

NEVADA COMMISSION FOR PERSONS WHO ARE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

(DRAFT) Position on Education for People who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Education is a fundamental right for all individuals, and for people who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing (D/HH), access to quality education from birth through adulthood is essential to ensuring independence, inclusion, and equal opportunities for success in society. However, many Deaf or Hard of Hearing (D/HH), Deaf/Blind (DB), and Deaf/Hard of Hearing+ (D/HH+) individuals face significant barriers in accessing educational opportunities, particularly when it comes to language access, support services, and funding.

The Nevada Commission for Persons who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing advocates for policies and initiatives that address these barriers, promote equitable access to education, and ensure that D/HH, D/B, and D/HH+ individuals have the resources and support needed to succeed academically and professionally.

The Need for Education Access for D/HH Individuals

1. Early Education and Language Access

- Early access to language, particularly American Sign Language (ASL), is crucial for D/HH, D/B, and D/HH+ children to develop communication skills, cognitive abilities, and a strong foundation for academic success.
- For children who are ASL users, consistent language access is necessary to ensure they thrive in an educational environment and develop to their full potential.
- Schools must provide language-rich environments and support early language development through ASL, or other communication methods as needed.

2. Access to Educational Interpreters

- Educational interpreters play a vital role in ensuring that D/HH, D/B, and D/HH+ students have equal access to classroom instruction, extracurricular activities, and school events.
- There is a nationwide shortage of qualified educational interpreters, leading to significant barriers in communication and educational participation for D/HH, D/B, and D/HH+ students.
- Hiring and training more qualified educational interpreters is essential to ensuring full participation in the learning process for D/HH, D/B, and D/HH+ students across all grade levels.

3. Increased Funding for Education

- Adequate funding is essential to support the educational needs of D/HH students. Schools often struggle to provide necessary accommodations, including interpreters, specialized staff, and communication tools, due to limited financial resources.
- There must be a concerted effort to increase funding specifically designated for the educational needs of D/HH, D/B, and D/HH+ students, ensuring that schools can provide equitable educational opportunities.

4. Lifelong Education and Adult Services

- Education for D/HH, D/B, and D/HH+ individuals should not end with high school graduation. Access to post-secondary education, vocational training, and lifelong learning opportunities is equally important for D/HH, D/B, and D/HH+ adults to achieve personal and professional success.
- Programs should be developed to ensure that D/HH, D/B, and D/HH+ individuals have access to the support services they need throughout their lives to continue learning and pursuing career goals.

Policy Recommendations

1. Increase Language Access in Early Education

- Ensure all early education programs provide access to qualified ASL interpreters, deaf educators, or other appropriate communication methods for D/HH, D/B, and D/HH+ children.
- Promote the integration of ASL into early childhood education programs to ensure language access from the start of a child's academic journey.

2. Expand the Pool of Qualified Educational Interpreters

- Invest in interpreter training programs to expand the number of qualified educational interpreters in Nevada, especially in underserved areas.
- Provide scholarships or incentives for individuals pursuing careers in educational interpreting to help address the shortage of qualified professionals.

3. Increase Funding for D/HH Educational Services

- Advocate for the allocation of increased state and federal funding to support services and accommodations for D/HH, D/B, and D/HH+ students, including the hiring of interpreters, speech-language pathologists, and other essential staff.
- Ensure that funding is dedicated to providing accessible materials and technology that support the learning needs of D/HH, D/B, and D/HH+ students.

4. Support Post-Secondary Education and Vocational Training

- Ensure that post-secondary institutions provide appropriate accommodations and support services for D/HH students to succeed in higher education.
- Expand access to vocational training programs and adult education opportunities for D/HH individuals to improve employment outcomes.

Proposed Next Steps (Call to Action): Ensuring access to education for people who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing is not only a matter of legal compliance but also a vital component of fostering inclusion, equity, and equal opportunities. Policymakers, educators, and community leaders must work together to prioritize education for D/HH, D/B, and D/HH+ individuals by addressing the unique challenges they face, including language access, interpreter availability, and adequate funding.

Conclusion: Access to quality education is essential for D/HH, D/B, and D/HH+ individuals to thrive academically, socially, and professionally. By increasing language access, expanding the pool of qualified educational interpreters, and securing adequate funding for educational services, Nevada can create an inclusive and supportive educational environment that empowers D/HH individuals to reach their full potential.