

AN ACT RELATING TO EDUCATION; ENACTING THE DEAF AND HARD-OF-HEARING CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL BILL OF RIGHTS.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO:

Section 1. SHORT TITLE.--This act may be cited as the "Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Children's Educational Bill of Rights".

Section 2. FINDINGS AND PURPOSE.--

A. The legislature finds that:

(1) hearing loss affects the most basic human need, communication. Without quality communication a child is isolated from other human beings and from the exchange of knowledge essential for educational growth and, therefore, cannot develop the skills required to become a productive, capable adult and a fully participatory member of society;

(2) children with hearing loss have the same innate capabilities as any other children. They communicate in a wide variety of manual and spoken modes, languages and systems. Some use aural/oral modes of communication, while others use a combination of aural/oral and manual communication. Many use American sign language, which is a formal language, as well as the preferred everyday language of the deaf community. Obviously, all children need to develop English proficiency; and

(3) it is, therefore, critical that all New Mexicans work toward ensuring:

(a) deaf and hard-of-hearing children, like all children, have quality, ongoing and fluid communication, both in and out of the classroom;

(b) deaf and hard-of-hearing children be placed in the least restrictive educational environment and receive services based on their unique communication, language and educational needs, consistent with 20 U.S.C. Section 1414(d)(3)(B)(iv) of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act;

(c) deaf and hard-of-hearing children be given an education in which teachers, related service providers and assessors understand the unique nature of deafness, are specifically trained to work with hard-of-hearing and deaf pupils and can communicate spontaneously and fluidly with these children;

(d) deaf and hard-of-hearing children, like all children, have the benefit of an education in which there are a sufficient number of age-appropriate peers and adults with whom they can interact and communicate in a spontaneous and fluid way;

(e) deaf and hard-of-hearing children receive an education in which they are exposed to deaf and hard-of-hearing role models;

(f) deaf and hard-of-hearing children, like all children, have direct and appropriate access to all components of the educational process, including recess; lunch; and extracurricular, social and athletic activities;

(g) deaf and hard-of-hearing children, like all children, be provided with programs in which transition planning, as required under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, focuses on their unique vocational needs; and

(h) families of children who are deaf or hard-of-hearing receive accurate, balanced and complete information regarding their child's educational and communication needs and the available programmatic, placement and resource options, as well as access to support services and advocacy resources from public and private agencies, departments and all other institutions and resources knowledgeable about hearing loss and the needs of children who are deaf or hard-of-hearing.

B. Given the central importance of communication to all human beings, the purpose of the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Children's Educational Bill of Rights is to encourage the development of a communication-driven and language-driven educational delivery system in New Mexico for children who are deaf or hard-of-hearing.

Section 3. EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS OF DEAF AND HARD-OF-HEARING CHILDREN--ADDITIONAL DUTY OF PUBLIC EDUCATION DEPARTMENT.--

A. The state of New Mexico recognizes the unique communication needs of children who are deaf or hard-of-hearing and encourages the development of specific recommendations by all state agencies, institutions and political subdivisions concerned with the early intervention, early childhood and kindergarten through twelfth grade education of students who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, including the public education department, the New Mexico school for the deaf and the department of health, to ensure that:

(1) these children have what every other child takes for granted, including an educational environment in which their language and communication needs are fully addressed and developed and in which they have early, ongoing and quality access to planned and incidental communication opportunities; and

(2) the recommendations, consistent with the findings and purpose of the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Children's Educational Bill of Rights, be completed expeditiously.

B. Since 20 U.S.C. Section 1414(d)(3)(B)(iv) of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act requires that the individual education plan team consider the unique communication needs of children who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, the public education department shall develop a model "communication considerations for students who are deaf or hard-of-hearing", to become part of the individual education plan process. The model shall be disseminated to all local school districts, with training to be provided as determined by the department.