

West Virginia Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

NEWSLETTER



“Advocacy is empathy, compassion, and community at work.”- Janna Cachola

Letter from the Executive Director

As we move into the holiday season, may we all take a moment to reflect on gratitude, celebrate our accomplishments, and cherish time with our families, friends, and community. This time of year reminds us of the importance of connection, belonging, and shared joy—values we hold close at the WV Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.



Deaf Santa Celebration at Mountwest

The annual Deaf Santa Celebration is right around the corner!

Registration: November 1–21

Event Date: Saturday, December 6

Time: 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Location: Mountwest Community & Technical College, Huntington

Bring your children, family, and friends to enjoy the holiday spirit! Meet Deaf Santa, connect with community members, and enjoy free goodies and gifts. We look forward to celebrating with you—see you there!

Deaf & Hard of Hearing Support Group at Marshall University

The Marshall University Speech and Hearing Center (MUSHC) support group for individuals who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing—open to children, adults, and families—will not meet in December and will resume in January 2026.

WVCDHH and Marshall University continue to work together to build Deaf awareness, strengthen community support, and provide a welcoming space for individuals and families navigating hearing loss. We are excited to continue expanding this partnership and creating meaningful opportunities for connection, education, and advocacy.

Meetings take place on the first Tuesday of every month at 6 PM. We look forward to seeing everyone when sessions resume in January.

Appreciation & Gratitude

A heartfelt thank-you to our dedicated WVCDHH staff, board of directors, and community partners. Your commitment to serving the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing communities across West Virginia is deeply appreciated. Your efforts make a difference, and we are grateful for all you do.

Wishing everyone a warm, safe, and joyful holiday season.

Eric Essington, Ph.D.

Questions or want to get involved? Contact me at: erik.j.essington@wv.gov



Reframing Health Care for Patients With Hearing Loss

Source: American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), McKee et al., 2022



Far too often, patients with hearing loss face barriers when seeking medical care—uncaptioned videos, untrained staff, missing interpreters, and noisy environments that make communication difficult. The ASHA article “Reframing Our Health Care System for Patients With Hearing Loss” urges a shift from viewing these barriers as individual problems to recognizing them as system-level design flaws. The article underlines that hearing loss is a health-equity issue, not just an audiological one. Inequities in access and outcomes for people with hearing loss need systemic attention.

“Access shouldn’t depend on who you get as your doctor—it should be built into the system.”

Key Barriers Identified

- System level: Health-care delivery systems often lack built-in accommodations for hearing loss (e.g., captioning, ASL interpretation, assistive technology). Information is rarely tailored for hearing-loss populations.
- Clinic/Provider level: Many providers are insufficiently trained in communicating effectively with patients who have hearing loss; they may not understand how to check for hearing loss, how to provide accessible communication, or how to engage in “teach-back” methods adapted for hearing-loss patients.
- Patient level: Patients with hearing loss often have lower health literacy (especially health information delivered audibly), greater frustration with care, increased risk of misunderstandings, and ultimately worse outcomes and higher costs.
- The compounded effect: fewer preventive services, more hospitalizations, and increased health-care expenditures tied to untreated or inadequately served hearing loss.

Proposed Strategies for Improvement

- Screening & identification: Routine hearing screening for adults in general-care settings; better integration of hearing-loss detection in primary care and specialty care.
- Universal design & inclusion: Make information and services accessible from the outset — e.g., captioning, visual alerts, clear signage, communication technologies, adjustable modalities (video, text, visual).
- Communication practices: Training providers in best practices (facing the patient, speaking clearly, checking for understanding, using supported communication modalities). Use “teach-back” adapted to hearing loss.
- Assistive technology & team diversification: Use hearing assistive technologies (HAT), captions, and interpreters.
- Patient empowerment & support networks: Encourage patients with hearing loss to link with hearing-loss organizations, peer support, and online resources; build systems that enable reporting accommodation needs and ensure they are met.
- Clinic & system redesign: Establish policies, workflows, and metrics for hearing-loss access (e.g., tracking accommodations, ensuring information in accessible formats, monitoring outcomes for patients with hearing loss) so that care is proactively designed, not reactive

Help Us Make Change – Your voice can help create the change we all need!

WVCDHH is collecting feedback from deaf and hard of hearing West Virginians about their experiences in hospitals, clinics, and emergency care to identify gaps, advocate for stronger policies, and promote accessible communication across the state. Scan the QR code to share your story!



Mountwest Community and Technical College (MCTC) offers an **Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree in American Sign Language** and a **one-year certificate in Deaf Studies**. These programs lay a solid foundation in ASL and Deaf culture, preparing students for careers in early intervention programs, boosting qualifications for roles that value ASL skills, or pursuing advanced studies and interpreter training. The curriculum emphasizes practical, hands-on experience and active community involvement.

Sign language interpreting is a rapidly expanding field, with interpreters engaged in a variety of environments, including medical, legal, religious, mental health, rehabilitation, performing arts, and business sectors.

Proficiency in American Sign Language (ASL), awareness of Deaf culture, and comprehension of the challenges faced by the Deaf community are advantageous not only for aspiring interpreters but also for professionals in public and private sectors, as well as educational institutions serving Deaf and hard-of-hearing communities. These competencies significantly enhance effective communication and understanding, benefiting roles such as teachers, counselors, consultants, therapists, and specialists.

Scan the QR code to learn more about the American Sign Language AAS



Scan the QR code to learn more about the Deaf Studies One Year Certificate



Brunch with Deaf Santa: A Cherished MCTC Tradition

Since its inception in 2009, the annual Brunch with Deaf Santa has become a beloved tradition at Mountwest Community & Technical College. This heartwarming event was initiated by the American Sign Language Student Association, stemming from the recognition of a unique need within the community—a Santa who could genuinely connect and communicate with deaf children through sign language.

Held each year to bring joy and inclusivity to the holiday season, this gathering offers an invaluable opportunity for the deaf and hard of hearing community to immerse themselves in the festive spirit alongside Santa and Mrs. Claus.

The event is designed to ensure that children who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind have an experience that is both magical and accessible.

Guests are treated to delicious refreshments, and holiday crafts.



Please Join MCTC for their **2025**

Deaf Brunch with Santa

Saturday, December 6th
10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Mountwest Community & Technical College

1 Mountwest Way
Huntington, WV 25701

Register between
November 1st - 21st
using the QR Code below





The Difference in an Interpreted Education: Why Qualified Interpreters Matter

In classrooms across America, deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) students often rely on interpreters to access instruction, classroom discussion, and the social fabric of school life. But what happens when the interpreter’s skills or training aren’t sufficient? The difference can determine whether a DHH student receives a truly equitable education—or one marked by partial comprehension and lost opportunities.

Understanding an Interpreted Education

An “interpreted education” means a DHH student receives instruction delivered through a sign language interpreter rather than directly from the teacher. This approach is common in mainstream education settings, where a qualified interpreter facilitates communication between the student, teacher, and peers.

Why Interpreter Qualifications Matter

Educational interpreting is a complex, demanding profession. Interpreters are not only language specialists — they are educational partners who bridge communication between two languages, two cultures, and two learning systems.

When DHH students receive information through inaccurate or incomplete interpretation, their right to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) is compromised.

Highly qualified interpreters must be able to:

- Understand and accurately convey academic content across subjects and grade levels.
- Interpret at the student’s language level, ensuring messages are both accessible and age-appropriate.
- Model rich, grammatically correct language that supports literacy and concept development.
- Maintain confidentiality and professionalism in a school environment.

The Role of the School System

As mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), public school systems are required to provide qualified interpreters for DHH students who need interpreting services to access the curriculum and fully participate in the school environment.

Educational and Life Consequences of Inaccessibility to Communication and Social Isolation

Include the Following:

- Reduced literacy levels
- Increased risk for social-emotional disorders
- Lower graduation rates
- Increased reliance on government assistance
- Lower average income than their hearing counterparts
- High rates of un- and underemployment

Building a Better Future

To examine the classifications of Educational Sign Language Interpreters as defined in West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) policy and state code, along with their required qualifications, and to understand why **“Sign Support Specialists are not intended to support students who are deaf or hard of hearing,”** please scan the QR code to access the “WVDE Educational Sign Language Interpreters: Guidance for Local Educational Agencies” document.



Investing in qualified interpreters transcends compliance; it’s about ensuring that DHH students receive an education that empowers them to think, learn, and aspire in their own language, and have the opportunity to reach their full potential, the same as their hearing peers.





College Prep Weekend



College Prep Weekend empowers Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Visually Impaired students to take the next step toward higher education. With sessions on applications, scholarships, careers, and campus life, students and families will gain the tools and confidence to succeed.

WE OFFER:

- ✔ Connect with Representatives from DRS, HEPC, and WVU
- ✔ Financial Aid Guidance
- ✔ Network with D/HH, B/LV College Students & Graduates
- ✔ Scholarship Workshops & Practice
- ✔ Personalized Support Navigating Financial Aid

ACADEMIC & COLLEGE PREP HIGHLIGHTS:

- ✔ Personalized workshops on navigating college applications for DHH and VI students
- ✔ Guidance on requesting accommodations and accessibility services at colleges
- ✔ Tips for selecting the right major or program based on individual strengths



CONTACT US
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TUESDAYS

- Nov. 4 at 6:00 PM
- Nov. 11 at 6:00 PM
- Nov. 18 at 6:00 PM
- Dec. 2 at 6:00 PM
- Dec. 9 at 6:00 PM
- Dec. 16 at 6:00 PM

Scan the QR Code OR use the link below to access each class.



ASL CLASS SERIES

Join us for our dynamic, interactive sessions with Jennifer Casto, WVSDDB Outreach ASL Communications Coordinator, and special guests (to be announced), designed to provide practical insights into communicating with members of the Deaf community.

Objective:

To equip more people across West Virginia to communicate respectfully and effectively by reducing communication barriers and strengthening community inclusion.

Who Should Attend:

Families, educators, school staff, and community members who want to learn more about American Sign Language and Deaf culture.

Instructional Approach:

Engaging, visual, and interactive lessons featuring live ASL modeling, short practice activities, and a Q&A segment.

Accessibility:

Live captions enabled. All materials will be provided in accessible, visual formats with both ASL and spoken English interpretation.

Special Feature:

Each session will include a Guest Spotlight—hearing directly from members of the Deaf community as they share personal perspectives and model real-world conversations.

ZOOM Link: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/84540081655?pwd=VVacqExsddUraMXWamTraCGXq4hfMa.1>





The “Kitchen Table Effect” at Thanksgiving: *Inclusion Beyond the Feast*

As the holidays approach, many families eagerly anticipate gathering around the kitchen table — the heart of Thanksgiving. It’s where stories are told, jokes are shared, and memories are made. But for many Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals, this cherished space can also be a place of quiet isolation — a reminder of what’s missing rather than what’s shared.







What Is the “Kitchen Table Effect”? The “Kitchen Table Effect” describes the sense of exclusion that occurs when Deaf and Hard of Hearing people are physically present but unable to fully participate in family conversations. It’s the moment when laughter erupts, but you’re not sure what was funny. When everyone’s talking at once, and you’re left smiling politely, nodding, and feeling disconnected.

This experience isn’t limited to Thanksgiving — it happens at every family gathering, holiday party, or casual conversation where communication access isn’t considered. But during Thanksgiving, when family connection is celebrated above all else, the impact can feel even deeper.

The Impact on Connection and Belonging — For Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals, these moments can lead to feelings of loneliness, frustration, or being overlooked — even among loved ones. Over time, it can create emotional distance in families that deeply care but may not realize how much inclusion matters in everyday communication. The kitchen table should symbolize togetherness, not separation. Inclusion begins not with technology or translation, but with awareness and effort.

Tips for Creating an Inclusive Table

Whether you’re Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or hearing, here are a few ways to make your Thanksgiving table truly inclusive:

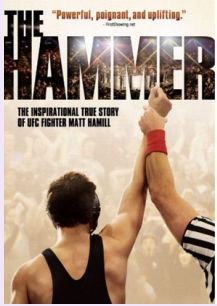
-  Make eye contact and speak one at a time. Group conversations can be overwhelming — slowing down helps everyone follow along.
-  Ensure good lighting. Soft, warm light makes it easier for those who use lipreading visual cues to participate.
-  Use visual language. If your family knows sign language, use it! Even a few signs or gestures can bridge communication.
-  Use technology thoughtfully. Captioned video calls, speech-to-text apps, or even a notepad can make a big difference when conversations move quickly.
-  Check in often. A simple “Did you catch that?” or quick recap of a story helps keep everyone included.
-  Model inclusion for children. Young family members notice how adults communicate — showing them how to include deaf and hard of hearing friends and relatives fosters empathy and lifelong awareness.

Reimagining the Kitchen Table

In Deaf culture, the kitchen table has also been a symbol of connection — a place where Deaf friends and family gather to share stories in sign language, where communication flows freely, and everyone belongs.

This Thanksgiving, let’s strive to bring that same feeling of belonging to every table. **Because the best part of the holiday isn’t just the meal — it’s being seen, understood, and included in the conversation!**






The Hammer 

Inspired by the life of deaf UFC fighter Matt Hamill, *The Hammer* tells the story of what it takes to be a champion, on and off the mat. *The Hammer* is a coming of age drama depicting the struggles and successes of what it takes to become a champion. Raised among those with the ability to hear, Matt later finds himself no less an outsider amidst the Deaf Community. But through sheer determination, he uses his 'perceived' disability as an asset, and becomes not only the first deaf wrestler to win a National Collegiate Championship, but an inspirational force to both hearing and deaf alike.






The Sign for Home 
Antony John (Author)

Piper is a seventeen-year-old high school senior, and she's just been challenged to get her school's super-popular rock band, Dumb, a paying gig. The catch? Piper is deaf. Can she manage a band with five wildly different musicians, nurture a budding romance, and discover her own inner rock star, though she can't hear Dumb's music?

Share Your Voice in the WVCDHH Newsletter! 

The West Virginia Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (WVCDHH) invites families with Deaf and hard of hearing children, professionals who work with the DHH community, and Deaf and hard of hearing adults to contribute to our monthly newsletter!

We're always looking for stories, spotlights, and ideas for our regular features, including:

-  **Parent to Parent** – experiences, challenges, and triumphs from families raising Deaf and hard of hearing children.
-  **Community Spotlight** – highlighting individuals, programs, and agencies making a difference in the deaf community across West Virginia.
-  **Deaf-Friendly & Deaf-Owned** – promoting businesses that welcome and support the Deaf and hard of hearing community.

Whether it's a personal story, classroom innovation, local event, or advocacy success—your voice helps connect and inspire others statewide.

-  **Submit your story, photo, or idea to wvcdhh@wv.gov**
-  **You can also share in ASL by sending a short video link!**

Let's celebrate our community!



**Calling all Parents/Guardians/Caregivers
of Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing kids in WV!**

We're conducting a survey to understand your child's experiences, well-being & access to early intervention services. Your input will help improve support for Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing children. Take the anonymous online survey now!

Please share with fellow caregivers and teachers!

Anonymous Survey Consent

Marshall University IRB
Approved On: 10/01/2025
Study Number: 2297339

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled **"A Survey of Caregivers of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children in West Virginia,"** designed to analyze the experiences, well-being, access to early intervention services, and the needs of Deaf and Hard of Hearing children in West Virginia as reported by their caregivers. The study is being conducted by **Principal Investigator R. Lanai Jennings**, with Co-Investigators Jean Marie Hunter-Suddreth, Erik Essington, Julie Turley, and Sandra Stroebel from Marshall University. The study has been approved by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This research is being conducted as part of the program evaluation requirements for Jean Marie Hunter-Suddreth and Erik Essington.

This survey is comprised of approximately 77 items and takes 20-30 minutes to complete. It consists of a variety of questions related to a child's background and experiences, early intervention history, communication use, current school factors, and the caregiver's perceptions of services. Your replies will be anonymous, so do not type your name anywhere on the form. There are no known risks involved with this study. Participation IS completely voluntary, and there will be no penalty or loss of benefits if you choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw. If you choose not to participate, you can leave the survey site. You may choose not to answer any question by simply leaving it blank. Once you complete the survey, you can delete your browsing history for added security. Completing the online survey indicates your consent for the use of the answers you supply. If you have any questions about the study, you may contact R. Lanai Jennings at 304-746-206, Jean Marie Hunter-Suddreth at 681-245-7805, and/or Erik Essington at 304-533-8032.

If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Marshall University Office of Research Integrity at (304) 696-4303.

By completing this survey, you are also confirming that you are 18 years of age or older.

Please print this page for your records.

To participate in the study, you can find the survey using the **website link** below or by scanning the **QR Code**.



https://marshall.azl.qualtrics.com/ife/form/SV_daRJBHp9R6w9YW



The West Virginia Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (WVCDHH) is dedicated to enhancing access, services, and resources for Deaf, DeafBlind, Hard of Hearing, and Late-Deafened individuals throughout our state. Your input is crucial in helping us identify areas of need within our community and shaping the Commission's future initiatives.

We encourage you to take a few minutes to complete the WVDHH Community Survey. Your feedback will enable us to pinpoint gaps, celebrate achievements, and develop programs and initiatives that truly make a difference.

Together, we can build a stronger, more connected West Virginia for everyone.

Scan the QR code
or use the link
to take the survey!



<https://forms.gle/MDLXtV9PYH5DAMRj6>

THINGS TO DO



WEST VIRGINIA DEAF SERVICE CENTER (WVDSC)

Deaf Coffee Chat

Join us for ASL Activities, Deaf culture, games, snacks, and more!
All ages and skill levels welcome!

Friday, November 7, 2025, 5:30-8:30 PM

Restore
815 Court Street
Charleston, WV

Saturday, November 22, 2025, 10:00 AM-1:00 PM

West Huntington Public Library
901 14th Street, West
Huntington, WV

Tuesday, November 11, 2025, 4:00-7:00 PM

2501 Dudley Ave.
Parkersburg, WV

To learn more about WVDSC go to
www.wvdeafservicecenter.org

OR

Scan the QR Code



WV Hands & Voices

Virtual Feast of FUN

Thursday, November 13, 2025, 6:00 PM

Via Zoom

Join WV Hands & Voices for a Thanksgiving-themed Zoom event for families of deaf or hard of hearing children!

Families who register by November 7th will receive a special package of supplies to enjoy during the event!

We can't wait to share this festive evening of fun and connection with you!

Scan the QR
code
to Register



Beckley Association for the Deaf

Dinner

Saturday, November 8, 2026, 12:00-6:00 PM, Dinner @ 3:00 PM

Lewis Community Center
469 Central Ave.
Oak Hill, WV 25901

Admission is free! Please bring a covered dish.

Come have fun! This is our Last Deaf Club event. We are closing, so come celebrate with us!!!!

For more information, scan the
QR code to message Robin

Tackett on



HANDS & VOICES

What Do We Know About Adverse Childhood Experiences (Including Bullying) for Children who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing?

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 2025, 10:00 AM – 11:00 AM MT

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and bullying can lead to psychological distress, causing both short- and long-term health and mental health problems. This webinar will share will provide important insights into ACEs and bullying for children who are DHH, DHH+CSHCN, and CSHCN using data derived from the National Survey of Children’s Health. these findings can help shape more effective prevention and support strategies, as well as public policies, to enhance the health and well-being of these children.

Scan the QR code to Register



 **LANGUAGE FIRST**

Book Launch: Communication Interventions with Deaf People

Thursday, November 20, 2025, 1:00 -3:00 PM ET

This hybrid event will be hosted via Zoom and in-person in City St. George’s, University of London, in London, England, and at the Westin DC Downtown in Washington, DC, USA, for international attendees.

This is a FREE EVENT. Participants must click the “register” button below, fill out the registration form, and “check out” in order to register for the event.

Order your copy of the book here (get 30% off with code AUFLY30): bit.ly/cidpbook

American Sign Language Curriculum Instruction Assessment (ASL CIA): The Missing Link

Saturday, November 22, 2025, 12:00 - 2:00 PM ET

This webinar will be hosted via Zoom for national and international attendees.

The CIA aligns with the Signacy Framework, which encompasses three core language competencies: Literacy, Oracy, and Signacy. The formalized instruction of ASL in K–12 classrooms has long been missing in the field of Deaf Education in the United States. This instruction should be guided by established standards, supported by curriculum, implemented through the Signacy Framework, and accompanied by ASL assessments for progress monitoring and intervention. This presentation will describe and explain these components with illustrative examples and include a discussion of the roles of ASL teachers and ASL Specialists across various educational settings, including classroom-based, pull-out, push-in, and program-wide models.

Workshop Fee: \$39

**This event is offered for 0.20 ASHA CEUs.*

For additional information or to register go to language1st.org/events **OR** Scan the QR Code



Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment Training Center

Interpreters are Related Service Providers but What Does That Mean?

Saturday, November 15, 2025, 11:00 AM - 3:00 PM ET

For additional information on this virtual workshop, scan the QR code



Registration Deadline: Monday, November 10, 2025, 12:00 PM CT

Target Audience: Educational Interpreters, Deaf Education Directors, Deaf Education Administrators, and Staff

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004), interpreters supporting deaf students are Related Service Providers, in the same category as audiologists and speech professionals (IDEA, Section 300.34). And while it’s now more widely understood that educational interpreters are professional providers, what does that really mean? Using a co-creation framework, the presenter will guide participants through activities to untangle our responsibilities as Related Service Providers. How do we document student use of services and participate in IEP meetings? This session will allow us to collaboratively share our expertise so we can be more proactive IEP team members.



The West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and the Blind (WVSDB) Outreach is sponsoring participation in this live online event, exclusively for professionals serving schools in West Virginia. To receive a sponsorship coupon code and registration details, please email the WVSDB Outreach Director, Mary Anne Clendenin at: mclenden@k12.wv.us.

