

>>> OCTOBER 2024

West Virginia Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing NEWSLETTER



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

Executive Director Erik Essington, Ph.D.



Please feel free to reach out if you have any questions or would like additional information.

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Here are three important updates for West Virginians:

- On September 28, I met with members of the West Virginia Audiology Association at their Fall Conference at Canaan Valley Resort to explore the creation of a hearing aid loan program for K-12 Deaf and Hard of Hearing students in West Virginia.
- On October 16, I attended the Fall Educator Preparation Program Advisory Council meeting at the University of Charleston to discuss their newly developed ASL Studies Minor, launching in Spring 2025. The WVCDHH is actively assisting in the development of this program to ensure it meets the needs of West Virginia's Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities.
- As the school year begins, it's crucial to ensure equal access to education for all students, especially those with disabilities. For parents of Deaf students, an IEP (Individualized Education Program) outlines their specific goals and services, while an IFSP (Individualized Family Service Plan) supports infants and toddlers with developmental delays, ensuring a strong foundation for learning. Both are mandated under IDEA.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA §300.1) is federal legislation enacted “To ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living.” (34 CFR § 300.1)

Therefore, The intent of IDEA, and thereby your child's Individual Education Program (IEP), is to prepare your child for life beyond school. Every step you take and every IEP you sign should have your child's adult life in mind.

The IEP is the centerpiece of IDEA and should be written using clear and accurate information based on your child's **INDIVIDUAL** strengths and needs.



The Present Level of **A**cademic **A**chievement and **F**unctional **P**erformance (PLAAFP) statement is the foundation of the IEP.

At a minimum, the PLAAFP must contain information that:

- Describes your child's
 - AA** - academic achievement and skills, such as reading grade level or ability to perform certain mathematical calculations.
 - FP** - nonacademic information, such as social or communication skills.

Parent-To-Parent Gwen Bryant

- Documents his or her levels of performance based on measurable data information.
- State the factors that impact your child's performance.
- Informs the annual goals and the appropriate special education services and supports required to meet these goals.

As you consider the PLAAFP, keep your long-term goals in mind. Do you envision your child living independently or semi-independently after high school? Will he work? Will she drive a car? What about a social life? Your child's Present Levels and subsequent IEP goals should always have those future, long-term goals in mind.

“There should be a direct relationship between the present levels of performance and the other components of the IEP. Thus, if the statement describes a problem with the child's reading level and points to a deficiency in reading skills, the problem should be addressed under both goals and specific special education and related services provided to the child.”

U.S. Department of Education, Code of Federal Regulation, 1999, Appendix C, Question 36





Community Spotlight

Christine Firkins, Ed.D.

Hometown: Westlake Village, CA
 Current Residence: Charleston, WV
 Children: Memphis, age 10, and Oliver, age 8.
 Current Occupation: Account Executive for Convo Communications.



Academic and/or Professional Background

I hold a Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership, a Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies, and a Bachelor of Arts in Deaf Studies, all from California State University, Northridge (CSUN). I served as an assistant professor at CSUN, where I developed and taught courses in American Sign Language and Deaf Studies, fostering a deeper understanding of Deaf culture and language among my students. Currently, I am an Account Executive for Convo Communications, where I leverage my expertise to enhance accessibility and inclusivity for Deaf employees and customers in corporate environments. Additionally, I am the Executive Director and founder of the National Center for Deaf Services, Inc., dedicated to advocacy and support for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. As a mother of a hearing child and a Deaf child, I am passionate about improving education and resources for families in the Deaf community.

What motivated you to become involved with the WVCDHH, and how has your experiences on the board impacted your views on advocacy for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community?

I am a mother of a Deaf child and currently serve on the board representing parents of Deaf children. I want to see the education of Deaf students improve in WV and encourage more parents and family members to learn sign language to communicate effectively with their Deaf family members. Having been born and raised in California and worked in the Deaf Studies department, I bring my knowledge and experience here to West Virginia, where I moved 2.5 years ago.

What initiatives or projects are you most proud of contributing to during your time on the board, or in your professional capacity, and how have they made a difference for individuals in West Virginia's Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community?

Last year, I advocated for the shift of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) program to Horace Mann Middle School (HMMS). It brings me immense joy to see the 6th-grade DHH students thriving in their new environment. Additionally, I teach virtual ASL classes for the state of WV, where several participants are parents of DHH kids or have family members who are DHH. Witnessing their engagement and growth makes me incredibly happy.

How do you see the role of WVCDHH evolving in the future, and what goals or changes would you like to see implemented to further support Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals across the state?

Having taught in a four-year BA program in Deaf Studies in California, I envision establishing similar programs in WV. Currently, there are only two-year programs available, limiting the ability of future interpreters and DHH teachers to further their knowledge of ASL and Deaf Studies. This gap in education contributes to the shortage of qualified ASL/English interpreters and DHH teachers in our state. Raising the standards for educational interpreters is crucial. For instance, a neighboring state, Kentucky, requires a 4.0 on the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA), a standard we currently lack and should strive for.

What do you think are the biggest challenges currently facing the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community in West Virginia, and how can community members, organizations, and policymakers work together to address these issues?

DHH teachers often work in isolation with limited knowledge of ASL, facing challenges without the necessary support and resources. By collaborating with organizations like WV Outreach for the Deaf and Blind and other centers, we can build a stronger network for DHH teachers, ensuring they receive the support they need. Additionally, DHH students frequently experience isolation, which can hinder their identity formation and sense of belonging. It is crucial to provide them with opportunities for social interaction, mentorship, and community engagement. By creating programs that foster connection and understanding, we can empower these students to develop a positive Deaf identity and build lasting relationships within the community.

Can you share a memorable story or experience from your work with WVCDHH, or outside of the WVCDHH, that highlights the positive impact the commission has had on individuals or families?

The recent program shift of the DHH program to Horace Mann Middle School has had a transformative impact on students. I love seeing the pictures posted on Facebook of the current DHH 6th graders enjoying their school experience at Horace Mann. Every time I see that, it brings a smile to my face, knowing that the program shift was a positive change. An added bonus was seeing some hearing students from HMMS at the Charleston Deaf coffee chat, showcasing the integration and community building that is happening.

Another moment that touched me deeply was when we got the green light to start an ASL studies program at the University of Charleston. Though it's currently just a minor, this step felt like a major milestone. I am filled with optimism at the prospect of this program evolving into a full four-year degree. My hope is that it will someday serve as a beacon for future interpreters and Deaf educators right here in West Virginia.

Do you have a favorite inspirational quote you would like to share?

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." – Helen Keller

This quote resonates with me deeply as it reminds us of the power of community and collaboration. It's only through collective efforts that we can truly make a lasting impact, especially for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community here in West Virginia.



>>> Deaf-Friendly <<<

The term "deaf-friendly" refers to creating environments that are both accessible and inclusive to the deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) community. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) plays a crucial role in protecting the rights of DHH individuals by prohibiting discrimination based on disability and mandating that businesses, governments, and non-profit organizations provide access and communication to services, programs, and activities.

However, access alone is not sufficient. As social beings, feeling connected and included is a fundamental human need that significantly impacts our overall health and well-being. In her inspiring TEDxAnchorage talk, Clara Baldwin, a passionate Teacher of the Deaf who is deaf herself, emphasized how the DHH (Deaf and Hard of Hearing) community often misses out on the many natural social interactions that occur during daily activities. This highlights the urgent need to create deaf-friendly environments in our society.

Below are some impactful deaf-friendly inclusion initiatives to actively consider and advocate for, to significantly enhance the customer, client, and patient service experience for individuals who are DHH.



- Ensure a top-notch customer/client service experience by equipping service areas with all the necessary writing supplies, including pens, paper, and/or dry-erase boards.



- Employ electronic options such as mobile devices, electronic menus, relay services, text messaging, and email. Electronic options often have the added benefit of supporting people with cognitive disabilities, as well as those who speak other languages. Make sure employees know what phone relay services sound like so they don't hang up on calls and that they are aware of video relay services.



- Promote Sign Language. Prepare your employees with basic sign language that pertains to your business. Place posters with common signs related to your customers' needs in employee breakrooms or in customer service areas. If an employee knows ASL, highlight them with a badge, door sign, or something else that is clearly visible to customers so they know they can pursue that option if desired.



- Learn Proper Etiquette. Teach employees proper etiquette for communicating with people who are deaf or hard of hearing. For instance, always face the person while talking, in case they attempt to read lips. If the customer has an interpreter, address the customer first and don't refer to them in the third person. Give extra time to ensure understanding.



- Use Captions. If your business, practice, or agency creates videos be sure to provide captions. Manual captioning is best for accuracy, but auto-captioning is far better than nothing. Don't forget to caption social media videos, such as YouTube and Facebook, as well.



To learn more about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) scan the QR code or go to www.ada.gov



Do you know of a deaf-friendly shop, restaurant, business, agency, etc. you would like highlighted in our newsletter?

OR

Have you experienced a situation where you were not provided access to activities, services, or programs as defined by the ADA?

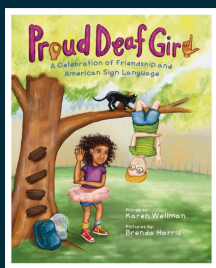


If so, we want to hear from you!



Please scan the QR code and let us know!





Proud Deaf Girl

For children ages 3-9
 Karen Wellman (Author)
 Brenda Harris (Illustrator)

“Proud Deaf Girl” invites readers to see the world through a pair of hands. Join Hazel and her best friend as they share a day of sweet friendship and adventure through American Sign Language. With signs shown on each page, everyone can easily join in on the excitement of learning!



Hello, Universe

For children ages 8-12
 Erin Entrada Kelly (Author) explores coming of age with sensitivity and honesty, giving voice to quiet characters.

In *Hello Universe*, four lives weave together in unexpected ways. Virgil Salinas is shy and kindhearted and feels out of place in his crazy-about-sports family. Valencia Somerset, who is deaf, is smart, brave, and secretly lonely, and she loves everything about nature. Kaori Tanaka is a self-proclaimed psychic, whose little sister, Gen, is always following her around. And Chet Bullens wishes the weird kids would just stop being so different so he can concentrate on basketball.

Told from intertwining points of view, the novel celebrates bravery, being different, and finding your inner bayani (hero).



WEST VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF THE DEAF (WVAD)

13th WVAD Annual Christmas Party

Parkersburg

Wood County Society
 317 E. 8th Street
 Parkersburg, WV 26104
 Saturday, December 14, 2024
 1:00 PM - 11:00 PM (Dinner served at 4:00 PM)
 \$25.00 (18+) - Includes dinner and a door prize
 \$15.00 (13-17) - Includes dinner
 \$10.00 (6-12) - Includes dinner

LIMIT OF 75 PEOPLE

MUST RSVP TO VERONDA HARRISON AT 304-964-6035 BY DECEMBER 11TH

www.wvad.org



WEST VIRGINIA DEAF SERVICE CENTER (WV DSC)

Deaf Coffee Chat

ASL activities, games, Deaf culture, and More!
 All ages welcome

Charleston 912 Young Street, Charleston, WV 25301

Fridays, 5:30-8:30 PM
 November 1, November 15, December 6, and December 20, 2024

Parkersburg 2501 Dudley Ave. Parkersburg, WV

Tuesdays, 4:00-7:00 PM
 November 5, and December 10, 2024

www.wvdeafservicecenter.org



Please email newsletter questions, concerns, and suggestions to Gwen.L.Bryant@wv.gov



West Virginia Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

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