Language Assessment for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Children

Introduction

Children who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, or deaf-blind have the same ability and capacity to learn language as their peers who are not deaf or hard-of-hearing. Language abilities are central to the human experience and are necessary prerequisites to cognitive, emotional, academic, and social growth, supporting children as they develop into healthy and productive members of society. Without language, formal education is not possible. At the present time, the State of Connecticut does not have performance data about the language learning and development of children who are deaf, hard-of-hearing or deaf-blind. Therefore, we are requesting that all children who are deaf or hard-of-hearing be assessed for language development and/or English literacy.

At the present time, the State of Connecticut does not have a way of identifying, assessing, or monitoring the progress of deaf or hard of hearing children from the time of identification of hearing levels through secondary education. The Department of Health, the Birth-to-Three Lead Agency, and the Department of Education need to collect and share data to improve services for children who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, or deaf-blind so that they have the necessary language skills to acquire knowledge that will allow them to be successful in school and life.

In Connecticut, responsibilities for these children are divided across agencies:

The Department of Health is responsible for early hearing detection and referral to intervention services through the Early Hearing Detection and Intervention program (EHDI).

The Birth to Three Lead Agency is responsible, under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), for the provision of early intervention services as identified in the child's individualized family support plan to children from birth to age three years with special needs and their families;

The Connecticut Department of Education is responsible, under Part B of IDEA, for the provision of special education and related services as identified in the child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) to children age three to twenty-one years; and

The U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights is responsible for ensuring equal access to education.

Therefore the legislature recognizes that:

(A) Each responsible agency listed above shall participate in a shared data collection system to identify and track children who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, and deaf-blind including but not limited to, those students requiring specialized instruction under IDEA or 504 plans.
(B) A Working Group on Language Assessment for Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing and Deaf-Blind Children is hereby established drawing expertise from The Department of Health, the Birth-to-Three Lead Agency/Birth-To-Three, The CT Department of Education, and selected individuals under section (E). The Working Group shall provide advice to those agencies regarding appropriate assessments, practices and programs.

(1) Ensure that appropriate language assessments are used on an annual basis for deaf and hard-of-hearing children/students for the purpose of monitoring and tracking developmental milestones in both expressive and receptive language acquisition for English and/or American Sign Language. For this section, English includes spoken English and written English.

(2) Ensure that individuals administering assessments to students who are deaf or hard-of-hearing shall be proficient in the student's primary language and communication mode. All assessments shall be presented in the child’s primary language and mode of communication (as identified in the child’s Language and Communication Plan).

(3) Ensure that all results shall be shared with parents in an accessible language by a knowledgeable professional in deaf education as well as disseminated to the child’s IFSP, IEP, or 504 team on an annual basis. The results will be used to set goals and objectives, as well as generate recommendations for strategies, services, and programs.

(C) If a deaf or hard-of-hearing child does not demonstrate progress in age-appropriate expressive and receptive language skills as determined by the assessment system described in section B1-3, members of the Working Group will provide specific guidance related to programs, practices and strategies to the child’s EFSP, IEP or 504 team.

(D) The department, with the assistance of the working group as defined below, shall develop specific plans and regulations by July 1, 2019. On and after July 1, 2019, an annual language assessment shall be given to each child who is deaf or hard-of-hearing. Language assessments shall be provided either through Birth-To-Three early intervention services administered by the Birth-To-Three provider, or if the child is three years of age or older, through the school district in which the child is enrolled. Such language assessments shall be provided in accordance with the provisions of this section and any recommendations adopted pursuant to this section.

(E) There is hereby established within The CT State Department of Education a working group on the language assessment for deaf, hard-of-hearing and deaf-blind children. The working group shall consist of 16 members as follows:

(1) one member shall be a credentialed teacher of the deaf who uses both ASL and written English during instruction;

(2) one member shall be a credentialed teacher of the deaf who uses spoken English during instruction;
(3) one member shall be a speech language pathologist who has experience working with deaf and hard-of-hearing children;
(4) one member shall be a professional who conducts research on language and academic outcomes of children who are deaf or hard-of-hearing using ASL and written English;
(5) one member shall be a professional who conducts research on language and academic outcomes of children who are deaf or hard-of-hearing using spoken English to communicate;
(6) one member shall be a parent of a child who is deaf or hard-of-hearing and who uses both ASL and English;
(7) one member shall be a parent of a child who is deaf or hard-of-hearing and who uses spoken English;
(8) one member shall be a deaf individual knowledgeable about the development of deaf and hard-of-hearing children, representing the deaf community;
(9) one member shall be a hard-of-hearing individual knowledgeable about the language development of deaf and hard-of-hearing children, representing deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals who use listening and spoken language;
(10) one member shall be a deaf-blind individual knowledgeable about deaf-blind children, representing the deaf-blind community
(11) one member shall be the executive director of American School for the Deaf, or designee;
(12) one member shall be the executive director of SoundBridge, or designee;
(13) one member shall be the director of the New England Center for Hearing Rehabilitation, or designee;
(14) one member shall be a representative of the State of CT Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education;
(15) one member shall be a representative of the State of CT Birth-To-Three system;
(16) one member shall be a representative from CT Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS).

(F) The State of CT Department of Education designee shall call an organizational meeting of the working group on or before August 1, 2019. At such organizational meeting, the members shall elect a chairperson and vice-chairperson from the membership of the working group. The working group may meet at any time and at any place within the state on the call of the chairperson. A quorum of the working group shall be nine members. All actions of the working group shall be by motion adopted by a majority of those members present when there is a quorum.

(G) On or before January 31, 2020, the working group shall develop specific action plans and make recommendations necessary to fully implement the language assessment program. In carrying out its charge under this section, the committee shall:

(1) solicit input from professionals trained in the language development and education of children who are deaf or hard of hearing on the selection of specific language developmental milestones;
(2) review, recommend and monitor the use of existing and available language assessments for children who are deaf or hard of hearing;
(3) identify and recommend qualifications of language professionals with knowledge of the use of evidence-based, best practices in English and American Sign Language who will participate at IFSP or IEP team meetings;
(4) identify qualifications of language assessment evaluators with knowledge on the use of evidence-based, best practices with children who are deaf or hard of hearing and the resources for locating such evaluators; and
(5) identify procedures and methods for communicating information on language acquisition, assessment results, milestones, assessment tools used and progress of the child to the parent or legal guardian of such child, teachers and other professionals involved in the early intervention and education of such child.

(H) The specific action plans and recommendations developed by the working group shall include, but are not limited to, the following:
(1) appropriate language assessments that include systems for data collection and timely tracking of the child’s development so as to provide information about the child’s receptive and expressive language development;
(2) guidelines for the administration of language assessments delivered in the child’s primary mode of communication;
(3) guidelines for determining assessors’ proficiency in ASL for ASL assessments and English for English assessments;
(4) use of language development assessment results, in addition to the data from assessments required by federal law, in IFSP and IEP team discussions regarding language development
(5) the participation of professional(s) knowledgeable in deaf education in IFSP or IEP team meetings;
(5) reporting of assessment results to the parents or legal guardian of the child and the applicable agency;
(6) reporting of assessment results on an aggregated basis to the committees on education of the house of representatives and the senate; and
(7) reporting of assessment results to the members of the child’s IFSP or IEP team, which may be used, in addition to the assessments required by federal law, by the child’s IFSP or IEP team, as applicable, to track the child’s progress, and to establish or modify the IFSP or IEP.

(I) On or before January 31, 2020, and each January 31 thereafter, State of CT Department of Education shall publish a report that is specific to language and literacy development of children who are deaf, hard of hearing or deaf-blind for each age from birth through the age of eight, including those who have other disabilities. CSDE shall publish the report on its website.

(J) As used in this section:
(1) “ASL” means American Sign language.
(2) “English” means written and/or spoken English.
(3) “IEP” means individualized education program.
(4) “IFSP” means individualized family service plan.
(5) “Language” means a complex and dynamic system of conventional symbols that is used in various modes for thought and communication.