

Hello,

My name is Holly Miller, and I have been a school psychologist working with Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing students for 11 years and was involved with Deaf education issues for years before that. I am state and nationally certified and am active in the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) and a member of the Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing Special Interest Group for NASP. I work at the American School for the Deaf and also do evaluations for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing students around the state who are in mainstream settings. I see students who are American Sign Language users, users of Signed English, users of Cued English, or oral only. I see students who speak and sign at the same time and students who do not/cannot use their voices. I see students with hearing aids, cochlear implants, BAHAs, or no amplification. The needs of these children are as diverse as they are. What they all share is that they deserve an equal chance in school. They deserve to have their diverse needs recognized and respected. They deserve to have someone who can communicate clearly work with them. They deserve to have direct communication with staff and peers in their own communication mode. They deserve to be understood for who they are.

It breaks my heart to read some of the reports I have read from school psychologists around the state who do not know anything about Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing issues. I often see that tests have been given that are inappropriate for these children, resulting in diagnoses of Intellectual Disability when the students actually have Average intelligence. On the other hand, some students are said to have much higher skills than they really do, academic and/or cognitive, because an interpreter was used inappropriately. It seems to be a common misconception that simply using an interpreter solves the communication issue during testing. It does not. Not all Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing students are adept at using an interpreter. An interpreter who does not know about psychological/educational testing may not realize that they have to say exactly what the student says and that they cannot give further explanation of test items. Another scenario that happens is that evaluators (as well as teachers and other staff) sometimes assume that because a child has good speech that he or she has equally good hearing and feel they do not need any services. It is possible to be profoundly Deaf and still have clear speech.

I understand that unless school personnel have had special training in working with this population, many are not even aware that these issues exist. The Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing special interest group of NASP is working on a position paper to help school psychologists understand that it takes special knowledge and skills to work with these students, on a national level. Connecticut can make a huge difference for the students in our state. The Deaf Child Bill of Rights would mean that each child would have a Language and Communication Plan. By completing this document, school personnel would have to think about all of these issues and to determine and acknowledge each child's unique needs. This will go a long way in helping students get the services they need to succeed.

Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing students can succeed. The large achievement gap between these students and their hearing peers is unnecessary. I strongly support the passage of HB 5357. All Deaf and Hard-of Hearing students deserve the same chance to succeed as every other child.

Thank you,

Holly J. Miller, Psy.S.