

Pa Agenda for Students who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing or Deaf-Blind

A Summary of Accomplishments

The Pennsylvania Agenda for Students Who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or Deaf-blind was implemented in 2005. Since then, the Educational Resources for Children with Hearing Loss committee (ERCHL) has worked steadily to achieve the goals within the document. Working to achieve these important goals has been daunting at times, however, ERCHL realizes that it is very important that the PA Agenda remains in the forefront for all consumers and wants it to continue to provide a meaningful roadmap to services for children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Below is a summary of accomplishments for each area of the PA Agenda as of October 2019 and a guide to goals, actions and outcomes currently being worked on.

I. Language and Communication Access:

The development of the Language/Communication Plan was one of the earliest goals addressed. Through ERCHL's efforts, the ***Communication Plan for a Child who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing*** was developed and included in the PA Chapter 14 Special Education regulations in 2008. Similarly, a Communication Plan was developed by the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) for children in Early Intervention. The information from these documents is required to be discussed and included for children who are deaf or hard of hearing who have an IEP/IFSP. Both the school-age Communication Plan and the ***Early Intervention Communication Plan for a Child who is Deaf, Hard of Hearing or Deaf-Blind*** can be found at www.pattan.net.

When the Communication Plan was developed several years ago, PaTTAN held widespread workshops and developed materials to be used throughout the Commonwealth to help all understand the Communication Plan and requirements involved. ERCHL is planning to work with PaTTAN/OCDEL this year to provide up to date training on these documents and other best practices in language and communication access.

II. Early Identification and Early Intervention

Many of these accomplishments from this topic area have occurred or are currently being worked on through the efforts of other state agencies and programs. For example, the Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) Program in the Department of Health has been working on some of the actions and goals listed in this section. Concerning the outcome of having all children receiving EI services by six months of age, data from 2016 (reported in November 2018) from the EHDI program revealed that 165 infants were identified with a permanent hearing loss. Of the 155 who were then referred to Early Intervention, 124 children then enrolled in EI; *approximately half of those (59 children) were enrolled prior to 6 months of age*. Efforts continue to improve that percentage in the coming year. The EHDI program now has an interagency agreement to share data on children identified with a hearing loss with the Department of Human Services (DHS), OCDEL, and the Bureau of Early Intervention Services and Family Supports with the goal of tracking those children to ensure that they receive appropriate Early Intervention services. They also share comprehensive information and materials concerning language and communication.

Efforts need to continue to address sharing balanced information with parents who need to make important communication and language decisions related to their child. A publication entitled ***Communication Considerations for Children who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing or Deaf-Blind*** (www.pattan.net) was developed to provide some basic information to parents, and both the Department of Health and Department of Human

Services (OCDEL) assure all parents of children who have been identified with a permanent hearing loss receive the **Getting Started** booklet.

To assist with successful transitions for preschool children, ERCHL has developed the **Preschool to School Age Transition Considerations for Children who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing or Deaf-Blind**. This list of questions allows for pre-planning and ongoing discussions between parents and school personnel. This document can be found at www.pattan.net.

Several training workshops have been targeted to birth to three Early Intervention service coordinators specific to the communication options and the EI Communication Plan. A significant increase in the use of the EI Communication Plan was noted in the most recent annual deaf/hard of hearing family survey and record review.

III. Family Involvement

Much attention has been centered on assisting families and developing a statewide network to share opportunities for families to meet and work together. Through OCDEL, the Hands and Voices Guide by Your Side program has been a remarkable help to families of newly diagnosed deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind infants and toddlers.

ERCHL has worked with PaTTAN and OCDEL to develop workshops, webinars and additional activities for families to help throughout their journey. The Great Start conference and HELIX: High Expectations for Students with Low Incidence Disabilities conference occur annually and involve many families of children who are deaf, hard of hearing or deaf-blind in education and networking opportunities. Families of children who are deaf-blind have access to the Deaf-Blind Listserv.

Attention is needed to develop a system that will document information families have received concerning the extent and meaning of hearing loss or deaf-blindness. Also, more help should be provided to families to assist in their participation in the IFSP/IEP process.

IV. Placements and Programs

This goal area is one that is constantly being addressed as programs evolve and change. Some program issues that are a challenge include turnover of staff and finding appropriate certified staff.

The continuum of services for deaf, hard of hearing or deaf-blind students is vital from birth through graduation. Ensuring this continuum is available has been addressed through ERCHL and PaTTAN in several ways, including through development of policy statements, papers and workshops. OCDEL, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), and ERCHL have all been involved in these efforts.

Through ERCHL's efforts, interpreter standards were developed and included in Chapter 14 regulations in 2008. These regulations ensure that educational interpreters in PA are either registered with the state under the Act 57 Sign Language Interpreter or Transliterator Act or achieve a 3.5 on the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA) and participate in 20 hours of professional development annually.

The importance of the Communication Plan has been stressed for many years. This Plan is the basis for the child's IFSP/IEP and efforts to provide information on the use of the Communication Plan will be a focus this year.

V. Technology

Almost all the actions in this goal area have been addressed and completed. This however doesn't mean they have been set aside but rather it means that they need to be reviewed on a regular basis.

ERCHL developed a checklist for local education agencies (LEAs) to use to review their adequacy of alerting systems, emergency announcement systems, and signage to provide a safe environment for all students. This publication, **Students who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing or Deaf-Blind: Safety Checklist for IEP Teams** is available on the PaTTAN website.

VI. System Responsibility: Standards, Assessment, and Accountability

This is an area that continues to evolve and grow as programs for the deaf, hard of hearing and deaf-blind students are always changing, adjusting and growing. Research continues to be of utmost importance in helping to learn the latest in assessment for these students based on language and learning needs. While this information is always being gathered, it then must be shared with LEAs and parents to best serve these students.

The attempt to share state testing information with LEAs and schools serving these students has been ongoing. Disaggregating test information for students who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind from other students continues to be a challenge at the state level. This is a goal ERCHL would like to see accomplished.

As compliance monitoring is done throughout PA, the Bureau of Special Education makes sure that a Communication Plan is attached to the IEP for children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

VII. Professional Standards and Preparation

Throughout the past several years ERCHL, PaTTAN and OCDEL have provided special education administrators, county Early Intervention coordinators, and other constituents with professional development related to the unique language and communication needs, social and cultural needs of deaf, hard of hearing and deaf-blind students.

A considerable amount of work has been done related to interpreter training programs to describe the extent, distribution, and nature of educational interpreter and intervener needs in Pa. The future of filling these positions has been brought to the attention of ERCHL and attention is being given to this topic. Through the efforts of ERCHL and PaTTAN, standards and guidelines for educational interpreting and transliteration have been disseminated throughout the commonwealth. A document dealing with clarification for school districts concerning liability issues that may be present when providing sign language interpreters in settings that involve the sharing of confidential information by a student who is deaf or hard of hearing (e.g., when interacting with outside agencies; crisis response and management; in-school therapy and counseling) has recently been published. This publication, ***Student Confidentiality: Guidance for Educational Interpreters*** is now available on the PaTTAN website.

VIII. Collaborative Partnerships

ERCHL constantly works to develop partnerships with all groups who work with deaf, hard of hearing or deaf-blind students. An OCDEL representative serves on the ERCHL committee, along with representatives from intermediate units, higher education, approved private schools and adult consumers. ERCHL members have attended Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) meetings and have participated in state conferences and exhibits representing ERCHL.

County Early Intervention service coordinators and related service providers are targeted for participation in the Great Start conference, which is held annually, sponsored by Early Intervention Technical Assistance (EITA). Through their attendance they learn more about children with low incidence disabilities, including those who are deaf, hard of hearing and deaf-blind.

IX. Deaf-Blindness

ERCHL has worked to ensure that children who are deaf-blind are represented in all of ERCHL's efforts. Workshops are given at state conferences, including Great Start and the HELIX: High Expectations for Students with Low Incidence Disabilities Conference to help share information concerning best practices in the education of students who are deaf-blind and it is a goal to continue to offer such workshops. ERCHL is currently beginning a discussion about the credentials and training needed for the role of intervener. ERCHL has a member of the PA Deaf-Blind Initiative serving on ERCHL which helps in this collaboration.