



Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students: Communication Assessment



**Texas Sensory
Support
Network**

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Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH): Communication Assessment

This document is intended as an overview of considerations to help guide the assessment team as they gather data needed to determine a student's communication needs. Meeting and supporting students' communication needs is pivotal to full participation and progress in the educational setting. This document is not meant to provide comprehensive information about how to conduct a communication assessment.



"The legislature finds that it is essential for the well-being and growth of students who are deaf or hard of hearing that

- educational programs recognize the unique nature of deafness and the hard-of-hearing condition and
- ensure that all students who are deaf or hard of hearing have appropriate, ongoing, and fully accessible educational opportunities" ([Texas Education Code \(TEC\) § 29.302](#)).

Unique Communication

"Students who are deaf or hard of hearing must have an education in which their unique communication mode is respected, used, and developed to an appropriate level of proficiency" ([TEC §29.303](#)).

Communication and Language



Communication and language are essential for social and academic progress. The consequences of hearing levels that are not in the typical range are often delays in communication and language development, which significantly increase the risk of educational challenges. It is essential that admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) committees carefully consider the unique needs of students who are deaf or hard of hearing (DHH) and keep in mind that communication access must be considered a major factor in all areas of the individualized education program (IEP) and the educational experience.



Communication

- The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) defines communication as the “active process of exchanging information and ideas, both in understanding and expression.”
- Examples: talking, listening, signing, gesturing

Language

- ASHA defines language as “the words we use and how we use them to share ideas and get what we want.”
- Examples: English, American Sign Language, Spanish, Vietnamese



Expressive and Receptive Communication

Expressive Communication	Receptive Communication
Our ability to let others know our thoughts, ideas, feelings, and wants	Our ability to understand what others are telling us
<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spoken language • American Sign Language • Manually Coded English (e.g., Signing Exact English) • Contact signs (e.g., Pidgin Signed English, Conceptually Accurate Signed English) • Fingerspelling • Cued Speech/Cued English • Home signs/gestures • Picture symbols/photographs • Objects • Writing 	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Auditory • American Sign Language • Manually Coded English (e.g., Signing Exact English) • Contact signs (e.g., Pidgin Signed English, Conceptually Accurate Signed English) • Speechreading • Cued Speech/Cued English • Home signs/gestures • Picture symbols/photographs • Objects • Reading



We have students who use a different mode of communication expressively and receptively. Is that typical?

It is not unusual for a student to use different expressive and receptive modes of communication. Expressive and receptive communication skills develop at different rates and require different physical, perceptual, social, and cognitive skills.

Typically developing children as well as children who are DHH usually understand different forms of receptive communication before they use them expressively. Some typically developing children need to hear a word 1,000 times before they are able to use it correctly. Students who are DHH may need that same amount of repetition or more in their mode of communication.

Texas Deaf Child Bill of Rights



The [Texas Deaf Child Bill of Rights \(DCBR\), TEC §§29.300-29.315](#), is a specific state law that recognizes the unique communication and language needs of students who are deaf or hard of hearing (DHH). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) validates the importance of the law by requiring consideration of special factors specific to students who are DHH.

Before local education agencies (LEAs) can ensure that they are meeting the communication needs of each student who is DHH, they need to identify the student's specific communication needs. [TEC §30.083\(a\)\(6\)](#) requires an assessment of "the student's potential for communications through a variety of means, including through oral and aural means, fingerspelling, or sign language."



Important to note!

Although the Part C disability report form is not required, the communication assessment is still required for students who are DHH.



We were told that the Part C and Communication Assessment were no longer required. Why do we need to do all of this?

The communication assessment has been a requirement per [TEC §30.083\(a\)\(6\)](#) since 1995. At one point a form was created as part of the IEP paperwork to assist multi-disciplinary evaluation teams in gathering essential components of the communication assessment. This form, referred to as the Part C, was often completed independent of the special education evaluation process, causing the essential communication information to not be included in the Full and Individual Evaluation (FIE). The Texas Education Agency (TEA) made the determination to require the communication assessment be embedded in the FIE and no longer requires the Part C form. Any component of the FIE that is impacted by communication should address the results of the communication assessment, and the data should be compiled in a narrative to be included as part of the FIE.



Our IEP software still has the Part C Form. Can we use that instead of embedding the communication assessment results in the FIE?

Some LEAs have made the decision to continue using the Part C disability report form. It is important to consider the following:

This form is not a stand-alone assessment, or a form meant to replace a complete communication assessment and report.

The form may be used to summarize the results of the assessment that are also written in a narrative format and embedded in the FIE.

Consideration of Special Factors/DHH Supplement



The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires the consideration of special factors when developing the IEP for students who are DHH. In Texas, these special factors are often referred to as the Auditory Impairment (AI) or DHH Supplement. IDEA identifies these special factors for DHH students that must be discussed:

- language and communication needs
 - opportunities for direct* communications with peers and professional personnel in the child's language and communication mode
 - academic level
 - full range of needs, including opportunities for direct* instruction in the child's language and communication mode"
- [\(34 Code of Federal Regulations \(CFR\) §300.324\(a\)\(2\)\).](#)

*Direct language/ communication/ instruction occurs person-to-person, not through an additional source (e.g., educational interpreter or captioner).



Important to note!

Determinations for these special factors must be made based on assessment data and are critical to helping students who are DHH succeed academically and functionally. They should be considered throughout the entire IEP process.

Questions to Consider

To consider these language and communication special factors, the IEP team should ask:

- What is the student’s primary language and mode of communication?
- What communicative needs and opportunities does the student have?
- Can the student comprehend what is said in school?
- Does the student have the skills and strategies, such as self-advocacy and social skills, necessary to meet those communicative needs and take advantage of communication opportunities?
- Can the student fulfill his or her need to communicate in different settings, including effectively participating in social situations and learning when in noisy environments?
- Does the student communicate appropriately and effectively to be a full participant in class, and if not, why not?
- How would the deficit in communication be described?



How often do we need to do a communication assessment?

ARD committees are required to determine the need for updated evaluation data at least triennially. At a minimum, a student should have a communication assessment every three years during that reevaluation process.

Best Practice

There is significant growth in communication skills that should happen between the triennial assessment. Conduct progress monitoring of communication throughout the school year, and report the progress at the student's annual ARD meeting.



Essential Elements of Language and Communication Skills

The *Essential Elements of Language and Communication Skills* tool was created to help a student's ARD committee create a plan for the communication assessment (Education Service Center 4 2020). When the communication assessment is thorough, the ARD Committee has the data to effectively consider the questions that should inform the development of the IEP. The tool can also be used as a checklist after the data is collected or the report completed to determine what information is evident, as well as to help determine what information may still need to be collected. The diagram below provides an overview of the components of a thorough communication assessment.

The *Essential Elements of Language and Communication* tool was developed by the DHH specialists at the ESC Region 4. The tool and instructions for using it can be found in the [Communication Evaluation Livebinder](#).

Components of the Essential Elements of Language and Communication Skills

- Hearing levels
- Speech perception
- History & etiology
- Hearing assistive technology
- Educational implications

Physical



- Intelligibility
- Language or system
- Language skills
- Types of language

Expressive Communication



- Functional listening
- Language or system
- Listening skills
- Speechreading

Receptive Communication



- Home language
- Communication with family members

Information from Parents



- Expressive & Receptive
- Academic & Social

Preferred Communication Mode



Best Practice

The speech language pathologist (SLP) and the teacher of students who are deaf or hard of hearing (TODHH) should work cooperatively to conduct the communication assessment.





Texas Education Code says we must address aural, oral, fingerspelling, and sign language. What if the student does not have any hearing or speech or does not use sign language?

All these areas should be considered, even if a student does not use a particular mode of communication. While writing the communication assessment narrative, this information should be addressed, and the reason for not assessing a component should be stated rather than being left out. The following are example statements addressing why a component of the assessment was not conducted.

- “Brandon does not have an auditory nerve and has no functional hearing. The educational audiologist determined that a functional listening evaluation would not be appropriate.”
- “Sonia is two years old, so fingerspelling was not assessed because of her age.”
- “Kayla uses her residual hearing and spoken language as her primary modes of communication. During her communication assessment the evaluator asked about her knowledge of sign language. Kayla reported that she was introduced to fingerspelling in fourth grade but did not remember most of the letters and never learned any other sign language.”

References

"American Speech-Language-Hearing Association". n.d. Accessed October 1, 2020.

<https://www.asha.org/>.

Education Service Center Region 4. 2020. *Essential Elements of Language and Communication Skills* [PDF]. Houston: Author. Retrieved from: bit.ly/38FjncB

Additional Resources

[Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#)

[Legal Framework](#)

[Texas Education Code § 30.083. Statewide Plan](#)

[Texas Education Code §§29.300-29.315. Texas Deaf Child Bill of Rights](#)