

## California Department of Education

### **Position Statement on Access to Language for Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing**

In California, there are approximately 14,000 students, ages birth to 22, who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. The California *Education Code (EC)*, Section 56000.5, notes that, “Many hard-of-hearing and deaf children use an appropriate communication mode, sign language, which may be their primary language, while others express and receive language orally and aurally, with or without visual signs or cues.” Further, *EC* 56000.5, states that, “It is essential that hard-of-hearing and deaf children, like all children, have an education in which their unique communication mode is respected, utilized, and developed to an appropriate level of proficiency.” In support of *EC* 56000.5, this document provides clarification for the California Department of Education’s position supporting the right of children to have access to a complete language, visual or spoken, as appropriate, from birth. In addition, this document clarifies the right of parents to receive comprehensive and balanced information about all language opportunities, communication tools, and educational approaches available, and to make informed decisions about which language(s) best meet the needs of their child and their family.

#### **What we know**

- Historically, most Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) children struggle academically, partly because they often have delayed language development, which may result in academic challenges.
- Being Deaf or Hard of Hearing does not cause language delay; it is language deprivation, caused by inability to access language, that causes language delay.
- Language and cognition are closely related; thus, language deprivation may lead to both language and cognitive delays.
- When children are identified and enrolled in appropriate Early Start services by six months of age, they can develop language skills commensurate with their hearing peers and with their cognitive abilities.

- Sign language promotes and enhances the acquisition of spoken language and cognition.
- Spoken language and enhanced listening capabilities are possible for increasing numbers of children born Deaf or Hard of Hearing, as advances in technology improve listening devices.

### **The California Department of Education**

- Believes that a strong language foundation is necessary to access education.
- Emphasizes that the purpose of Early Start for children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing is to ensure that these children acquire age-appropriate language skills to enable them to do well in school and career.
- Emphasizes that Deaf and Hard of Hearing programs have a responsibility to provide on-going assessment of language development, and work with families to provide services that will lead to age-appropriate language development.
- Believes that children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing have the right to receive appropriate services that will provide them with exposure to fully accessible natural languages – American Sign Language (ASL), and spoken English (or other spoken language).
- Accepts and respects all languages.
- Accepts and respects all communication tools (i.e., Cued Speech, Signing Exact English, Conceptually Accurate Signed English, Sign Supported Speech, Simultaneous Communication).
- Accepts and respects all educational approaches in the education of Deaf and Hard of Hearing children (i.e., ASL/English Bilingual, Listening and Spoken Language, and Total Communication).
- Recognizes and respects the right of parents of children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing to receive comprehensive information about the language opportunities available to them.
- Recognizes and respects the right of parents of children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing to receive comprehensive information about the communication tools available to them.

- Recognizes and respects the right of parents of children who are born Deaf or Hard of Hearing to receive comprehensive information about the educational approaches in the education of Deaf and Hard of Hearing children.
- Recognizes and respects the right of parents of children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing to make informed decisions about the language(s) they will use in raising their children.
- Recognizes and respects the right of parents of children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing to make informed decisions about the communication tool(s) they will use in raising their children.
- Recognizes and respects the right of parents of children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing to be fully informed about the continuum of placement options available to their children, including regular education programs, resource specialist programs, designated instruction and services, special classes, nonpublic, nonsectarian school services, state special schools, itinerant instruction, instruction using telecommunication, and instruction in the home or hospital, pursuant to *California Education Code 56360*.
- Believes that parents of children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing should be informed that the use of ASL supports and enhances the development of spoken language and cognition for ALL children.
- Believes that parents of children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing should be encouraged to explore all language opportunities, communication tools, and educational approaches.
- Believes that parents should not be compelled to choose between spoken and signed language. They may choose to use both.
- Recognizes the importance of parent-to-parent connections in supporting parents of children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing through the decision making process.
- Recognizes the importance of role models who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing in supporting parents as their children grow and develop.