The primary purpose of this Communication Plan is to provide educators and parents with a structured format to support review of both the general and special factors that must be considered when planning with and on behalf of students who have hearing differences. The Communication Plan should be the starting point for the IEP, and the results of the discussion it prompts should be used to identify the student’s present educational levels as well as to complete other sections of the IEP.

By using this Communication Plan, educators and parents (as well as the student, when appropriate) outline the unique communication and language access needs of the student, build a foundation of mutual understanding beneficial to student success, and establish shared, written documentation that all special factors have been considered as they uniquely apply to the named student. A Communication Plan should be completed for any student who is Deaf, deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind even if a hearing difference is not identified as the student’s primary exceptionality.

**STUDENT DETAILS** [[[1]](#endnote-2)]**:**

Describe the student’s hearing levels and type of hearing difference, including when and how the student’s hearing difference was diagnosed:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Does the student have other exceptionalities? [[[2]](#endnote-3)] Yes No

If yes, what is/are the student’s exceptionality/exceptionalities?

Click or tap here to enter text.

Are there insights or considerations the family and/or student would like noted or addressed? [[[3]](#endnote-4)]

Click or tap here to enter text.

1. **LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION:**

**1a.** The child’s/student’s **primary language,** as identified by the child’s parent(s)/guardian(s) and/or self-identified by the student [[[4]](#endnote-5)], is one or more of the following: \* (Check all that apply.)

*Receptive [[[5]](#endnote-6)]:*

Listening to Spoken American English

American Sign Language

Other Native Language (Spanish, German, etc.);

Specify the language:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Is the language spoken or signed?

Click or tap here to enter text.

Combination of two or more languages

Formal language emerging

No formal language established

*Expressive [[[6]](#endnote-7)]:*

Spoken American English

American Sign Language

Other Native Language (Spanish, German, etc.);

Specify the language:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Is the language spoken or signed?

Click or tap here to enter text.

Combination of two or more languages

Formal language emerging

No formal language established

*Describe, including explanation of multiple languages, if necessary:*

Click or tap here to enter text.

**1b.** The student’s **primary mode of communication,** as identified by the child’s parent(s)/guardian(s) and/or self-identified by the student [[[7]](#endnote-8)], is implemented using one or more of the following: \* (Check all that apply.)

*Receptive*

American Sign Language

Listening – Following Listening and Spoken Language (LSL)/ Auditory‑Verbal Principles

Listening - Following Auditory/Oral Method(s)

Listening – No Principles or Method(s) Specified

Fingerspelling

Speech reading

Written English

Tactile Sign Language

Signing Exact English

Signed English

Cued Speech/Cued English

Conceptual signs (Pidgin Signed English or Conceptually Accurate Signed English)

Touch Cues

Picture symbols/ pictures/ photographs

Gestures

No emerging formal language

Combination of two or more languages

Other*Expressive*

American Sign Language

Speaking/Spoken Language

Fingerspelling

Written English

Tactile Sign Language

Signing Exact English

Signed English

Cued Speech/Cued English

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Device

Conceptual signs (Pidgin Signed English or Conceptually Accurate Signed English)

Touch Cues

Picture symbols/ pictures/ photographs

Gestures

No emerging formal language

Combination of two or more languages

Other

*Describe, including explanation for multiple modes of communication, if necessary:*

Click or tap here to enter text.

**1c.** The family reports the following strengths and challenges when communicating with their child/student:

Click or tap here to enter text.

**1d.** Based on data from multidisciplinary evaluations and assessments, including annual [[[8]](#endnote-9)] language evaluation, describe the student’s language and communication skills.

Click or tap here to enter text.

**1e.** Are supports needed to increase parent(s) understanding of the student’s language and communication needs, the proficiency of parent(s) and family members in communicating with the student in the student’s language and mode of communication (defined at 1a and b), and/or the parent(s) ability to make an informed decision regarding their child’s language and mode of communication? [[[9]](#endnote-10)]

*Describe:*

Click or tap here to enter text.

**Action(s) Needed Regarding *Language and Communication* Factors**

*\*If the family needs support to make an informed decision regarding their child’s language or mode of communication, ‘Actions needed’ should include Parent Counseling and Training that incorporates directing the family to* [*www.ALhearinglossoptions.org*](http://www.ALhearinglossoptions.org) *(See Item # 1e).*

*List* [[[10]](#endnote-11)]*:*

Click or tap here to enter text.

1. **OPPORTUNITIES FOR *DIRECT COMMUNICATION* WITH PEERS AND PROFESSIONAL PERSONNEL IN THE STUDENT’S LANGUAGE AND MODE OF COMMUNICATION**

**2a.** Does the child/student use the same language and mode of communication at home, at school, and in the community?  Yes  No

*Describe:*

Click or tap here to enter text.

**2b**. Describe the opportunities for and limitations to direct, two-way communication between the student and adults in the school environment outside of the instructional setting.

Click or tap here to enter text.

**2c**. Describe the opportunities for and limitations to direct, two-way communication between the student and peers in the school environment. Consider both peers who use the same mode of communication and language as the child/student and peers who do not.

Click or tap here to enter text.

**2d.** Consider the student’s need for (1) adult role models who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind and use the same communication mode(s) as the student and (2) peer group(s) in sufficient numbers of children/students who are deaf or hard of hearing and use the same communication mode and/or language as the student. Document the plans for exploring opportunities for adult role model connections and peer interactions. [[[11]](#endnote-12)]

*Opportunities considered:*

Click or tap here to enter text.

**Action(s) Needed Regarding Opportunities for *Direct Communication* Factors**

*List* [[[12]](#endnote-13)]*:*

Click or tap here to enter text.

1. **ACADEMIC LEVEL** [[[13]](#endnote-14)]

**3a.** Using data from annual multidisciplinary evaluations and assessments (see also 1d) in addition to general State or district wide assessments, consider the student’s academic level and the language and communication supports necessary for the student to access and make progress in the curriculum as well as to acquire grade‑level academic skills and concepts of the general education curriculum in the general education setting.

Select One [[[14]](#endnote-15)]:

The student has the language and communication necessary to acquire grade-level academic skills and concepts in the general education setting. Supports are needed to continue proficiency in grade-level academic skills and concepts of the general education curriculum and maintain annual progress. (Particular attention to reading and written language skills is recommended).

*Describe:*

Click or tap here to enter text.

The student requires supports to increase proficiency in communication, language, literacy, and/or written language skills to achieve grade-level academic skills and concepts of the general education curriculum and account for accelerated progress needed to close skill gaps with peers who have typical hearing levels.

*Describe:*

Click or tap here to enter text.

The student requires supports to increase proficiency in communication language, literacy, and/or written language skills. The goals established for the student should be appropriately ambitious and include opportunities to achieve challenging objectives. However, narrowing or closing skill gaps with peers who have typical hearing levels are not anticipated outcomes due to factors such as severe limitations in intellectual functioning and/or adaptive behavior resulting from an exceptionality or exceptionalities other than the student’s hearing difference.

*Describe:*

Click or tap here to enter text.

**3b.** Identify the student’s developmental and functional instructional needs that arise from the child’s/student’s hearing difference (e.g., self‑advocacy, self-determination, self-awareness, support networks, community resources, career education, visual and auditory technologies, using interpreters or transliterators, management of auditory/listening/communication fatigue, communication repair skills, etc.) [[[15]](#endnote-16)]

*Describe:*

Click or tap here to enter text.

**3c**. How will the student’s progress, including appropriate rate of progress, be comprehensively monitored? (For the majority of students who are deaf or hard of hearing, a minimum of 1 month’s progress in one month’s time as measured quarterly, semiannually, or annually should be expected.) What evaluations and/or assessments must be included (see also 1d), which team member will complete the evaluations or assessments and when? [[[16]](#endnote-17)]

*Describe:*

Click or tap here to enter text.

**Action(s) Needed Regarding *Academic Level* Factors**

*List* [[[17]](#endnote-18)]*:*

Click or tap here to enter text.

1. **FULL RANGE OF NEEDS**

**4a**. Identify nonacademic and extracurricular school services and activities in which the student participates across the school day. How will all school routines, services, and activities be presented with effective and fully accessible communication? [[[18]](#endnote-19)]

*Issues considered:*

Click or tap here to enter text.

**4b**. How will the student be effectively communicated with during emergency situations such as fire alarms, practice drills, tornado alerts, lockdowns, etc.?

*Issues considered:*

Click or tap here to enter text.

**Action(s) Needed Regarding *Full Range of Needs* Factors**

*List* [[[19]](#endnote-20)]*:*

Click or tap here to enter text.

1. **OPPORTUNITIES FOR *DIRECT INSTRUCTION***

**5a.** An accurate and complete explanation of all the educational options along the continuum of education placements available for the student has been provided to the parent(s). Discussion should include Local Education Agency (LEA) resources and programs as well as community-based options and special schools for students who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind [e.g., [Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB)](https://www.aidb.org/) and [Woolley Institute for Spoken-Language Education (WISE)](https://www.wise4al.org/), etc.] [[[20]](#endnote-21)]

*Placements explained:*

Click or tap here to enter text.

*Describe how the placement options impact the student’s communication access and educational progress in light of the student’s language and communication mode:*

Click or tap here to enter text.

**5b.** The teachers, interpreters, educational audiologists, and speech-language pathologists, as well as other related service providers and special instructional personnel providing services and auxiliary aids outlined in this Communication Plan must have demonstrated proficiency in and ability to accommodate for the student’s primary communication mode and language, implement the student’s primary communication mode and language with fidelity, and communicate effectively. [[[21]](#endnote-22)]

*Write a statement of the strengths and challenges related to this consideration. Include information regarding certification(s), training, and experience specific to the student’s communication mode and language [[[22]](#endnote-23)]:*

Click or tap here to enter text.

**5c.** Are supports needed to increase staff/personnel understanding of the student’s language and communication needs and/or the proficiency of staff/personnel in communicating with the student using the student’s mode of communication and language? [[[23]](#endnote-24)]

*Write a statement of the strengths and challenges related to this consideration.*

Click or tap here to enter text.

**Action(s) Needed Regarding Opportunities for *Direct Instruction* Factors**

*(Note: Support for Personnel Planning is a related service separate and distinct from direct service minutes provided to the child/student):*

*List* [[[24]](#endnote-25)]*:*

Click or tap here to enter text.

1. **ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY, AUXILIARY AIDS, AND SERVICES** [[[25]](#endnote-26)]

This section of the Communication Plan draws from guidance provided by both IDEA and “Frequently Asked Questions on Effective Communication for Students with Hearing, Vision, or Speech Disabilities in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools” (DOJ-DOE FAQ). The team will consider not only communication‑accessible academic instruction, but all school services and programs across the entire school day, daily transition times, and extracurricular activities to ensure effective communication access.

**6a.** Does the student require auxiliary aids and services such as qualified interpreters or transliterators, notetakers, transcription/captioning services, hearing assistive technology, etc., to achieve communication that is as effective as communication for individuals without disabilities?  Yes  No

*Describe the assessment(s) employed to determine whether the student needs assistive technology(ies), auxiliary aids, or services:*

Click or tap here to enter text.

*Describe how the IEP Team is ensuring the student is receiving communication that is as effective as what nondisabled peers are receiving and specify what auxiliary aids and services the student is receiving.*

Click or tap here to enter text.

*In the case of interpreters, transliterators, notetakers, and transcription/captioning services, describe how student readiness for mediated communication was established.*

Click or tap here to enter text.

*In the case of hearing assistive technology, describe the process for ensuring that selection, fitting and verification of the technology is completed by an educational audiologist. [[[26]](#endnote-27)]*

Click or tap here to enter text.

*In all cases, describe the assessments used to verify effective communication.*

Click or tap here to enter text.

**6b.** Are the auxiliary aids and services provided by the school primarily based on the preference(s) of the student or his/her parent(s)/guardian(s)? [[[27]](#endnote-28)]

Yes  No  Not Applicable

*If yes, please document informed decision making by describing the options considered and the reasons the student/family provided for their preference. This explanation can include the reasoning for declining a recommended auxiliary aid or service.*

Click or tap here to enter text.

*If no, explain. (i.e., the family requires Parent Counseling and Training to formulate a preference [See Item 1e] or the school can demonstrate that the auxiliary aid or service preferred by the student and/or his/her parent(s)/guardian(s) [please list below] would result in a fundamental alteration in the nature of a service, program, or activity) [[[28]](#endnote-29)*]

Click or tap here to enter text.

*If not applicable, explain (e.g., assessment(s) determined that auxiliary aids and services are not needed.)*

Click or tap here to enter text.

**6c.** What steps were or will be taken to ensure that the auxiliary aids and services are provided in a timely manner? [[[29]](#endnote-30)]

Click or tap here to enter text.

**6d.** Does the child/student use hearing assistive technology or personal hearing devices (e.g., hearing aid(s), cochlear implant(s), or osseointegrated auditory prosthetic(s) at school?  Yes  No

*If yes, explain who is responsible for checking the function of these devices, how often the devices will be checked, and the procedures for completing and documenting monitoring activities.* [*[[30]](#endnote-31)*]

Click or tap here to enter text.

**6e.** Check all considerations that apply to the student, then describe the alternate plan in place to maintain effective communication with the student during academic instruction, school services, and extracurricular activities if any of the following events happen:

Interpreter is absent

Hearing aid(s)/cochlear implant(s) is/are not working (batteries are dead, components missing, left at home, etc.)

Hearing Assistive Technology is not working

Closed Captions are not available, including videos posted online or digital curricula

Trained notetaker is absent

Real-time captioning services are not available

Other: Click or tap here to enter text.

*Describe issues considered and alternate plans:*

Click or tap here to enter text.

**Action(s) Needed Regarding *Assistive Technology* Factors**

*List* *:*

Click or tap here to enter text.

**AFFIRMATION:**

The named student is Deaf, deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind. The IEP team has conscientiously discussed and considered each of the factors listed in the Communication Plan and has not denied instructional opportunity based on the student’s hearing level(s) or the ability of the parent(s) to communicate. To the extent appropriate, inputs about this student’s communication and related needs, as suggested from adults who are Deaf, deaf, hard of hearing or deaf-blind and who utilize the same communication mode as the child/student, have been considered. This Communication Plan is considered an integral part of the child’s/student’s IEP. 34 CFR §300.324(a)(2)(ii, iv, v) and AAC 290-8-9.05(6)(l)(m)

**BACKGROUND**

Educators and parents have a shared goal best achieved through strong home/school partnerships. Both educators and parents want students to receive a quality education. Students who are Deaf, deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind have unique instructional and access needs that must be addressed for them to achieve educational success. The challenge is multifaceted. First, students who have hearing differences are a low incidence population. It is not unusual for a student who is deaf or hard of hearing to be the only student in his or her school or school district who has a hearing difference. Second, this group of students is a diverse population with diverse needs. The specialized instruction, auxiliary aids, and services appropriate for one student may be wholly inappropriate for another even when the students may seem similar. Lastly, the specialized knowledge, expertise, and experience to appropriately meet the needs of students who are deaf or hard of hearing is not widespread. Fortunately, guidelines exist which support educators’ and parents’ efforts to deliver meaningful instruction to students who have hearing differences.

*The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*

One source of guidance is included within the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) legislation and its successors. In developing each child’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP), the IEP Team is directed to consider: (i) The strengths of the child; (ii) The concerns of the parents for enhancing the education of their child; (iii) The results of the initial or most recent evaluation of the child; and (iv) The academic, developmental, and functional needs of the child. 34 CFR § 300.324(a)(1) and AAC 290-8-9.05(6). As appropriate, the results of any general State or district wide assessments must also be considered. AAC 290-8-9.05(6)

The IEP team also must consider special factors unique to students who are Deaf, deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind. For a child/student who is Deaf/deaf/hard of hearing (“hearing impaired”) or deaf-blind, the special factors the IEP Team must consider include the child’s/student’s (1) language and communication needs, (2) opportunities for direct communications with peers and professional personnel in the child’s/student’s language and communication mode, (3) academic level, (4) full range of needs (e.g. social, emotional, cultural, etc.), (5) opportunities for direct instruction in the child’s/student’s language and communication mode and (6) whether the child/student needs assistive technology devices and services. 34 CFR § 300.324(a)(2)(ii, iv, v) and AAC 290-8-9.05(6)(l)(m)

**INSTRUCTIONS, EXAMPLES, AND REFERENCES**

(Please note: Lists of examples are not intended to be exhaustive. Instead, they are intended to serve as a starting point for discussion of the individual needs of the student and family.)

1. **CHILD/STUDENT DETAILS:**

   * *Hearing Levels*: mild, moderate, severe, profound
   * *Types of Hearing Differences*: sensorineural, conductive, mixed (sensorineural and conductive together), and auditory neuropathy spectrum disorder (ANSD).
   * *How and When:* Having information about how and when the student’s hearing difference was diagnosed can be helpful to the team. The opportunities for therapy and instruction, lived experience, and knowledge base of families and students can be strongly impacted by whether the student’s hearing difference was identified through newborn hearing screening, late identified, or late onset.
   * Check reports and other documentation from the student’s clinical and/or educational audiologist. These records usually include a brief description of the student’s hearing difference. These records may also include other details that could be helpful to the team (e.g. Is the student’s hearing difference stable or progressive/changing over time? Is the cause of the student’s hearing difference known? Are there other health concerns or syndromes associated with the student’s hearing difference? etc.)

   [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. *Other Exceptionalities:* Are there other considerations or diagnoses the team should be aware of in planning for the student? Examples: Vision challenges? Learning challenges? Health concerns or medical history? Diagnosed syndrome(s)? Learning Disabilities? Attention Deficit Disorder? Autism? Other? [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. *Family Insights and/or Considerations:* A response to this prompt is optional. At the same time, the prompt provides an opportunity for the family to share thoughts or raise questions that should be given consideration as the Communication Plan is completed and IEP developed. Examples could include, but are not limited to, changes in family or family supports (e.g., birth or adoption of a new sibling, change in custody, change primary care giver roles, etc.), new or emerging concerns such as shifts in social engagement or participation that might signal the need for extra discussion of a particular factor or factors, changes in health or hearing status, known learning style preferences, special learning or extra-curricular activity interest(s) of the student (e.g. participation in school or community youth sports, theater, music, arts, dance or STEAM enrichment programs).

   **1. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION** [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. 1a & b: The “native language” provision of IDEA places selection of language and communication mode under the purview of parents and/or student. Additional guidance from OCR provides additional clarifying detail. 34 CFR §303.25(b), AAC 290-8-9.00(13)(b), and OCR-000012 Deaf Students Education Services [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. *Receptive:* Understanding others [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
6. *Expressive:* Communicating with others [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
7. 1d. Please include all data relevant to the child’s/student’s mode(s) of communication (e.g., receptive and expressive language abilities, including vocabulary/semantics, syntax, morphology, and pragmatics; auditory skill development; speech recognition in quiet and in noise; benefit from speech reading; sign language skill development, written language abilities; articulation; etc. - as appropriate). 34 CFR §300.304(b) and AAC 290-8-9-.02 (d, l) Conduct of Evaluation, variety of tools and strategies, not use single measure or assessment [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
8. Annual language testing is strongly recommended. The special factors considerations were included in IDEA in recognition of the fact that students who have hearing differences cannot benefit from education if they do not receive educational programming focused on promoting the development of effective communication and language skills that are foundational to the development of literacy skills, numeracy skills, cognition, and future employment.

   Children who are deaf or hard of hearing (all hearing levels from mild to profound whether unilateral or bilateral) are known to be at risk for delays in development of both language and literacy skills. Knowledge and skills related to phonology (including grammatical morphemes that mark tense and number), vocabulary, and syntax are areas of particular concern (Spencer and Marschark, 2010). The non-linear growth observed in specific language skill domains in combination with shifts in typical developmental timelines caused by language delays can create patterns of “illusory recovery” as well as periods of differential diagnostic sensitivity in which milder, yet still educationally significant delays may be more easily masked (Scarborough, 2001).

   The Joint Committee on Infant Hearing (JCIH) recommends that progress monitoring be completed on a consistent scheduled (every 6 months through 36 months and annually thereafter) using instruments that are norm-referenced to permit analysis of developmental growth over time. If progress does not meet expectations or critical variables change, consistent monitoring permits timely adjustments to services in keeping with the goal that earlier identification of children who are deaf or hard of hearing lead to prevention of delay thereby also minimizing the need for remediation of delay. (JCIH 2013) [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
9. 1e. 34 CFR §300.34(c)(8)(i, iii) and AAC 290-8-9.07(5) Parent Counseling and Training [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
10. Examples of Action(s) Needed Regarding Language and Communication Factors:

    IDEA references related to Language and Communication Factors focus heavily on (a) Parent Counseling and Training and (b) evaluations and assessments. Actions needed regarding these factors are likely to reflect that focus.

    Research indicates that positive language development outcomes for children who are deaf or hard of hearing are most strongly influenced by three variables ‑ early identification, early intervention, and high levels of family involvement (Yoshinaga-Itano, Sedey, Coulter, Mehl, 1998, Moeller, 2000, Spencer and Marschark, 2010, NASDSE, 2018). In particular, higher levels of family involvement in promoting children’s communication are associated with enhanced child language outcomes (Moeller, 2000, Watkin et al., 2007). Informed decision making is foundational to parent engagement as is the ability to support ongoing development of the student’s skills in his or her language and mode of communication.

    Examples of Action(s) Needed Regarding Language and Communication Factors that would support parent/family engagement include writing the Parent Counseling and Training section of the student’s IEP to include, as appropriate:

    * instruction regarding language and communication mode options;
    * Auditory-Verbal Therapy (AVT) services provided by a Certified Listening and Spoken Language Specialist (Parent Coaching and Training is a foundational principle of AVT);
    * ASL instruction or classes (Parents/Families cannot support and carry over school activities if their communication skills do not keep pace with the child’s).

    Examples of Actions Needed Regarding Language and Communication Factors related to evaluation and assessment include:

    * administer a functional listening evaluation;
    * use of an educational sign language interpreter and/or teacher fluent in the child’s language and mode of communication during testing;
    * provide test accommodations (e.g., extra time, no oral tests, minimize acoustic and/or visual distractions in the test environment, strategic seating);
    * support attention to speech-reading needs (e.g., no hands or projection equipment in front of the face, good lighting on the face, well-trimmed facial hair, no gum chewing).

    Many of the examples of potential ‘Action(s) Needed’ for each of the factors listed in the Communication Plan came from Educational Advocacy for Students Who are Deaf or Hard Hearing: The Hands & Voices Guidebook (2023) and were used with permission. Additional examples may be found in this publication. Additionally, Alabama is a member of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE). Optimizing Outcomes for Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing; Education Service Guidelines published NASDSE is recognized as a source of best practice guidance. The publication may be accessed at: <https://www.nasdse.org/docs/nasdse-3rd-ed-7-11-2019-final.pdf>.

    **2. OPPORTUNITIES FOR *DIRECT COMMUNICATION* WITH PEERS AND PROFESSIONAL PERSONNEL IN THE STUDENT’S LANGUAGE AND MODE OF COMMUNICATION** [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
11. 2d. 34 CFR §300.324(a)(2)(iv) and AAC 290-8-9.05(6)(l)

    Organizations to contact regarding adult role models and/or peer groups:

    * AIDB Outreach ([www.aidb.org/outreach](http://www.aidb.org/outreach));
    * AIDB Regional Centers ([www.aidb.org/RegionalCenters](http://www.aidb.org/RegionalCenters));
    * Alabama Hands & Voices ([www.alhandsandvoices.org](http://www.alhandsandvoices.org) or 205-677-3136);
    * Center for the Advancement of NextGen Deaf (CANGD) ([www.cangd.org](http://www.cangd.org));
    * WISE ([www.wise4al.org](http://www.wise4al.org))

    [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
12. Examples of Action(s) Needed Regarding Opportunities for Direct Communication:

    * establish and implement a system for clearly identifying student speakers in group settings;
    * promote and model positive turn-taking etiquette in discussion formats;
    * encourage and model restating questions and responses;
    * facilitate student participation in regional and national programs and competitions designed for students who have hearing differences (NTID programs, AGBell LEAP and LOFT programs, AIDB Summer Camps, etc.);
    * identify a section in the school library that includes books and other media which reflect the full range of the lived experiences of individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing including those about Deaf Culture and history, about the development and history of hearing technologies, by authors or creators who are deaf of hard of hearing, and that incorporate deaf or hard of hearing representation;
    * offer sign language classes as a world language for the student body;
    * connect to a DHH role model program.

    Many of the examples of potential ‘Action(s) Needed’ for each of the factors listed in the Communication Plan came from Educational Advocacy for Students Who are Deaf or Hard Hearing: The Hands & Voices Guidebook (2023) and were used with permission. Additional examples may be found in this publication. Additionally, Alabama is a member of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE). Optimizing Outcomes for Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing; Education Service Guidelines published NASDSE is recognized as a source of best practice guidance. The publication may be accessed at: <https://www.nasdse.org/docs/nasdse-3rd-ed-7-11-2019-final.pdf>.

    **3. ACADEMIC LEVEL** [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
13. “Unless the language levels of deaf [or hard of hearing] children are within 1 or 2 years of the levels of those in the regular class in which they are placed, they are virtually cut off from the entire verbal input process that is basic to educational experiences.” McConkey Robbins (2000) [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
14. 3a. Students who are deaf or hard of hearing are a low incidence population with diverse needs. The descriptive growth trajectory categories are included to provide a framework designed to focus the IEP Team’s discussion on priorities reflective of the student’s unique circumstances as the Team develops specially designed instruction and IEP goals. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
15. 3b. In addition to academic instructional needs, a student who is deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind possesses instructional needs that result from the student’s hearing difference. Although not included in the general education curriculum, IDEA directs that these developmental and functional instructional needs also be addressed. When knowledge and skills are developed in exceptionality specific domains, students are better able to access the general education curriculum and be full participants in the classroom and school. 34 CFR § 300.39(b)(3) and AAC 290-8-9.00(21)(b)(3) adapting content, methodology, or delivery of instruction, 34 CFR § 300.39(b)(3)(i) and AAC 290-8-9.00(21)(b)(3)(i) address unique needs, [ADA Title II 28 CFR §. 35.160(a)(1)]. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
16. 3c. 34 CFR §300.304(b) and AAC 290-8-9-.02 (d, l) Conduct of Evaluation, variety of tools and strategies, not use single measure or assessment

    A study by Antia, Jones, Reed, and Kreimeyer (2009) published in The Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education found that 79% - 81% of students who are deaf or hard of hearing made one or more year’s progress annually. These findings demonstrate that the goal of a minimum of one month’s progress in one month’s time is both reasonable and achievable

    (<https://academic.oup.com/jdsde/article/14/3/293/330644>).

    Nationally recognized sources of best practice guidance recognize the benchmark of one month’s progress in one month’s time as the minimum standard (NASDSE 2018, Success for Kids with Hearing Loss, 2018 [<https://successforkidswithhearingloss.com/progress-monitoring-gains-equal-to-peers/>], Hands & Voices, 2023).

    In Optimizing Outcomes for Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing; Education Service Guidelines, NASDSE advises that goals must address the gaps between age- and grade-level standards in academic and functional areas and the student’s present level of performance as identified in the evaluation process as well as account for annual and accelerated progress toward those standards. NASDSE also states that “progress monitoring of specially designed instruction is critical to ensure students are making short term and annual growth as well as accelerated progress to close gaps... Professionals should routinely (i.e., daily, weekly, monthly and quarterly) use multiple data sources to indicate that the specially designed education program is resulting in the intended outcomes for students.” (NASDSE, 2018, p.32)

    Noting that “for most students who are deaf or hard of hearing, goals and services should minimally result in one year’s growth in one year based on relevant assessment and progress monitoring tools, NASDSE goes on to advise that “if otherwise typical students are not making expected annual progress, the services and/or their placement must be examined and modified.” (NASDSE, 2018, p. 3) [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
17. Examples of Action(s) Needed Regarding Academic Level:

    * ensure academic goals are measurable and deliverable and not based solely on teacher observation;
    * ensure academic level goals are tied to general grade-level curriculum;
    * ensure academic goals also include functional skills (e.g., note taking, organization information);
    * remediate as necessary without compromising the child’s/student’s in-class instructional time;
    * implement collaboration strategies between the special education providers and the general education teachers;
    * support the student with best practices such as pre-teach, teach, and reteach methods;
    * ensure parent training and counseling as needed to support academic level at home.

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    **4. FULL RANGE OF NEEDS** [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
18. 4a. Consideration of the entire school day (e.g., recess, lunch, routine daily public address announcements, assemblies, field trips, clubs, athletic teams etc.), daily transition times (e.g., arrival, dismissal, change of classes, etc.), and what the student needs for communication that is as effective as what peers who have typical hearing levels receive in all activities will allow more complete and meaningful educational benefits for the student. 34 CFR § 300.324(a)(2)(iv,v) and AAC 290-8-9.05(6)(l)(m) Communication, Assistive Technology; 34 CFR § 300.107 and AAC 290-8-9.07(3)(a) Non-academic services, 34 CFR § 300.117 and AAC 290-8-9-.06(2) Non-academic settings, [ADA Title II 28 CFR § 35.104 (1)], [ADA Title II 28 CFR § 35.160(a) (1)]. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
19. Examples of Action(s) Needed Regarding Full Range of Needs:

    * implementation of services beyond the physical classroom (e.g., interpreters, remote microphone systems [previously referred to as ‘FM systems’], and/or captioning services as appropriate utilized for field trips, assemblies, pep rallies, and extracurricular activities);
    * use of RM system at home to support IEP agenda outside school day.
    * ensure that bus drivers, school resource officers, and other key staff are aware of the student’s hearing difference and communication mode;
    * permission for texting to support communication access and/or note taking on student’s cell phone;
    * use blinking lights and other visual alert systems for alarms/bells;
    * develop an emergency plan to ensure effective communication access during non-routine events;
    * ensure that video monitors with school wide news and announcements are captioned and/or interpreted;
    * include IEP goals that promote independence in use and care of personal hearing technology (e.g., hearing aid(s), cochlear implant(s) or osseointegrated auditory prosthetic(s));
    * include IEP goals that promote the development of pre-requisite skills needed to use an interpreter efficiently and effectively;
    * foster the student’s positive self-concept as a person who is deaf or hard of hearing by including IEP goals that address the student’s understanding of the details of his or her hearing difference and knowledge of auxiliary aids and services options and use.
    * support self-determination and positive social/emotional development by including IEP goals focused on establishing communication repair skills, understanding of social engagement rules that initiate and maintain friendships, appropriate responses to peer pressure or bullying, and flexibility in perspective taking and problem solving.

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    **5. OPPORTUNITIES FOR *DIRECT INSTRUCTION*** [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
20. 5a. 34 CFR § 300.115 and 290-8-9.06(3) Continuum of alternative placements; 34 CFR § 300.327, 34 CFR § 300.501(c), and AAC 290-8-9-.06(1)(a) Parents must be members of any group making placement decisions. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
21. 5b. 34 CFR § 300.39(b)(3) and AAC 290-8-9.00(21)(b)(3) adapting content, methodology, or delivery of instruction, 34 CFR § 300.39(b)(3)(i) and AAC 290-8-9.00(21)(b)(3)(i) address unique needs, [ADA Title II 28 CFR §. 35.160(a)(1)]. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
22. “It is widely recognized that a key component of providing quality services is the expertise of the provider, including knowledge and skills that are specific to working with children who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families” (JCIH, 2013; Moeller et al., 2013 as referenced by JCIH 2019).

    Other affirmations of the importance of provider qualifications include, but are not limited to:

    * “Specialized programming and teaching methods…are required if children with hearing loss are to achieve their full potential, and teachers who understand the needs of students who are deaf or hard-of-hearing are needed regardless of placement options or models.” (Spencer and Marschark, 2010).
    * “A discussion about the opportunities for direct instruction and the ability to accommodate for the student’s communication needs must include a discussion of the proficiency level or qualifications of personnel who are providing the individualized education program.” (Hands & Voices, 2023, p. 19)
    * “Providers of services to students who are deaf or hard of hearing require specialized expertise to address the unique language, communication and social implications of their hearing status.” (NASDSE, 2018, p. 61)
    * “SISPs [Specialist Instructional Support Personnel] (e.g., educational audiologists, educational interpreters, school psychologists) must have training that adapts their clinical profession to the needs of children in educational settings.” (NASDSE, 2018, p. 61)
    * It is the responsibility of the school or school district administrator to ensure that professionals working with students who are deaf or hard of hearing have the appropriate knowledge and skills to implement language and communication approaches and other instructional strategies with fidelity.” (NASDSE, 2018, p. 62)
    * “Each student must receive instruction and services by qualified professionals, including support personnel, who have the specialized skills necessary to meet the academic, communication, social-emotional and transition needs of students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Even though there are many challenges to locating and maintaining these professionals, a quality teacher can make a significant difference in a student’s educational outcomes. Therefore, SEAs and LEAs should explore creative ways for schools to collaborate, including across districts and with special schools, so that limited resources are maximized.” (NASDSE, 2018, p. 78)

    NASDSE highlights the skills, training, and expertise of Teachers of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students as outlined by The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), Division for Communication, Language, and Deaf/Hard of Hearing (DCD). The skills, training, and expertise of Listening and Spoken Language Specialists are also recognized. Teachers of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students and Listening and Spoken Language Specialists are identified as uniquely qualified to provide leadership to collaborative, multidisciplinary teams regarding instructional strategies for students who are deaf or hard of hearing that is consistent with the student’s language and mode of communication. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
23. 5c. Include information regarding opportunities and need for professional development training, in‑service training, mentoring, etc. specific to the impact hearing differences have on educational performance and outcomes and/or the child’s/student’s communication mode and/or language*.* 34 CFR § 300.320(a)(4) and AAC 290-8-9.05(6)(c) Supports for Personnel [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
24. Examples of Action(s) Needed Regarding Direct Instruction:

    * consider student placement outside the school district to facilitate a placement that could provide direct instruction;
    * ensure that teacher who is instructing the student is matching the language and communication mode of the student;
    * implement co-teaching to enhance direct instruction opportunities;
    * ensure that general educators and other staff have awareness of and instructional strategies for students who use spoken language through use of hearing technology;
    * ensure that general educators and other staff have awareness of and instructional strategies for students who use visual language;
    * use of tele-education to access direct instruction (e.g., science teacher from school for the deaf teaches student through video teaching)

    Many of the examples of potential ‘Action(s) Needed’ for each of the factors listed in the Communication Plan came from Educational Advocacy for Students Who are Deaf or Hard Hearing: The Hands & Voices Guidebook (2023) and were used with permission. Additional examples may be found in this publication. Additionally, Alabama is a member of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE). Optimizing Outcomes for Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing; Education Service Guidelines published NASDSE is recognized as a source of best practice guidance. The publication may be accessed at: <https://www.nasdse.org/docs/nasdse-3rd-ed-7-11-2019-final.pdf>.

    **6. ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY, AUXILIARY AIDS, AND SERVICES** [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
25. In November 2014, the U.S Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Education issued the document “Frequently Asked Questions on Effective Communication for Students with Hearing, Vision, or Speech Disabilities in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools” (DOJ-DOE FAQ). This document reflects many of the questions parents, families, teachers, service providers, and administrators may have regarding the communication needs of students who are deaf or hard of hearing and clarifies the interplay between the regulatory requirements outlined by IDEA, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504), and the Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

    Schools must not wait for a child/student or the child’s/student’s family to request assistive technology, auxiliary aids, or services before acting. IDEA establishes that schools have a responsibility to determine whether a child/student needs assistive technology devices and services [34 CFR §300.324(a)(2)(ii, iv, v) and AAC 290-8-9.05(6)(l)(m)]. The DOJ-DOE FAQ document provides additional guidance, delineating the fact that, while IDEA establishes a basic floor for consideration of assistive technology, auxiliary aids, and services needs, meeting IDEA requirements may be necessary, yet insufficient to meet all obligations with respect to the communication access needs of individuals who are Deaf, deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind. Congress also found that “…research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by - …supporting the development and use of technology, including assistive technology devices and assistive technology services, to maximize accessibility for children with disabilities [20 US Code §1400(c)(5)(H)]”.

    This section of the Communication Plan draws from guidance provided by both IDEA and the DOJ-DOE FAQ. The team will consider not only communication-accessible academic instruction, but all school services and programs across the entire school day, daily transition times, and extracurricular activities to ensure effective communication access. 34 CFR § 300.324(a)(2)(vi, v) and AAC 290-8-9.05(6)(l)(m); 34 CFR § 300.34 and AAC290-8-9.00(18); 34 CFR § 300.105, 34 CFR § 300.5-.6 and AAC 290-8-9.07(6); 34 CFR § 300.107 and AAC 290-8-9.07(3)(a); 34 CFR § 300.117 and AAC 290-8-9-.06(2); 34 CFR § 300.101 and AAC 290-8-9-.05(1)(b), ADA Title II 28 CFR 35.104(1), DOJ-DOE FAQ, p. 7 [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
26. 6a. Selection, fitting, verification, management, and monitoring hearing assistive/assistance technology are all distinct processes. “Based on professional scopes of practice in audiology (AAA, 2004; ASHA, 2002), speech-language pathology (ASHA, 2017), and deaf education (CEC-CED, 2015), the audiologist is the only professional who is qualified to fit and verify hearing aids and personal hearing assistance technology (Educational Audiology Association, 2009). School-based educational audiologists must work in collaboration with the student’s private audiologist who provides and manages personal hearing technologies (e.g., hearing aids, cochlear implants, bone anchored hearing aids) to maximize use of hearing technology in the educational environment.” (NASDSE, 2018, p. 70)

    Schools without educational audiologists on staff should contract with pediatric audiologists from their communities for these services. (NASDSE, 2018, p. 71) [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
27. 6b. “The school must honor the individual’s choice unless the school can prove that an alternative auxiliary aid or service provides communication that is as effective as that provided to students without disabilities and affords an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from the service, program, or activity.” DOJ-DOE FAQ, p. 9; DOJ-DOE FAQ, p. 19 [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
28. The school must provide a written statement of the reasons for reaching that conclusion and provide a satisfactory alternative auxiliary aid or service. ADA Title II 28 CFR 35.164, DOJ-DOE FAQ, pp. 12-13 [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
29. 6c. ADA Title II 28 CFR 35.160 (b)(2), DOJ FAQ p. 11 [IDEA’s evaluation and IEP processes may still be pending] [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
30. 6d. *34 CFR § 300.113 and AAC 290-8-9.07(2) (a) Routine checking*

    **Alabama Hands & Voices Logo**

    *This Communication Plan was adapted by* [*Alabama Hands & Voices*](https://alhandsandvoices.org/) *from State Communication Plans referenced in Appendix A of National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE), (2018). Optimizing Outcomes for Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing: Educational Service Guidelines, 3rd ed. (Specifically: Colorado, Florida, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia).*

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