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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the findings and recommendations of a task force of the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) on current trends in the education of students who are deaf or hard of hearing (including deaf-blind students) and the implications of a proposed Deaf Child's Bill of Rights. The task force reviewed the literature and existing mandates of Virginia and other states and convened focus groups of students, parents, consumers, and educators. Findings addressed the following areas: placement options, modes of communication, current mandates, personnel standards, demographic information, educational interpreters, curriculum information, information available to parents, the role of adults who are deaf or hard of hearing, focus group results, and other current initiatives addressing related issues. Among 10 recommendations proposed are the following: (1) revision of teacher endorsement requirements; (2) reexamination of the need for a teacher training program in Virginia to prepare teachers of students with hearing impairments; and (3) increased participation by persons who are deaf or hard of hearing on advisory groups and boards. The task force did not recommend a Deaf Child's Bill of Rights but indicated that if such a bill was introduced it should be given careful consideration. Brief summaries of the major reports evaluated are appended. (CR)

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**REPORT OF THE
DEPARTMENT FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING ON**

**TRENDS IN THE EDUCATION OF
STUDENTS WHO ARE DEAF OR
HARD OF HEARING**

**TO THE GOVERNOR AND
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA**



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COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Office of the Governor

George Allen
Governor

Kay Coles James
Secretary of Health and Human Resources

February 9, 1995

TO: The Honorable George Allen

and

The General Assembly of Virginia

The report contained herein is pursuant to House Joint Resolution 114, agreed to by the 1994 General Assembly.

This report constitutes the response of the Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to coordinate a study to determine current and future needs for the education of deaf and hard-of-hearing children and to consider the feasibility of an Education Bill of Rights for Deaf and Hard-of Hearing Children.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kay Coles James", written over a horizontal line.

Kay Coles James
Secretary of Health and Human Resources

PREFACE

In agreeing to House Joint Resolution 114 (HJR114), the 1994 General Assembly requested the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) to study trends in the education of students who are deaf or hard of hearing and to make recommendations related to the feasibility of a Deaf and Hard of Hearing Child's Bill of Rights for Virginia. In responding to this request, VDDHH sought a broad range of input from consumers, parents and educators. The ensuing report represents the breadth of information which was considered and recommendations based on a careful review of that information. VDDHH recognizes the significant contributions of the following task force members:

Dr. Patricia Abrams, Department of Education, Richmond
Ms. Rachel Bavister, Virginia Association of the Deaf, Staunton
Dr. Philip Bellefleur, Department of Education, Richmond
Ms. Regina Black-Thorne, Parent, Portsmouth
Ms. Kathleen Desmond, Virginia Board for People with Disabilities, Alexandria
Mr. Marshall Dietz, Parent, Herndon
Ms. Jean Drudge, Parent, Virginia Beach
Ms. Carter Felvey, Parent, Richmond
Ms. Sara Franco, Hard of Hearing Consumer, Springfield
Ms. Lynn Frankel, Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind, Hampton
Ms. Terry Heath, Parent, Midlothian
Ms. Mary Jean Hughes-Daniels, Parent, Virginia Beach
Ms. Daphne Cox McGregor, VSDB-Staunton Alumni Association, Fairfax
Dr. Joseph Panko, Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind, Staunton
Ms. Joy Rosenburg, Educator, Arlington
Ms. Lisa Tuck, Educator, South Boston
Ms. Dorothy Lee West, VSDB-Hampton Alumni Association, Newport News
Ms. Becky Walton, Educational Interpreter, Chesapeake

Special appreciation is also extended to the participants in the Focus Groups, to Irene Carney who served as the facilitator for the Task Force and the Focus Groups, and to Andy Firth of the National Center for Law and Deafness.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

House Joint Resolution 114 (HJR114) was initiated as the result of the actions of a coalition individuals concerned about the education of students who are deaf or hard of hearing. These individuals included parents, educators and consumers who are themselves deaf or hard of hearing. The Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, as lead agency for the study, convened a representative task force and proceeded to explore current trends in education of students who are deaf or hard of hearing and the implications of a Deaf Child's Bill of Rights as a possible action in the Commonwealth. The study included a review of literature, Department of Education data, current state and federal mandates, and five focus groups. As a result of these activities, four primary issues were identified, as follows:

1. Educational programs for students who are deaf or hard of hearing must recognize unique needs of students who are deaf or hard of hearing through a range of options and appropriate academic standards.
2. Parents of these students need clear, unbiased information to assist in making critical decisions about their children's education.
3. All personnel who serve students who are deaf or hard of hearing must have specific and appropriate training in the educational and communicative implications of hearing impairment.
4. The role of adults who are deaf or hard of hearing should not be overlooked by parents, educators or the community at-large.

Around these issue statements, the Task Force formulated a series of recommendations with a request for the Education Committees of the General Assembly to forward the recommendations to the Secretaries of Education and Health and Human Resources, as well as the Superintendent of Public Instruction for implementation and follow-up. The recommendations include:

- * The Virginia Department of Education should support local school divisions in their efforts to respond more effectively to the unique needs of learners who are deaf or hard of hearing by updating and/or reissuing earlier guidance papers; disseminating the U.S. Department of Education's policy guidance statement on "Deaf Students Education Services"; encouraging the full range of choice in educational programs and maintaining residential/day education as an option for students who are deaf or hard of hearing; and by disseminating the U.S. Department of Education list of captioned films and other accessible materials to all school divisions.
- * The Virginia Department of Education should document the effectiveness of education for deaf students by conducting a study to determine ongoing data collection needs to maintain information on achievement levels of students who are deaf or hard of hearing and by examining the use of the Literacy Passport Test (LPT) as an indicator of achievement for students who are deaf or hard of hearing, and, as appropriate, encouraging all students who are deaf or hard of hearing to take the LPT at the required intervals.

- * The Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing will assist in the revision of existing materials and will develop new materials to assist parents in making decisions regarding their child's communication and education needs. In accomplishing this, the Department will work with the Department of Health, the statewide network of Parent Resource Centers, Early Intervention, as well as with the Virginia Schools for the Deaf and the Blind, and local interagency coordinating councils, to develop and disseminate materials and conduct workshops for parents of children with hearing impairments on such topics as Choices in Education and Transition to Adulthood (specific to students who are deaf or hard of hearing) and to prepare material for professionals who may interact with parents during the developmental stages.
- * The Virginia Department of Education should revise the requirements for an endorsement in hearing impairment such that teachers would have demonstrated competency in the mode of the communication that is appropriate to the child in the classroom.
- * The Secretary of Education should re-examine the need for a teacher training program in Virginia designed to prepare teachers of students with hearing impairments.
- * The Department of Education and VDDHH should continue to respond to and implement the recommendations of "Educational Interpreters in Virginia Public Schools" (October 1993) regarding the training, qualifications and role of educational interpreters.
- * The Department of Education should provide technical support and plan for routine in-service training for regular education teachers, administrators, and on the unique needs of deaf and hard of hearing students, and on the use of Deaf adults as role models.
- * The Virginia Department of Education and local school divisions should be mindful and actively seek to employ persons who are deaf or hard of hearing in positions such as teachers, administrators, secretaries, guidance counselors, instructional aides and other school personnel to act as role models.
- * The State Board of Education and the state level Special Education Advisory Committee should be aware that the educational needs of students who are deaf or hard of hearing are unique and are not necessarily represented on advisory groups and boards without the participation of persons who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- * The Virginia Association of the Deaf, Self Help for the Hard of Hearing, Inc., Tidewater Association for Hearing Impaired Children, mentor programs ("Big Brothers, Big Sisters" as a model), and other consumer groups should make it an organizational priority to make themselves available to the public schools as role models.

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PROBLEM STATEMENT

Students who are deaf or hard of hearing are faced with unique educational needs, especially in the area of communication, which must be recognized and addressed by policy makers, educators and the general public.

BACKGROUND

The request for a study on issues surrounding the education of students who are deaf or hard of hearing was generated by a coalition of individuals and organizations who shared a concern about the educational services offered to these students in the Commonwealth. This coalition, initiated by a joint effort of the Virginia Association of the Deaf and the Northern Virginia Resource Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, was intended as an opportunity for an often-overlooked segment of the population to influence a policy change at the state level. In selecting the issue of quality education for students who are deaf or hard of hearing, the coalition responded to a national trend to bring attention to the serious concerns about the educational opportunities for and achievement of these students.

In 1988, the Commission on Education of the Deaf, established by Congress to study these issues, published its report, Toward Equality. This report included fifty-two recommendations considered essential for the improvement of educational services for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. While many of the recommendations have been addressed since the report was published, many remain unattended to or need continued attention. (Appendix A)

Throughout this report, reference is made to students who are deaf or hard of hearing. It is important to note that this includes students who are deaf-blind. While the needs of students who are deaf-blind are unique, they, too, center on issues of communication and community awareness.

STUDY METHOD

Recognizing the wide range of issues imbedded within the general concern about the education of students who are deaf or hard of hearing, and, further recognizing the limited time available to complete the primary compilation of information, VDDHH developed a work plan which relied upon reviews of literature, existing mandates in Virginia as well as in other states and at the federal level, and existing data from the Virginia Department of Education. In addition, the agency determined that the use of focus groups comprising key stakeholders would provide a necessary and valuable perspective on the day-to-day reality of the education of students who are deaf or hard of hearing in Virginia.

A task force was established to assist the Department in reviewing the information collected, identifying key issues, and developing recommendations to address those issues.

Key sources of information were identified and contacted for assistance.

FINDINGS

Controversy in the education of students who are deaf or hard of hearing is not new. Issues of placement and communication mode have existed within this field for many years. This study has not attempted to identify a preference for one placement over another or one mode of communication over another. Rather this study looks at the quality of the education available, regardless of placement or mode. While the scope of HJR114 does not lend itself to a comprehensive analysis of the range of placements and modes, this brief overview should inform the reader's consideration of the issues addressed and the recommendations provided.

Placement Options - Currently in Virginia, students who are deaf or hard of hearing have a continuum of placement options available to them. The Virginia Schools for the Deaf and the Blind at Staunton and Hampton provide residential and day programs for these students. Local public school placement options include full mainstreaming in a regular classroom, either with or without support services such as interpreters; mainstreaming with some separate services from a resource teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing; and self-contained classes for students who are deaf or hard of hearing within a regular school building.

Modes of Communication - A variety of modes of communication exists in programs for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Strong advocates support each of the modes and this report does not attempt to indicate a preference for one over another. Simply put, the following modes of communication are most commonly used with this population:

- American Sign Language is a unique manual language with grammar, syntax and vocabulary separate from the English language.
- Manually-coded English systems offer several different means of expressing the English language, grammar and vocabulary visually, including Pidgin Signed English, Conceptually Accurate Signed English and Signing Essential English and Signing Exact English.
- Cued Speech is a system of handshapes designed to show the phonemes of the English language manually. Not a language in itself, Cued Speech is a manual representation of English.
- Auditory/Oral modes rely upon amplification, the use of any residual hearing and the development of speech and speech reading skills for communication.

Current Mandates - Current state and federal mandates impacting the education of Virginia students who are deaf or hard of hearing were reviewed. Included in the review were all laws, regulations and guidance letters which address these students. The National Center for Law and Deafness (NCLD) provided a review of federal mandates (Appendix B), while staff at the Virginia Department of Education compiled information on the state level.

The NCLD review focused on the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA - formerly Education of All Handicapped Children's Act) and its associated regulations and guidance. IDEA provides that each eligible child with a disability is entitled to a free, appropriate public education based on an Individual Education Program (IEP) and under adherence to strict procedural and due process safeguards. LRE, or Least Restrictive

Environment, is a concept central to the provisions of IDEA which emerges in the regulations governing the programs under the law. The regulations require that:

- (a) State Education Agencies and Local Education Agencies must provide a "continuum of alternative placements" ranging from regular classrooms, to special classrooms, home schooling, special schools and institutions";
- (b) Unless the child's IEP requires a different placement, the child must be placed in the school he or she would attend if not disabled; and,
- (c) In selecting the LRE, consideration must be given to any potential harmful effect on the child or on the quality of services that he or she needs.

Common understanding of the concept of Least Restrictive Environment has varied over the years, especially in relation to the education of students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Guidance out of the U.S. Department of Education has contributed to confusion over the interpretation of the concept. Most recently, in response to concerns from educators, parents and consumers, the USDOE issued policy guidance in the Federal Register (October 13, 1992) which affirmed that full consideration of the unique needs of a child who is deaf, including the range of communication and related needs, will help to ensure the provision of an appropriate education. With the groundswell of interest in "inclusion " programs which place primary consideration on placement in regular classrooms, advocates for appropriate education for students who are deaf or hard of hearing raised concerns. In response, the Department of Education re-released the 1992 policy statement in February 1994, along with a memorandum stating that the overriding rule in determining the program and placement for each child who is deaf is that these determinations must be made on an individual basis. (Appendix C)

Virginia has regulations in place which address the implementation of IDEA in the Commonwealth. Included in these regulations, in response to concerns from individuals involved in the education of students who are deaf or hard of hearing, are specific requirements for the provision of educational interpreting services by qualified personnel. In addition, the Virginia Department of Education has issued a number of guidance documents specifically addressing issues affecting the population under study. (Appendix D)

The study also considered the activities of other states where specific legislative proposals for a Deaf and Hard of Hearing Child's Bill of Rights have been considered. Specifically, contact was made with Louisiana and South Dakota, where the legislation was passed in 1993 and Texas and California where legislative proposals have been presented in recent years. In all of these states, the impetus for action came from consumers who are deaf. Louisiana (Appendix E) and South Dakota (Appendix F) were able to successfully incorporate the concerns of varying interest groups to enact legislation which provides recognition for the unique needs of the population and a framework for addressing those needs. In both cases, the final result is permissive rather than mandatory. Texas and California have faced greater challenges in achieving codification of the Deaf Child's Bill of Rights, although advocates in both states continue to refine their proposals for further legislative consideration.

Nebraska adopted a different approach to the same issues when consumers there challenged the quality and range of services. The Nebraska Department of Education, working with a committee of community representatives and the support of the Board of Education,

developed an administrative plan to respond to the needs. (Appendix G)

Personnel Standards - The current Department of Education Licensure Standards for School Personnel include standards for endorsement in hearing impairment. (Appendix H) To receive this endorsement for grades NK - 12, a teacher must complete a minimum of 27 semester hours of course work including each of eleven subject areas. One of the course work requirements is communication modalities comprising sign language systems, Cued Speech, speechreading and verbal communication. There is no suggestion, either in the Licensure Standards or in the prevailing hiring practices, that competency in the mode of communication used by the students should be required when hiring a teacher of students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Recognizing the need for communicative competence, the Council on Education of the Deaf, a national organization which offers certification for teachers of the deaf, has been revising its standards to include stronger requirements in the area of specific communication skills. In the past, the standards in Virginia have attempted to reflect the CED standards and these may need to be reviewed in the near future.

Personnel providing educational interpreting services in Virginia must meet standards established in the Regulations Governing Special Education. These professionals must have achieved a Virginia Quality Assurance Screening Level III or hold national certification. For those individuals who do not meet this standard, provisions are in place which allow for incremental attainment. (Appendix I)

Demographic Information -

The Students - As of December 31, 1993, Virginia schools report serving 1350 students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Of those students, 180 are being served by the Virginia Schools for the Deaf and the Blind, while 554 students are in programs in eight (8) school divisions with large programs. The remaining students are being served in LEAs with from 1 to 18 children in programs for the deaf or hard of hearing. Placements within LEAs for these students in recent years have included regular education classrooms, with or without related services (34% of students), resource special education classes (22%) and self-contained special education classes (44%). The data, as currently maintained, does not allow for a clear determination of students who are considered deaf as opposed to those who are considered hard of hearing.

No achievement data could be assembled on these students during the course of the study because of the nature of the data which is collected at this time by the Department of Education. For example, the Literacy Passport Test is a requirement for all students in Virginia in order to receive a standard diploma, however, students with disabilities may be exempt from this test and may receive a special education diploma. DOE currently has no readily available means to determine how many of the students taking the LPT are deaf or hard of hearing, how those who do take it perform compared to hearing students, or how many students are exempted. Based on 1990-91 data, the Department of Education does report that 73% of students who are deaf or hard of hearing graduated with a diploma, while 10% received a special education diploma/certificate and 16% dropped out prior to graduation.

Teachers of Students Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing - According to DOE, 155 teachers were assigned to programs for hearing impaired students in 1991. These teachers are required to have a valid Virginia teaching certificate with endorsement in hearing impairment.

While conditional licenses are available, only four were requested for teachers of the hearing impaired in 1993.

Educational Interpreters - In 1993, the Virginia Department of Education conducted a study on the status of educational interpreters in Virginia schools. (Appendix J) Thirty-three school divisions reported employing 163 persons to provide educational interpreting services. At that time, 58% of those interpreters were working under a waiver, indicating that they had not met the personnel standards established for educational interpreters in Virginia Public Schools. Current DOE data shows that 77 educational interpreters have been approved for waivers in the 1994-95 school year.

Curriculum Information - While it was not possible to review the specific curriculum used in each program serving students who are deaf or hard of hearing in the Commonwealth, the study did consider the implications of the Standards of Learning and adaptations to same. In addition, curriculum materials from the Virginia Schools for the Deaf and the Blind and selected school divisions were examined. The implications of the requirements for an individualized educational program (IEP) for students receiving special education services cannot be overlooked. Hence, while general curriculum guidelines may be followed, the implementation of these may vary greatly from one student to another.

Information Available to Parents - The information which is available to parents about the educational impact of hearing impairment, the range of services which might benefit students who are deaf or hard of hearing, Deaf Culture and the Deaf Community, assistive technology and a myriad of other topics was studied. Of specific concern to the Task Force were the means for disseminating the available information and the breadth of the information presented. Most local school divisions operate Parent Resource Centers which are staffed by a parent and a special educator and which are intended to respond to the parent training and information needs of that particular school division. Several members of the Task Force have been involved with Parent Resource Centers and report that, while these centers may be a valuable community resource, the range and quality of information specific to students who are deaf or hard of hearing varies greatly. In addition, because they are operated by LEAs, there are limitations to the services which may be provided.

With the implementation of early intervention programs under Part H of IDEA, Infant Intervention Programs are becoming one of the early sources of information for parents. These programs provide a range of services in a non-categorical approach, meaning that specialized information from experts in the area of deafness is usually not available. Efforts are under way to expand the relationship between these programs and the Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, especially through training and information sharing.

The Department of Health operates the Virginia Hearing Impairment Identification and Screening Program (VAHIIMS) which identifies and screens infants at-risk for hearing loss. Standard risk factors are reviewed for every infant born in a Virginia hospital and parents of those identified as at-risk receive information on the implications and the Department of Health does follow-up to encourage testing. The primary brochure issued to these parents presents information on hearing impairment in general and focuses on the development of residual hearing and speech. No mention is made of the variety of communication modes and educational options available for children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Other common sources of information that parents contact include physicians and audiologists. The information provided by these professionals can be characterized as clinical, with a focus on amplification and limited attention to the educational implications.

The Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing offers a wide variety of information resources, including books, videotapes, and brochures representing the range of perspectives, philosophies and methodologies. These materials are available for loan statewide through the agency's library. No formal mechanism exists to ensure that parents of children who are deaf or hard of hearing are referred to VDDHH for information resources.

Parent support groups, while providing a valuable resource, are not uniformly available across the state. The Tidewater Association for Hearing Impaired Children is the largest such group of its kind in the Commonwealth and includes representation from all of the methodologies commonly employed in educating students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

It appears based on this review that the scope of information available to parents is quite broad. Yet parents are often unaware of all that is available to them. There does not seem to be a comprehensive, consistently utilized single source of information. A parent's willingness to continue the search is often the only assurance that a full range of information will be accessed.

The Role of Adults who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing - No empirical data was uncovered during the study which provides a picture of the involvement of deaf or hard of hearing adults in the education of students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Anecdotal accounts provided some insight into the limited nature of this involvement currently and the desire for increased activity.

The Department of Education does not have any data on the number of personnel who themselves are deaf or hard of hearing and who are providing services to students who are the same. Two members of the Task Force were consumers who are employed in public school systems and there were reports of others across the state though accurate counts could not be determined during the study period. The Virginia Schools for the Deaf and the Blind employ professionals and paraprofessionals who are deaf or hard of hearing.

A role model program offered by the Communication Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Richmond provides a model for matching students with adult consumers. While not operated by the public school system, the program works closely with local school divisions and consumers in the community to provide valuable interactions for deaf children. (Appendix K)

At the policy- and decision-making levels, consumers who are deaf or hard of hearing are often not included. The Department of Education has, in the past and currently, established advisory groups to address the issues of this population and has typically included some consumers in the composition, however in no instance have consumers held majority representation. In addition, neither the Board of Education nor the State Special Education Advisory Committee have members who are deaf.

Focus Group Results - Five focus groups composed of key groups of stakeholders were convened to respond to a series of questions developed by the Task Force. The questions were framed around the issues of the range of placement options and communication modes available, parental choice in placement, information available to parents, qualified personnel, the role of

consumers who are deaf or hard of hearing in education, students' exposure to Deaf Culture, academic standards, preparation of students for post-school life, and the need for the Deaf Child's Bill of Rights as a law in Virginia. The information provided by the focus groups is among the most valuable collected during the study. (Appendix L) The perspectives of each group were unique although on some issues they were remarkably similar, as highlighted:

1. Students who are deaf or hard of hearing emphasized: The need to focus on the qualifications of interpreters/ transliterators; the importance of student interactions with deaf adults; the need for closed captioned materials to be more widely available and utilized in schools; and, the need for committed educators. The students felt the Deaf Child's Bill of Rights would be a positive action.
2. Consumers who are deaf indicated that: parents need information from a neutral, well-informed source; students need exposure to deaf culture; A Bill of Rights may be needed but existing laws may address needs; there is a need for closed captioned materials in schools; and a consumer who is deaf needs to be included on the State Special Education Advisory Committee.
3. Consumers who are hard of hearing highlighted: a strong emphasis on support needs to respond to the isolation that comes from not belonging fully to either the deaf or the hearing world; that parents need information from people they come in contact with as they seek services; the need for a stable source of information; training for regular education teachers and administrators to improve understanding of the implications of mild to moderate hearing loss; the need for assistive technology in the classroom. This group saw the Deaf Child's Bill of Rights as a good awareness tool but also felt that enforcement of current laws is important.
4. Parents of students who are deaf or hard of hearing expressed that: professionals who have initial contact with parents need to be better informed; parent information should come from a central, unbiased resource; teachers of deaf and hard of hearing students need better communication skills; administrators need to be better informed; Virginia needs a pre-service training program for teachers of students who are deaf and hard of hearing; more teachers who are deaf are needed; and, consumers need to be involved in the State Special Education Advisory Committee. The Parents Focus Group did not express a clear opinion as to the need for a Deaf Child's Bill of Rights, rather they focused on the importance of parental choice in education.
5. Educators and Educational Administrators noted that: parents need a full range of information early from unbiased source; professionals who interact with families early on need to have better information to share; teachers need better communication skills; administrators need better background and training on issues affecting these students; consumers should be encouraged to be involved, especially as role models. The group felt that unless the Bill of Rights law had teeth, it would not have full impact.

Other Current Initiatives Addressing Related Issues

There are several other activities, studies and planning processes currently underway which could complement this study. Specifically, the Governor's Commission on Champion Schools is considering issues of parental choice in education and teacher certification standards;

the Program Support Committee of the Virginia Schools for the Deaf and the Blind is developing a vision statement and long-range plan which includes activities to make these schools more responsive to the shifting needs of the population; and the Education Committee of the Governor's Commission on Government Reform has issued preliminary findings which include recommendations regarding the merging of the two residential schools into a single program.

CONCLUSIONS And RECOMMENDATIONS

After carefully reviewing all of the information gathered over the course of the study, the Task Force determined that four over-riding issues could be isolated and addressed through the development of recommendations. The issues and associated recommendations are:

- I. There exists a range of options for the education of students who are deaf or hard of hearing yet these options are neither uniformly available in the Commonwealth nor consistently of a high quality. In addition, within the educational service system which delivers these options, there is a need for consistent and appropriate academic standards which recognize the unique needs of students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Recommendations:

1. The Virginia Department of Education should support local school divisions in their efforts to respond more effectively to the unique needs of learners who are deaf or hard of hearing.
 - 1.1 The Virginia Department of Education should update and/or reissue earlier guidance papers, including: Counseling with Handicapped Students: A Monograph (April 1985); Virginia School Health Guidelines (August 1992); Program Guidelines for Students with Hearing Impairment in Virginia Public Schools (March 1990, revised from 1981); Guidelines for Testing Students with Disabilities in the Literacy Testing Program (Nov. 1993, revised from 1989); Procedures for Child Study Committees Operating in Virginia (Nov. 1993, revised from 1986); and, Issues Related to Graduation and Students Receiving Special Education Services, Superintendent's Memorandum No. 126, May 31, 1989, Informational.
 - 1.2 The Virginia Department of Education should facilitate the provision of a free, appropriate, public education to students who are deaf or hard of hearing by disseminating the U.S. Department of Education's policy guidance statement on "Deaf Students Education Services". (This statement emphasizes the unique needs of deaf students and clarifies the interpretation of "least restrictive environment" relative to this student group.)
 - 1.3 The Commonwealth of Virginia should encourage the full range of choice in educational programs and should maintain residential/day education programs as an option for students who are deaf or hard of hearing.
 - 1.4 The Virginia Department of Education should disseminate the U.S. Department of Education list of captioned films and other accessible materials to all school divisions.

2. The Virginia Department of Education should document the effectiveness of education for deaf students.
 - 2.1 The Virginia Department of Education should conduct a study to determine ongoing data collection needs to maintain information on achievement levels of students who are deaf or hard of hearing.
 - 2.2 The Virginia Department of Education should examine the use of the Literacy Passport Test (LPT) as an indicator of achievement and other implications for students who are deaf or hard of hearing, and should as appropriate, encourage all students who are deaf or hard of hearing to take the LPT at the required intervals.
- II. Parents of children who are deaf or hard of hearing must have [ready] access to a full range of information to assist them in making critical decisions about the education of their children. Specific information on the deaf community, educational options and communication modes is critical.

Recommendations:

1. The Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing will assist in the revision of existing materials and will develop new materials to assist parents in making decisions regarding their child's communication and education needs.
 - 1.1 The Virginia Department of Health should revise the brochure that is mailed to parents of children at risk for hearing impairment. This brochure should refer to the different means by which children and adults communicate and should help parents to prepare for the many decisions they will face if a hearing loss is identified.
 - 1.2 VDDHH will prepare information for distribution to and by professionals with whom parents will have contact at the time of or soon after diagnosis. These professionals include doctors, audiologist, speech and language clinicians, and early intervention personnel. These materials should inform readers about options in communication, technology, parent support and information, and educational placement.
2. VDDHH will work with the statewide network of Parent Resource Centers, Early Intervention, as well as with the Virginia Schools for the Deaf and the Blind, and local interagency coordinating councils, to develop and disseminate materials and conduct workshops for parents of children with hearing impairments on such topics as Choices in Education and Transition to Adulthood (specific to students who are deaf or hard of hearing).
- III. All personnel who serve students who are deaf or hard of hearing must have specific and appropriate training in the educational and communicative implications of hearing impairment. Educational administrators, teachers, speech-language pathologists, educational interpreters, instructional aides and any other personnel who interact with these students should be provided with the necessary resources, including appropriate

training, to provide appropriate services.

Recommendations:

1. The Virginia Department of Education should revise the requirements for an endorsement in hearing impairment such that teachers would have demonstrated competency in the mode of the communication that is appropriate to the child in the classroom.

The Virginia Department of Education needs to address the communication competence of teachers of the students who are deaf or hard of hearing and this should involve a review of endorsement requirements and the recertification process. The Virginia Department of Education should consider a system of verification such as Signed Competency Proficiency Interview (SCPI) as an action to ensure communication competence.

2. The Secretary of Education should re-examine the need for a teacher training program in Virginia designed to prepare teachers of students with hearing impairments. The Virginia Department of Education should examine the supply and availability of qualified teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing to include reconsideration of program and information.
 3. The Department of Education and VDDHH should continue to respond to and implement the recommendations of "Educational Interpreters in Virginia Public Schools" (October 1993) regarding the training, qualifications and role of educational interpreters. (pp. 42-42, Recommendations 8, 9, and 10.)
 4. The Department of Education should provide technical support and plan for routine in-service training for regular education teachers, administrators, and on the unique needs of deaf and hard of hearing students, and on the use of Deaf adults as role models.
- IV. The role of adults who are deaf or hard of hearing should not be overlooked by parents, educators or the community at-large. In addition to serving as valuable role models, consumers who are themselves deaf or hard of hearing must have avenues for involvement in policy- and decision-making in the educational system.

Recommendations:

1. The Virginia Department of Education and local school divisions should be mindful and actively seek to employ persons who are deaf or hard of hearing in positions, such as administrators, teachers, secretaries, guidance counselors, instructional aides and other school personnel to act as role models while complying with Affirmative Action guidelines.
2. The State Board of Education and the state level Special Education Advisory Committee should be aware that the educational needs of students who are deaf or hard of hearing are unique and are not necessarily represented on advisory groups and boards without the participation of persons who are deaf or hard of hearing.

3. The Virginia Association of the Deaf, Self Help for the Hard of Hearing, Inc., Tidewater Association for Hearing Impaired Children, mentor programs ("Big Brothers, Big Sisters" as a model), and other consumer groups should make it an organizational priority to make themselves available to the public schools as role models.

The Task Force asks the Education Committees of the General Assembly to transmit this report with the preceding recommendations to the Secretary of Health and Human Resources, Secretary of Education, and the Superintendent of Public Instruction. In transmitting the report, the Committees are asked to direct these entities to develop specific plans for implementation of these recommendations and to report to the Committees on the status of implementation by July 1, 1996.

There was a shared and strong sentiment underlying these specific recommendations that students who are deaf or hard of hearing have often not been adequately served under existing laws and regulations. Some states have used a Deaf Child's Bill of Rights as a legislative remedy for the ills in public education for deaf students. The Task Force did not choose to propose such legislation for Virginia at this time. The Task Force did feel, however, that if such a bill was introduced to the General Assembly, that it should be given careful consideration.

Other states have approached these issues through administrative means by comprehensive review and planning related to the education of students who are deaf or hard of hearing. The Task Force expressed interest in being reconvened to receive updates on implementation of recommendations and to continue with the development of a more comprehensive plan.

Appendix A
Commission on Education of the Deaf Recommendations

The 1988 Report of the Commission on Education of the Deaf, "Toward Equality", included 52 recommendations for the improvement of educational services for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. A copy of these recommendations and information on the status of same at the time of the HJR114 study are available from VDDHH, 1100 Bank Street, 12th Floor, Richmond, Virginia 23219-3640.

Appendix B
National Center for Law and Deafness Review

Mr. Andy Firth, an attorney at the National Center for Law and Deafness, prepared an overview of current federal legislation, regulation and guidance papers which impact the education of students who are deaf or hard of hearing. A copy of this document is available from VDDHH, 1100 Bank Street, 12th Floor, Richmond, Virginia 23219-3640.

Appendix C
U.S. Department of Education Guidance Paper

This document, originally published in the Federal Register at 57 Fed. Reg 49274 and reissued February 4, 1994, was intended to clarify the free appropriate public education requirements of Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Copies of this document and related information may be obtained from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 400 Maryland Ave. SW, Washington, D.C. 20202. The contact person is Rhonda Weiss, telephone (202)205-9053. Reference OSEP 94-15.

Appendix D
Virginia Department of Education Report

Dr. Patricia Abrams of the Virginia Department of Education prepared a summary of state laws, regulations and guidance papers which impact the education of students who are deaf or hard of hearing. This report also includes data on the number of teachers endorsed in the area of hearing impairment and information on complaints filed with the Department of Education related to students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Copies of this document are available from VDDHH, 1100 Bank Street, 12th Floor, Richmond, Virginia 23219-3640.

Appendix E
Louisiana Deaf Child's Bill of Rights

Louisiana House Bill 1601 (1993) enacted §1960 of the Louisiana Code as the Deaf Child's Bill of Rights. A copy of this legislation is available from the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, 1100 Bank Street, 12th Floor, Richmond, Virginia 23219-3640.

Appendix F
South Dakota Deaf Child's Bill of Rights

A copy of Senate Bill 219 (1993) as enacted by the Legislature of South Dakota is available from the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, 1100 Bank Street, 12th Floor, Richmond, Virginia 23219-3640.

Appendix G
Nebraska Plan

The Preliminary Report of the Steering Committee for Programs, Services, and Accommodations for Children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, published December 1993, outlines Nebraska's efforts to establish a conceptual model for the education of students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Copies of this report are available from the Nebraska Department of Education.

Appendix H
Virginia Department of Education Licensure Standards

The Licensure Regulations for School Personnel (7/1/93) outline the standards which must be met for a teacher in Virginia Public Schools to become licensed and to receive an endorsement in hearing impairment, grades NK-12. These regulations may be obtained from the Office of Professional Licensure, Division for Compliance Coordination, Virginia Department of Education, P.O. Box 2120, Richmond, Virginia 23216-2120.

Appendix I
Virginia Regulations Governing Special Education

The Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities (1/1/94) include information on identification, evaluation, eligibility, service delivery, and procedural safeguards among others. Also included are the standards for educational interpreters. A full copy of the regulations may be obtained from Virginia Department of Education, Office of Public Affairs - 25th Floor, P.O. Box 2120, Richmond, Virginia 23216-2120.

Appendix J

Educational Interpreters in Virginia Public Schools: Factors Affecting Supply, Demand, and Training

This report includes demographic information on educational interpreters practicing in Virginia, qualification standards, training information and recommendations for improvement. A copy of the report may be obtained from Virginia Department of Education, Office of Public Affairs - 25th Floor, P.O. Box 2120, Richmond, Virginia 23216-2120. Reference RFP#92-69.

Appendix K

Communication Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Mentoring Program

The Communication Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing has established a mentorship program which matches deaf adults with young deaf students to serve as role models. For more information about this program, contact Carlisa Smith-Gunter, Communication Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, 1512 Willow Lawn Drive, P.O. Box 6565, Richmond, Virginia 23230-0565.

Appendix L
Summary of Focus Group Meetings

A summary of the discussions of the five focus group meetings conducted in conjunction with HJR114 is available from the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, 1100 Bank Street, 12th Floor, Richmond, Virginia 23219-3640.



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