



Public Input 2018 Survey Findings: The Challenges in Meeting the Needs of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students with Disabilities and of Their Families

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The Clerc Center, a federally funded national deaf education center, ensures that the diverse population of deaf and hard of hearing students (birth through age 21) in the nation are educated and empowered and have the linguistic competence to maximize their potential as productive and contributing members of society. This is accomplished through early access to and acquisition of language, excellence in teaching, family involvement, research, identification and implementation of best practices, collaboration, and information sharing among schools and programs across the nation.

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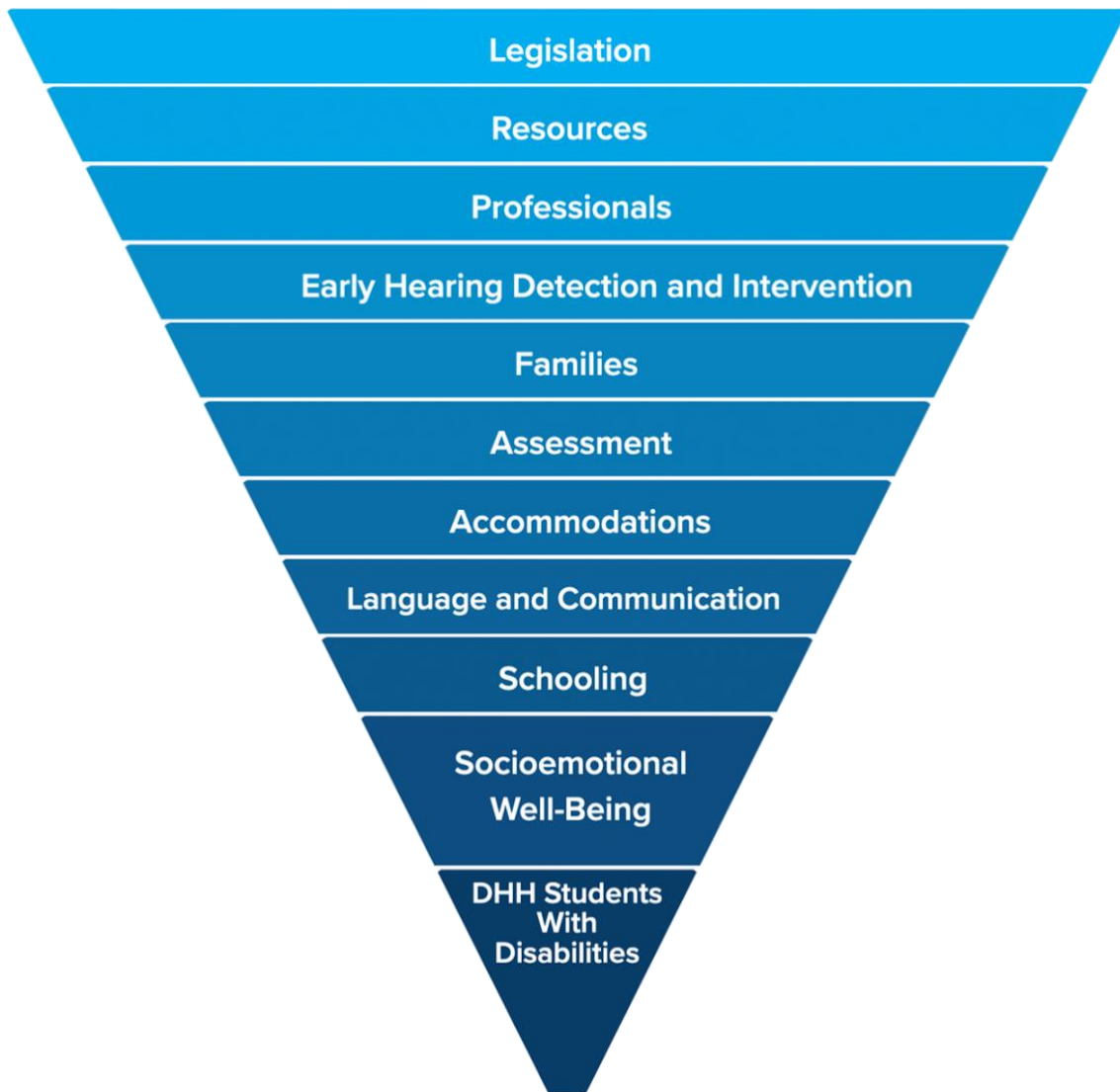
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Overview

Students with Disabilities is one of the 14 barriers listed on the national public input survey that was disseminated by the Laurent Clerc National Deaf Educational Center in 2017 and 2018 to parents and caregivers of deaf and hard of hearing children as well as to professionals who work with those children and families. In this survey, respondents were asked to answer the question: *What are the barriers preventing deaf and hard of hearing students from reaching their potential?* Comments were categorized using the above-mentioned barriers as a guide.

The Students with Disabilities model is based on analysis and interpretation of responses about this group of students. This model includes 11 levels connected to one another: Legislation, Resources, Professionals, Early Hearing Detection and Intervention, Families, Assessment, Accommodations, Language and Communication, Schooling, and Socioemotional Well-Being. The model shows how these factors impact one model component: Meeting the Needs of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students with and without Disabilities.

Most respondents were concerned about meeting the needs of deaf and hard of hearing students with disabilities; however, some respondents included the needs of those without disabilities in their responses as well. For instance, some respondents discussed that resources are not appropriately allocated between deaf and hard of hearing students with and without disabilities or those resources are clumped together to their detriment. Additionally, some respondents discussed that the needs of deaf and hard of hearing students with disabilities are more challenging or complicated compared to those without disabilities and that the needs of deaf and hard of hearing students with disabilities are increasing.

Examples of responses:

- *"... Students with disabilities are another factor. I have grades transitional kindergarten -1st grade, and two students are on the spectrum. Having varying grade levels and students with varying needs or other disabilities often takes away from other students who are just deaf or hard of hearing."*(professional)
- *"... Students with hearing loss along with another disability seems to be more frequent, and appropriately meeting their needs is a challenge"*
- *"I have found that many deaf students also have other disabilities that impact their academic learning, social interactions, and peer relations, oftentimes more than being deaf."*
- *"... Many Deaf schools have decreased the deaf students and increased deaf and more disabilities to cause social problems with sports, academics, and peers"*
- *"... Our son is severely developmentally delayed, and it has added additional challenges at home and at school, especially now that he is 9 years old"*(parent)

Each of the 11 levels in the model are described below.

Legislation

Starting at the uppermost level, Legislation influences all the subsequent levels. Respondents discussed the impact of legislation on other levels, such as providing funds for resources and staffing needs to support deaf and hard of hearing students with disabilities. Respondents also discussed the

impact of least restrictive environment (LRE) and the grouping of deaf and hard of hearing students with disabilities with students without disabilities or those with different disabilities. Thus, legislation is not effectively designed to support the needs of deaf and hard of hearing students with disabilities.

Examples of responses related to Legislation:

- *"... The state places all students with disabilities under the same umbrella, which I feel has been detrimental to my deaf/HH students"* (professional)
- *"... On the other hand, LRE at Deaf school does not work because too many with special needs (Deaf plus) are in one room with Deaf students. The Deaf students [are] often being held back because too much energy is spent focusing on Deaf plus students"*

Resources

Many respondents discussed the need for resources, including organizations and programs, webinars, services, translated materials, technology, research, and monies to support deaf and hard of hearing students with disabilities. Additionally, some respondents mentioned the need for better resource allocation for these students. Further, respondents discussed the need for resources to be provided to schools, professionals, and families so they can better support these students. Respondents also shared that there is a need for families to receive training on how to best support deaf and hard of hearing students with disabilities, including information about language and communication, assessment, and accommodations. Training focused on topics specific to deaf and hard of hearing students with disabilities leads to more informed knowledge for families, which benefits the subsequent levels. Finally, respondents discussed the need for research and more information on how to best support deaf and hard of hearing students with disabilities, especially for professionals and families.

Examples of responses related to Resources:

- *"My HH child has a secondary cognitive delay ... she speaks ... ok but needs services to understand and to feel equal to her peers. Help in her understanding is one of our primary goals for her success."* (parent)
- *"... Translated materials for families to understand the impact of deafness and additional disabilities on their child's future opportunities post high school."*

- *"While my son had bilateral cochlear implantation at 20 months, he also has ADHD, and finding services to meet the needs of the whole child has been difficult and directly impacted language development."* (parent)
- *"... Students with additional disabilities would benefit from behavioral services/ABA services, DHH teachers with special education expertise, and resource specialist providers. Deaf plus are lacking social/extracurricular activities for social-emotional and language/communication development. Without appropriate service providers, families are left with limited resources/understanding of how to meet their child's needs and where to find support."* (professional)
- *"... Students with disabilities: Lack of resources, especially with deaf/HOH with additional disabilities 'plus.' All deaf and hearing educators who work with deaf and/or HOH children are encouraged to receive more resources on how to work with deaf/HOH who have additional disabilities. They deserve as much as other children should receive as- well."*
- *"... Many children who are deaf also have additional disabilities, and there is not enough research, resources, or information on best practices for supporting their success."*

Professionals

Respondents discussed how professionals are not always meeting the needs of deaf and hard of hearing students with disabilities and that they lack knowledge or background in supporting these students. Professionals are not necessarily best prepared to provide assessments and may be unknowledgeable or reluctant to provide accommodations. There is a need for professionals to receive training to better support and work with deaf and hard of hearing students with disabilities and their families. Increasing the availability of personnel with expertise to work with deaf and hard of hearing students and their families is also needed.

Examples of responses related to Professionals:

- *"... Teachers have no idea what to do with students who are deaf with significant disabilities, and most of the curriculums used for students with autism or Down syndrome rely on hearing."*

- *"... Students with disabilities - Our son happens to have multiple disabilities, with some symptoms that fall into multiple categories. It is difficult to get teachers and specialists to understand or agree that different behaviors mean different things at different times. Often, our explanation is dismissed and behaviors are seen as "acting out," which then avoids the proactive approach of addressing the problem and teaching healthy coping techniques."*
(parent)
- *"... Students with disabilities: Many teachers do not want to work with students with additional disabilities because they have no degree or in-depth knowledge [of] how to work with deaf students with disabilities"*
- *"In rural areas, it can be difficult (or impossible) to procure access to qualified TODs [teachers of the deaf] and interpreters. Students who may already have learning delays are then left to attempt to catch up without educators who speak their language or fully understand their educational and social needs."*
- *"Over the 20+ years in my career, I have seen a trend that our D/HH students are becoming more complicated and are having additional special needs that often regular D/HH teachers are not adequately trained to accommodate or to figure out how to creatively meet their needs"*

Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI)

Respondents commented that early intervention influences families with resources and information provisions and is important for deaf and hard of hearing children with disabilities to ensure their needs are met. Respondents also discussed EHDI's influence on language and communication access, language plans, and language acquisition for deaf and hard of hearing children with disabilities. It is important that appropriate EHDI services are provided for these students so that their needs are met and they are more school-ready.

Examples of responses related to EHDI:

- *"... Early detection and intervention are also crucial for those Deaf plus children; if they're not identified early, they have more of a delay, and therefore, are not school ready"*

- *"... Early hearing detection and intervention: Program didn't give enough screening testing, mentors for parents who [have] no clue what to do with a deaf child or with a multiple disabilities child"*
- *"The number one barrier is the lack of ASL [American Sign Language] input from birth or as soon as hearing loss is detected. This is the watershed moment—the moment when a child's ease of success will be determined by the parents and the services rendered at that time. The intensity of all else that follows is dialed up and down by that alone. Children with disabilities on top of deafness have an even harder time and need appropriate services as early as possible"*

Families

Respondents shared that families' involvement and support of their deaf or hard of hearing children with disabilities is crucial but that families sometimes are overwhelmed—too busy and/or do not have the knowledge they need. Therefore, these families need resources and support to meet these children's needs. Some respondents also commented that specific backgrounds, such as socioeconomic status, can impact how families can support their deaf or hard of hearing children with disabilities. Further, respondents who themselves are parents of deaf or hard of hearing children with disabilities discussed their struggles with getting their children's needs met.

Examples of responses related to Families:

- *"... Also, most of our students have a hearing loss plus a cognitive one as well and are coming from lower income families, which means they are not getting the language and support when they are at home because the parents don't understand and/or know what to do at home with them."*
- *"As a family with a deaf child who has other special needs, we've had an incredibly difficult time finding appropriate services and resources for her in our community, even though we live in a major U.S. city and have access to financial and transportation-based resources." (parent)*

Assessment

Respondents discussed the importance of appropriate assessment to meet the needs of deaf and hard of hearing students with disabilities, including accommodation provisions, curriculum adjustments, and language plan development. However, there are not enough assessments and/or qualified personnel to provide these assessments appropriate for use with these students. Therefore, respondents shared concerns that deaf and hard of hearing students with disabilities have unmet needs or are not being appropriately diagnosed.

Examples of responses related to Assessment:

- *"... SWD - Why do schools ONLY test for deafness and not other disabilities? For example, if 10% of the population has a learning disability, then 10% of the deaf population should also. Why do we not address this?"*
- *"... Children with additional disabilities need to be assessed and plans developed to engage them in language acquisition before they reach preschool age."*

Accommodations

Respondents discussed the need for deaf and hard of hearing students with disabilities to receive appropriate accommodations and specialized services, which does not always happen. Support for deaf and hard of hearing students with disabilities requires a commitment that some individuals are not willing to provide. Some professionals and other individuals may not be well informed or well trained, and, as a result, they may provide inappropriate accommodations or fail to adapt to the needs of these students. Some services are not provided in rural areas. Some deaf and hard of hearing students with disabilities transfer to different schools either by choice or as an alternative, and the quality and appropriateness of accommodation provisions vary among schools. Some accommodations being provided may still cause issues for deaf and hard of hearing students with disabilities, such as not feeling comfortable with interpreters or still struggling with tests.

Examples of responses related to Accommodations:

- *"... Deaf students that have additional handicapping conditions, such as LD [learning disabilities], continue to struggle with tests and test formats despite accommodations allowed by states for testing purposes."*
- *"... There are so many different classes of special needs that it seems to be difficult to customize the curriculum to meet all needs"*
- *"In my experience as a parent of a Deaf high schooler with additional disabilities, one of the big problems is that hearing people forget she is Deaf and do not do even the simple things that would improve communication and understanding: facing, getting attention, talking"*

clearly. This affects all aspects of life: academic instruction, extracurriculars, and social interactions. When the student is nonresponsive or slow to respond/comprehend, communication repair is not even thought of, much less attempted. Others tend to form negative judgments about intellect, motivation, and attention/engagement from these experiences”(parent)

Language and Communication

Respondents commented that it is important to ensure deaf and hard of hearing students with disabilities are able to access a language modality that works for them and to have fluent language models to help them meet their language development milestones. Some also shared how having a disability is a barrier to language acquisition. Deaf and hard of hearing students with disabilities need families, professionals, and peers who can communicate with them fluently in their language to understand their needs and support them with language learning. Some respondents emphasized the use of visual or signed language. They also discussed how limited access to language and communication can contribute to delays in language and development or to a misunderstanding of students' abilities and needs. Additionally, their disabilities may make it more challenging for these students to acquire a language. Services, research, and resources for language development for these students are needed.

Examples of responses related to Language and Communication:

- *"... In the field, I would appreciate ways to help support our students with additional disabilities, not just D/HH, in helping them access the communication modality that works for them (PECS [Picture Exchange Communication System®], buttons, signing, verbal, eye gaze)."*
- *"... Secondary disabilities play a significant part in hindering development but might be mitigated or lessened by effective language acquisition and sociolinguistic acquisition and intervention."*

Schooling

Respondents discussed how school experiences of deaf and hard of hearing students with disabilities are influenced in different ways, including: 1) resource allocation determined by legislation, 2) training and development of school professionals to become informed about this group's needs, 3) access to and use of language and communication at school, and 4) specific programs and educational placement. A few respondents mentioned the need for curriculum adjustments or adaptations for deaf and hard of hearing students with disabilities. Schools play a large role in how deaf and hard of hearing students with disabilities' needs are met when they are placed in the same schools or classrooms. This includes academics, language development, socioemotional development, and career or college readiness.

Examples of responses related to Schooling:

- *"... I have also personally encountered instances where deaf children were refused placement at a state school due to other accompanying disabilities—specifically autism and a progressive neurological condition that affected cognition"*
- *"... As a parent of a young adult who is deaf, looking back I see her education suffered due to her additional disabilities and the lack of support and understanding about how to provide an education to a unique student"(parent)*
- *"We are moving to another state for our child to go to Deaf school because the district we are in will not provide interpretation to our profoundly Deaf child; they have a deaf/hard of hearing class, but because our daughter has other disabilities and a trauma history, they refuse to put her in it"(parent)*
- *"... Deaf plus [students] are badly served if they are served at all. There is still warehousing of deaf plus students. This MUST end!"*
- *"... Also, the deaf and [deaf] plus, they are often considered as failed subjects in their school districts and thrown to the institution"*

Socioemotional Well-Being

Respondents discussed the different ways the socioemotional needs of deaf and hard of hearing students with disabilities may not be met at school. For example, they may experience more negative socioemotional impacts compared to deaf or hard of hearing students without disabilities. Sometimes having disabilities may affect deaf and hard of hearing students' social skills, and they need services to address this need. Also, when deaf and hard of hearing students' socioemotional needs are not met, they may engage in behaviors resulting in a diagnosis of a disability.

Examples of responses related to Socioemotional Well-Being:

- *"... While a child can be successful academically, social isolation can have a severe impact on the child's self-esteem, especially those with additional challenges/health concerns."*

- *"... My son is expected to have the same social and emotional development as his peers. His behavior is expected to be on the same level, but it isn't. He has sensory overload and anxiety on top of that. It presents differently from his peers, and he is often punished instead of getting what he needs. This leads him to believe that he is not as good as the other kids and that other children do not want to play with him" (parent)*
- *"... On the iceberg side, are the families that excuse their child's poor social skills and lack of student-like behavior as being due to the hearing loss taking no responsibility for their lack of parenting skills? These children are sometimes identified as "deaf plus" because their behavior is so unacceptable, but is it organically caused or caused by lack of communication and socialization?"*

Conclusion

Overall, the barriers experienced by deaf and hard of hearing students with and without disabilities, as well as by their families, may prevent these students from achieving their academic, linguistic, and socioemotional potential. Respondents discussed the barriers and made recommendations on how to reduce or eliminate them. The Students with Disabilities model includes different levels influencing the experiences of deaf and hard of hearing students—both with and without disabilities—and their families while striving to achieve their potential.

One respondent pointed out that deaf and hard of hearing students with disabilities themselves are never the reason they do not reach their potential, highlighting the key point that disabilities by themselves are not the cause of the problem but rather some of the issues are systematic, a lack of qualified professionals, and limited resources. Other issues, as shared by respondents, include the inability and struggles of states, schools, and organizations to meet the needs of deaf and hard of hearing students with disabilities. These issues are key challenges for deaf and hard of hearing students to achieve their educational, linguistic, and socioeconomic potential. As one respondent commented:

"... Deaf children and deaf children with disabilities are not the problem. Your question asks about them meeting their potential, and a deaf student with a disability would never be a reason they did not meet their potential. The system and the professionals working with the child would be the reason they don't meet their potential. And blaming students with disabilities for other deaf students not meeting their potential is just wrong. Educators should have the skills and resources to meet all students' needs, and they have no right to blame students with disabilities. They need to differentiate instruction or work with administration to meet the needs of each student."

Addressing the barriers to an effective education, especially for those students who are deaf or hard of hearing with and without disabilities, is of utmost importance. When those students have all the resources and support they require, they are more likely to succeed.

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