced educators of the deaf and poor language development outcomes for deaf and hard of hearing children, and improvement in post-secondary education transition outcomes for deaf and hard of hearing children.

In following up on this testimony to the legislature, the subcommittee held a discussion on factors contributing to an insufficient number teachers of the deaf, speech pathologists and interpreters with adequate training and experience in working with deaf and hard of hearing children in schools throughout the state.

Key problems that arose from this discussion include:

- There is nobody at the Nevada Department of Education with any expertise in deaf education.
- Interpreters are classified as aids, rather than professionals, therefore in some schools the interpreters are called upon to perform tasks unrelated to interpreting.
- Interpreter pay is also inadequate in spite of being the only classified employees in the schools required to have a special certification to perform their job function.
- Deaf education is often lumped together with special education and there is little understanding the unique challenge that language acquisition plays in educating deaf and hard of hearing children.
- Few teachers of the deaf are being hired who are proficient in ASL, nor is there sufficient understanding among those doing the hiring of the different skills required of teachers of the deaf depending on the mode of communication that will be used in the classroom.
- In some states there is expertise to vet the ASL proficiency of teachers of the deaf prior to hiring them to teach in a classroom where ASL is the primary mode of communication of the students.
- There is no program to educate teachers of the deaf in Nevada, so interested students must go out of state or pursue on-line education from an out-of-state provider. Also, the pathway to appropriate licensure for teachers of the deaf is unclear to many interested teachers and administrators.

Some specific recommendations that were made during the discussion included:

- Direct advocacy to the legislature on the severe impacts of language deprivation from insufficient support for language development.
- Advocating for the acquisition of some expertise in deaf education at the state level.
- Advocating for the development of a pathway for educating teachers of the deaf in-state and strengthening of the in-state interpreter training programs.
- Advocating for a reclassification of educational interpreters as professionals rather than classroom aids, and pay that is commensurate with their special training and certification requirements.

The education subcommittee seeks additional input from Commissioners, ally/partners, and the public to shape a comprehensive strategy to resolve these problems.