

Shortages and Demographic Changes Require New Approaches

The Preparation of Qualified Deaf Education Teachers: What States Should Know

IN THIS WATCH

Nationwide shortages of qualified teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing exist—What should states know to meet the challenge?

There is a persistent, nationwide shortage of *qualified* teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Moreover, to address statewide shortages—shortfalls that have been reported as high as 82 percent—some states have allowed individuals without appropriate certification or licensure to teach students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

The supply of new teachers is insufficient to meet the demand. During the last decade, more than a 20 percent increase in the number of students who are deaf or hard of hearing was reported. Yet, the number of new teachers certified to teach these students did not increase. In the coming years, it is predicted that the number of new certified teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing will actually decrease as a result of declining numbers of teacher preparation faculty in the area.

Although shortages are more pronounced in western and southern regions, the demand for qualified teachers outstrips the supply in virtually every state. As states look to support districts in filling vacant positions for teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hear-

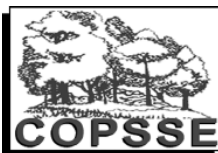
ing, the emphasis will be on finding qualified candidates. What should you know about current trends, and what do the experts recommend that you do about them? Read on to find insights from the research.

The Student Population Is Changing—Do You Know How This Will Affect Teacher Quality?

Student demographics are changing. These changes affect how deaf educators have traditionally “done business” and, thus, they will affect teacher quality and preparation. The following trends are cited:

- The cause of most hearing losses will continue to be unknown. However, most hearing losses will be classified as having occurred at birth or shortly thereafter.
- Approximately 20 to 40 percent of students who are deaf or hard of hearing will display a secondary disability.
- The primary ethnicity of students who are deaf or hard of hearing will change from Caucasian to Latino, African American, or Asian. Cur-

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rently, only five to 10 percent of teachers are from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and most of them teach in residential schools.

- The number of students who receive their education in residential or day schools will continue to decline, and the number of students who receive their education in their local public schools will continue to increase.
- As more and more students with mild to moderate hearing loss are identified and provided with educational services, speech alone, rather than speech and sign, will become the predominant communication modality. The use of sign alone will continue to increase for a small minority of students, most of whom will likely receive their educational services at residential and day schools.

Furthermore, 32 states have passed legislation that requires

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Shortages of qualified teachers come at a time when the educational results of many students who are deaf or hard of hearing are being questioned. Students' ability to achieve academic success is inexorably tied to the instructional effectiveness of their teachers.

hospitals to conduct newborn hearing screening tests. Such screening practices may result in more students being identified as deaf or hard of hearing in the schools.

Children who have benefited from early identification (prior to six months) are just now beginning to enter the

nation's schools. Perhaps even more noteworthy will be the differences in learning characteristics

that these early identified students may exhibit. It is likely that, as a result of early identification and intervention, a significant number will begin their education with a level of language skills that is at or near that of their hearing peers. If this does occur, it may well necessitate a change in both the type of educational programming that is characteristically provided to students who are deaf or hard of hearing and the preparation and ongoing professional development of their teachers.

Teacher Preparation Is Undergoing Major Changes—Do You Know What Experts Working in the Area Are Recommending?



The critical and ongoing shortage of teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing, combined with few preparation programs (18 states and territories do not offer one) and the prevalence of individuals teaching without appropriate certification or licensure has led experts working in the area to suggest large-scale solutions. Two examples follow:

- **Regional consortium.** Six southern states—Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas—have entered into a collaborative agreement for the design, funding, implementation, and evaluation of regional—rather than state-specific—deaf education teacher preparation. States will establish common certification requirements, develop joint recruitment and admissions programs, and share resources.
- **Virtual community of learners.** The Association of College Educators-Deaf/Hard

of Hearing designed the *Deaf Education Web Site* (www.deafed.net), which links preservice teachers with practicing teachers, students who are deaf or hard of hearing, and parents nationwide, thereby enhancing the exchange of state-of-the-art information. Teacher preparation faculty exchange course syllabi, assign cross-program student tasks, and share course modules.

For More Information

Information reported in this brief was based on the COPSSE issue brief, *U.S. Deaf Education Teacher Preparation Programs: A Look at the Present and a Vision for the Future*, by Harold A. Johnson. This document can be found on the COPSSE web site at www.copsse.org.

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