

Questions parents should ask when looking for an educational program to meet the needs of their child with hearing loss

Only 1 in every 100 students with IEPs has qualified to receive specialized support due to hearing loss or deafness. As a low incidence program, the unique access and educational needs of these students requires specialized knowledge in how to appropriately meet these student's needs. Families often lack the information needed to make informed decisions about the appropriateness of a school's suggested program, staff, accommodations and related service support. The following questions are designed to assist families in what to ask when learning about a potential educational placement.

Program

- Who oversees the program at the administrative level and is it easy for families to know how that person is contacted?
- What is the lead administrator's level of knowledge/background in educating students who are deaf or hard of hearing?
- Who is the building principal and how active is he or she in this program or in support of accommodating the access and educational needs of the student with hearing loss?
- What is the principal's knowledge/background in educational needs due to hearing loss?
- Is the principal part of the special services team; do they show up for IEP meetings?
- If there is an educational specialist who is representative of Special Services, who is it and how are they contacted. How are they involved in decision-making?
- How long has the program been at this site?
- What is the program's communication philosophy and does it match what you are seeking?
- If it is a program in which most students with hearing loss use sign language, does it include signing with voice or is it voice off?
- If it is a listening and spoken language (auditory/oral) program or simultaneous communication (total communication) program does it have a specific curriculum or scope and sequence that is followed for developing listening skills?
- If the program primarily supports students who use ASL, are there interpreters and what is the level of their training and their experience in this particular setting.

Teacher of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing

- What's the deaf educator's actual teaching credential? (DHH teacher)
- Where has the teacher worked? What's her background and level of experience in working with students who are deaf, Deaf, and hard of hearing?
- If there are interpreters, what is their required skill and experience level?
- What is the ratio of students with hearing loss to one DHH teacher?
- What is the ratio of students to interpreters?
- What ongoing professional development is available for DHH staff during the school year that is directly related to their teaching/supporting students with hearing loss?

- In the proposed classroom, do some/most students have learning challenges in addition to hearing loss or deafness? (sometimes called Deaf plus)
- Are the staff able to explain how they address developing language for students who are at different levels of delay in comparison to the language of age peers in same grade classrooms?
- What is the curriculum used for your child's level of language ability – not grade level but language level?
- What parent support programs are in place and how can you become involved?
- Does the school/staff allow the DHH teacher to (regularly) visit or observe a student during a typical school day? (in the classroom and/or during special education support staff sessions)
- How are the mainstream teachers provided key information about the educational impact of hearing loss and teaching these students? Who does that inservice? When is it done?
- How are decisions made about student readiness to be placed in an inclusive or mainstream classroom? Who makes this decision?
- How often will you be receiving the result of program monitoring data, and from whom, so you can evaluate the effectiveness of your child's programming and IEPs?
- How are listening skills taught? Most of these skills cannot be taught within a mainstream class.
- Does the DHH teacher develop listening skills 1:1 or in small groups or are there attempts to include listening development into daily teaching within the classroom?
- Are support staff (interpreters, paraeducators, SLPs) routinely assigned to teach or reinforce development of listening skills?
- How is progress for language and listening skill development documented?
- How are participation, group work, language and listening skill development supported in the mainstream classroom? (e.g., seating, technology, communication repair strategies, self-advocacy skills, social skills). How is this reflected in student IEPs?
- Is there a system that is routinely used for daily communication with the families? Is there an identified system of communication between the DHH teacher and the parent?
- Is there homework and if so, who assigns it? If homework from the mainstream classroom requires modification, is the mainstream teacher open to that?
- How will the mainstream teacher be selected and what is their background or experience with this population?
- How do you as the DHH teacher receive feedback concerning a student's performance within any mainstream classroom he/she may be in? How is that feedback documented?

IEP Team

- Who is on the IEP team?
- Will the family receive a draft of the IEP prior to the meeting and if so, how far in advance?
- How much input does the family have in developing the IEP? Are they welcomed to provide information/questions?
- Who is the school psychologist or diagnostic evaluator who will perform 3-year-evaluation? What is the background, specialized training, and experience of that person in the area of impact of hearing loss and Deafness on educational development?

- Does the family know how to call an IEP meeting if they feel a change may be needed in the IEP?
- How is data reported at report card time (IEP data as opposed to the mainstream report card)?

Speech and Language Pathologist (SLP)

- What's is the SLPs specific background in working with students who are deaf and hard of hearing and how long have they been at this site?
- What specific training has the SLP received in listening skill development?
- How is the SLP working with the DHH teacher to incorporate classroom objectives (concepts, vocabulary, language expansion) into your child's SLP sessions so that both the teacher and the SLP are coordinated in working on similar goals?
- Does the SLP coordinate with private therapists if your child is receiving outside speech/listening and language skills?
- Is information about the focus of outside therapy sessions shared with the DHH teacher and support staff (interpreters, OT, PT, paraeducators)?
- Does the SLP routinely use the ASL interpreters as well as the student's hearing technology in their sessions (as appropriate to the specific student)?
- Can the family visit/observe during SLP sessions with the student?
- Are there homework or activities specified with families to support development at home?

Hearing Technology:

- Do both the teacher's and interpreters know how to support hearing technology?
- Can everyone troubleshoot the hearing assistance technology?
- The IDEA law requires that schools must ensure student hearing devices are functioning. Are daily checks performed to make sure hearing devices are working appropriately? If so, can the staff demonstrate how monitoring is performed? Can they provide the data sheets used for equipment checks and listening checks?
- How immediately can the child access hearing device batteries if needed?
- Are the mainstream classrooms set up with classroom audio systems (soundfield) and if so, are they in use in appropriate coordination with the hearing technology used by the student with hearing loss? (i.e., are classroom audio systems compatible with FM/DM/RM systems if your child requires FM/DM/RM?)
- Is there an audiologist available to assist with auditory access and hearing technology issues? How often is the audiologist available? Can the family contact the audiologist?
- How recent is the hearing assistance technology provided by the school (FM/DM/RM)?
- Are staff from the school district in routine communication with the cochlear implant centers in the area to allow appropriate 2-way communication in support of students who use cochlear implants?