

Serving Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students and Their Families: Implications for Education and Service Delivery

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) fully supports the effective education of and service delivery to students who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families. NASP ethics (NASP, 2020) require that only qualified personnel may assess students who are deaf or hard of hearing to avoid misdiagnosis and promote student success. School psychologists serving students who are deaf or hard of hearing must recognize and integrate each student’s culture, language, and individuality in all services they deliver (Cawthon, 2011a; Luckner, Slike, & Johnson, 2012; Lukomski, 2005).

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED TO SERVE STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

Myriad factors influence the psychological and educational needs of students who are deaf or hard of hearing (and their families). These include, but are not limited to:

- type of hearing loss (e.g., onset, severity, etiology);
- parental hearing status;
- access and response to assistive technologies (e.g., hearing aids, cochlear implants);
- language modality (e.g., signed vs. spoken), type (e.g., English, American Sign Language/ASL, Spanish), quality (e.g., native ASL models vs. English speakers with limited signing proficiency), surrogacy (interpreter vs. self-speaker/signer), and age at access (e.g., birth vs. following educational intervention);
- educational setting (residential, day, inclusion) and philosophy (e.g., oral/aural, cued speech, simultaneous communication, bilingual/bicultural); and
- cultural (Deaf) vs. disability (deaf, hard of hearing) identity. Members of the Deaf community share a common language (ASL), folklore, history, and identity—and often object to being labeled “hearing impaired.” Not all individuals with hearing differences identify as Deaf, and some members of the Deaf community are hearing (e.g., hearing children of Deaf adults). Therefore, *Deaf* denotes cultural identification and ASL use, whereas *deaf* denotes a significant hearing difference.

These characteristics intersect with other forms of diversity (e.g., religious, ethnic, economic, gender identity, sexual orientation) to create a myriad of issues in identifying, understanding, and meeting the educational and psychological needs of students who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families. Only professionals with deep background knowledge of these issues should provide services to students who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families; professionals with partial or limited knowledge of these issues should seek supervision from, consult with, or refer clients to professionals with this expertise. Resources to assist school psychologists in identifying professionals with expertise are provided in the Resource List that accompanies this statement.

NASP advocates for all school psychologists to increase their skills, awareness, and sensitivity to serve this distinct population of students and their families. As such, NASP recognizes the following as essential for providing services to deaf and hard-of-hearing students and their families.

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

- All school psychologists who work with students who are deaf or hard of hearing must first hold the appropriate school psychology credential as defined by the state where the services are provided.
- School psychologists must recognize the strengths and limitations of their training and experience and engage only in practices for which they are qualified.
 - School psychologists who have the prerequisite background knowledge to serve students who are deaf or hard of hearing, but who lack fluency in a student's or caregiver's primary mode of communication, must secure the assistance of other qualified professionals (e.g., ASL, sign English, oral interpreters) to reduce or eliminate communication barriers when providing services to the student and the student's family.
 - School psychologists who lack the prerequisite background knowledge to serve students who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families should consult with or refer to professionals with the appropriate expertise and background knowledge to ensure the welfare of students and their families.
- School psychologists, through their preservice graduate education programs and through ongoing professional development, should be aware of research in the field of deafness, specifically relating to the reliability and validity of psychological assessment instruments and methods, to ensure appropriate practice and avoid inappropriate practice. Furthermore, because of the tremendous heterogeneity within this population, school psychologists are responsible for confirming that the samples and validity studies for any assessment they use with students who are deaf or hard of hearing are aligned with an individual student's background (Cawthon, 2011b; Knoors & Marschark, 2018).

ACCESS TO COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES

Students who are deaf or hard of hearing may grow up in families and educational environments with limited access to accessible (e.g., signed) language. This limited access creates significant challenges to students' psychological, educational, and social development in general, and literacy in particular. School psychologists must determine how students' characteristics and backgrounds may affect their acquisition of skills necessary for success in an educational or testing situation. In addition, access to services should address the following:

- Assessments and other educational support services must address all relevant domains, including linguistic, social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development, and should use multiple sources of information for decision-making. Due to etiological, neurobiological, and social factors, most students who are deaf or hard of hearing are at risk for academic, social, or emotional difficulties. A successful educational program should address the needs of these students, and it should provide school psychological assistance to educators and support personnel working with these populations (Marschark, 2017).
- Recent trends in special education promote the use of students' response to intervention as a component of evidence for decisions regarding service eligibility. Although students' responses to intervention may be useful in adapting programs to meet the needs of students who are deaf and hard of hearing, school psychologists should not use response to intervention as a prerequisite to determine eligibility for special education services. Neither should school psychologists presume students are ineligible for services simply because they perform similarly to students without impairments on measures of achievement; rather, school psychologists must include a broad assessment of multiple domains, including cognitive, affective, social, linguistic, cultural, and medical aspects, to determine eligibility for special educational services.
- School psychologists working with students who are deaf or hard of hearing are ethically obligated to ensure that these students have an equal opportunity to develop their personal identity in an

environment free from discrimination, harassment, violence, and abuse. To achieve this goal, school psychologists must educate and advocate with and on behalf of students who are deaf or hard of hearing (and their families) to reduce discrimination and ensure access across environments.

- School psychologists working with students who are deaf or hard of hearing must coordinate with other specialists to understand and support students and their families. Such coordination and support typically includes professionals with expertise in medicine, audiology, speech–language pathology, deaf education, and interpreting (oral, ASL, sign English). Innovative technologies such as cochlear implants, assistive listening devices, communication technologies (e.g., real-time captioning, cuing) evolve rapidly and interact with students in unpredictable ways. Therefore, school psychologists should always consult with the full range of professionals and family members in the student’s life to best understand, support, and meet students’ needs.
- School psychologists working with students who are deaf or hard of hearing should know the full range of services serving such students within their district, region, and state. Services typically range from supplemental services provided in general education contexts, to day programs, to full-time residential schools serving deaf or hard of hearing students. When considering which program(s) best meet the student’s needs, psychologists should consider access to language used in instruction, and opportunities for language-mediated social interactions with peers and adults, along with other factors (e.g., proximity to the student’s home, availability of specialized services). The companion Resource List provides links to help school psychologists identify local and national resources and programs.

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

NASP recognizes that, for parents to make informed decisions about their child’s educational needs, they must have access to well-rounded information concerning available education and mental health services for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. School psychologists who serve these families must be aware of regional, state, and national resources for information regarding the methodologies, approaches, and philosophies regarding enhancing language development for students who are deaf or hard of hearing (National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 2018) and share this information with parents and guardians. School psychologists should encourage parents to be highly involved in their child’s educational plan and to be active, collaborative partners in their children’s educational program. School psychologists respect the educational choices and interventions that students who are deaf and hard of hearing and their families make and use, particularly as those choices may influence students’ access and identification with Deaf culture and identity (Thumann-Prezioso, 2005).

ROLE OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

All school psychologists must work collaboratively with other professionals to address the needs of students who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families. School psychologists with expertise in students who are deaf and hard of hearing have a unique obligation to educate and advocate for these students and their families by:

- promoting nondiscrimination policies;
- providing inservice training for other educators and professionals;
- challenging policies and practices that lead to discrimination and neglect of student needs;
- sharing information about the diverse needs of students who are deaf or hard of hearing; and
- modeling ethical practices through attitudes, language, and behaviors that are accepting and affirming of Deaf, deaf, and hard of hearing students, their families, and their community in daily interactions with all students and staff.

ROLE OF DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

NASP recognizes that individuals who are Deaf, deaf, or hard of hearing provide psychologists and educators with deeper understanding and appreciation for the students and families we serve. NASP encourages Deaf, deaf, and hard of hearing professionals to become school psychologists and assume leadership positions to advocate for early intervention, education, and psychological services in support of all students and their families—but particularly those who are Deaf, deaf, or hard of hearing.

SUMMARY

School psychologists who serve deaf or hard of hearing students and their families require specialized knowledge, skills, and abilities to ensure they can identify and meet the needs of the students and families they serve. This statement identifies critical issues confronting school psychologists who seek to serve these students and their families. The Resource List that accompanies this statement attempts to help school psychologists locate and, when possible, acquire the specialized knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to meet the needs of deaf or hard-of-hearing students and their families.

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