

## Serving Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) fully supports and encourages improvements in the education of and service delivery to students who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families. NASP supports having only qualified personnel conduct assessments of students who are deaf or hard of hearing to ensure access to effective instruction. Achieving this goal involves ongoing professional development for school psychologists who serve students who are deaf or hard of hearing. It is essential that all school psychologists understand that each student's culture and individuality must be respected and integrated into all school psychological services (Bradley-Johnson & Evan, 1991; Cawthon, 2011a; Luckner, Slike, & Johnson, 2012; Lukomski, 2005).

NASP recognizes that students who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families are a heterogeneous group in terms of hearing levels, cause, age of onset, use of assistive listening devices, and language skills. They also reflect the diversity of society and can share membership in other groups related to differences in religion, ethnicity, disability, and sexual identity. Most students who are deaf or hard of hearing share a common trait in that they can access language fully through the visual channel. NASP supports the need for all school psychologists to increase their skills, awareness, and sensitivity to serve this distinct population of students and their families. NASP endorses the following:

### 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 their state and school system policies.
- School psychologists need to recognize the strengths and limitations of their training and experience and engage only in practices for which they are qualified. When a school psychologist cannot communicate directly in the language and modality of a student who is deaf or hard of hearing, NASP supports the ethical and responsible use of peer review, consultation that includes distance technologies, and referral to appropriately qualified professionals.
- School psychologists should be aware of research in the field of deafness, specifically relating to the reliability and validity of psychological assessment instruments, to avoid misuse. Furthermore, because of the tremendous heterogeneity within this population, test developers, publishers, and other researchers are urged to specify the significant characteristics (e.g., degree of hearing loss, etiology, age of onset, language, communication modality, educational placement) of students who are deaf or hard of hearing and are included in collected samples and validity studies (Cawthon, 2011b; Spencer & Marschark, 2010).

### ACCESS TO COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES

School psychologists must be aware that students who are deaf or hard of hearing may grow up in families and educational environments with limited direct communication access. This limited access

can create significant barriers to the full psychological development of these students and may affect the students' ability to function effectively via spoken and written languages. The school psychologist must determine what early opportunities the student may have had or not had that may affect the acquisition of skills necessary for success in an educational or testing situation. For students who are deaf or hard of hearing for whom American Sign Language (ASL) is their primary language, consultation with credentialed ASL signers familiar with educational issues is an essential component of the language assessment process. In addition, access to services should address the following:

- Assessments and other educational support services need to address all domains in the life of the student who is deaf or hard of hearing, including social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development, and should use multiple sources of information for decision making. Due to etiological, neurobiological, and social factors, some students who are deaf or hard of hearing may be at risk for academic, social, or emotional difficulties. A successful educational program should proactively address the needs of these at-risk students and provide school psychological assistance to educators and support personnel working with these populations (Brauer, Braden, Pollard, & Hardy-Braz, 1998; Sattler & Hardy-Braz, 2001).
- School psychologists need to recognize that students who are deaf or hard of hearing may also have physical disabilities, have learning disabilities, or be members of a minority group that creates additional challenges when receiving educational and mental health care within school systems, human service agencies, and society as a whole.
- 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, efforts must be made through education and advocacy to reduce discrimination and ensure access across environments.
- For students who use cochlear implants or hearing aids, the school psychologist, in conjunction with other professionals, should determine how well the student can understand and communicate with these assistive devices and whether an interpreter (e.g., sign language, oral, or cued speech) may also be needed to access the curriculum.
- School psychologists should collaborate with specialists knowledgeable in working with students who are deaf or hard of hearing (e.g., certified teachers of the deaf, speech and language pathologists, audiologists, ASL/deaf studies teachers) to assess how the student can communicate in a variety of settings. A mechanism should be in place to provide ongoing progress monitoring and, when progress is deemed less than adequate, additional assessment and intervention should be provided.

## **FAMILY INVOLVEMENT**

NASP recognizes that in order for parents to make informed decisions about their child's educational needs, they must have access to nonbiased information concerning available education and mental health services for children who are deaf or hard of hearing. School psychologists should 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. In addition, they should be able to present this information to parents and guardians (Thumann-Prezioso, 2005). School psychologists should encourage parents to be highly involved in their child's educational plan, and to be active, collaborative partners in the educational program. School

psychologists respect the educational choices and interventions that students who are deaf and hard of hearing and their families make.

## **USE OF INTERPRETERS**

In order to ensure the student's right to an evaluation in his or her primary language, a school psychologist proficient in the student's preferred language or communication mode should be utilized. When such a professional is not available, an interpreter should be enlisted as a last resort. Because of the diversity of the communication needs of students who are deaf or hard of hearing, the school psychologist must ensure that the interpreter is qualified to interpret for a specific student and has experience with educational assessments. The school psychologist is responsible for training the interpreter to serve in an ancillary examiner role, and must be able to determine the validity of test data collected (National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 1992).

When using an interpreter is necessary, only Interpreters/Transliterators certified by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), the National Cued Speech Association (NCSA), or the state certifying agency should be utilized. In addition, school psychologists should be familiar with the variety of assistive listening devices such as hearing aids, cochlear implants, or FM loop systems that an individual student may use and ensure that they are in good working order prior to conducting the evaluation.

In lieu of the interpreter/ancillary examiner model, a school psychologist who is not proficient in the primary language of the student is strongly encouraged to refer the assessment to a state outreach program, which may be able to provide a professional qualified to provide assessment services to students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

## **EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION**

As members of the multidisciplinary evaluation team (MET) and Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams, school psychologists make significant contributions to the development of appropriate educational programs for each student based upon his or her needs. The MET or IEP team for a student who is deaf or hard of hearing should include professionals knowledgeable about the sociological, cultural, medical, clinical, psychological, educational, language, communication modes, and developmental aspects of students who are deaf or hard of hearing (Antia, Jones, Luckner, Kreimeyer, & Reed, 2011; Bowen, 2008). A certified teacher of the deaf should always be part of the team. Efforts to create quality schools for students who are deaf or hard of hearing should include as a minimum:

- ongoing professional development concerning best practices for students who are deaf and hard of hearing;
- reduction or removal of barriers to accessibility (e.g., provision of videophones, closed or open captioned videos, telecommunication devices, visually based alerting systems);
- a variety of direct communication skills for use by students who are deaf and hard of hearing; and
- promotion of a school community that exemplifies attitudes and behaviors that affirm the dignity and rights of all students.

In accordance with IDEA (2004), NASP supports the need for students who are deaf or hard of hearing to have frequent opportunities for direct interaction with peers of similar ages and diverse communication skills. NASP also supports educating students and staff through inservice training

regarding the educational experiences and outcomes for these students; relevant research; and appropriate means for meeting their social, emotional, and educational needs.

## ROLE OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

All school psychologists must work collaboratively with other educators and clinicians to address the needs of students who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families. School psychologists can participate in education and advocacy on a number of levels by:

- promoting nondiscrimination policies;
- conducting school-wide inservice training;
- actively addressing 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 and hard of hearing students, their families, and their community in daily interactions with all students and staff.

## REFERENCES

- Antia, S. D., Jones, P., Luckner, J., Kreimeyer, K. H., & Reed, S. (2011). Social outcomes of students who are deaf and hard of hearing in general education classrooms. *Exceptional Children*, 77, 489–504.
- Bowen, S. K. (2008). Coenrollment for students who are deaf or hard of hearing: Friendship patterns and social interactions. *American Annals of the Deaf*, 153, 285–293. doi:10.1353/aad.0.0052
- Bradley-Johnson, S., & Evan, L. (1991). *Psychoeducational assessment of hearing-impaired students*. Austin, TX: Pro-ed.
- Brauer, B. A., Braden, J. P., Pollard, R. Q., & Hardy-Braz, S. T. (1998). Deaf and hard of hearing people. In J. Sandoval, C. L. Frisby, K. F. Geisinger, J. Dowd Scheuneman, & J. Ramos Grenier (Eds.), *Test interpretation and diversity: Achieving equity in assessment* (pp. 297-315). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Cawthon, S. W. (2011a). Education of deaf and hard of hearing students and accountability reform: Issues for the future. *American Annals of the Deaf*, 156, 424.
- Cawthon, S. W. (2011b). Making decisions about assessment practices for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. *Remedial and Special Education*, 32, 4–21. doi:10.1177/0741932509355950
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004). Public Law 108-446.
- Luckner, J. L., Slike, S. B., & Johnson, H. (2012). Helping students who are deaf or hard of hearing succeed. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 44(4), 58.
- Lukomski, J. (2005). Best practices in program planning for children who are deaf and hard-of-hearing. In A. Thomas & J. Grimes (Eds.), *Best Practices in School Psychology IV* (pp. 1394–1403). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.
- National Association of State Directors of Special Education. (1992). *Deaf and hard of hearing students educational service guidelines*.
- Sattler, J., & Hardy-Braz, S. (2001). Assessment of children with hearing impairments. In J. Sattler (Ed.), *Assessment of children: Behavioral and clinical applications* (4th ed.; pp. 377–389). San Diego, CA: Sattler Publishing.

Spencer, P. E., & Marschark, M. (2010). *Evidence-based practice in educating deaf and hard-of-hearing students*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Thumann-Prezioso, C. (2005). Deaf parents' perspectives on deaf education. *Sign Language Studies*, 5, 415.

Adopted by the NASP Delegate Assembly in July 2012.

Please cite this document as:

National Association of School Psychologists. (2012). *Students who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families* [Position statement]. Bethesda, MD: Author.