

## **The Alice Cogswell Act Putting the “Appropriate” in Free Appropriate Public Education for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students**

In the early 1800s when Alice Cogswell’s parents discovered she was deaf there were no teachers or schools established to teach her. In 1817, her father, Mason Cogswell, joined with Thomas Gallaudet and others to establish the American School for the Deaf, the first formal education program for deaf students in the United States.

Passed in 1975, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act governs the education of students with disabilities. IDEA requires that schools evaluate students with disabilities to determine their educational needs, provide services and settings based on those needs, and are accountable for their academic outcomes.

Despite these efforts, the educational outcomes of deaf and hard of hearing students are not commensurate with their abilities. Deaf and hard of hearing students require specialized services to meet their unique, diverse needs, services which often are not available in today’s schools.

The Alice Cogswell Act will shine a light on the needs of these students and enhance accountability for the services they require, thereby leading to improved outcomes. Among other things the Alice Cogswell Act will:

- Require states to identify, locate, and evaluate children who are deaf or hard of hearing regardless of whether they are categorized in another disability category, and provide special education and related services to address their language and communication needs.
- Require states to file an addendum to its IDEA-mandated state plan outlining how the state will ensure that children who are deaf or hard of hearing are evaluated on their language, communication, and other needs; sufficient personnel are available to evaluate and instruct deaf and hard of hearing children in the state; and all children who are deaf or hard of hearing within the State who need special education and related services, whether or not such children have other disabilities, receive such instruction.
- Enhance existing “special factors” provisions ensuring that they provide for the child’s language and communication needs and other unique learning needs including those related to assistive technology, self sufficiency, self determination, socialization, independent living skills, and career education.
- Require the U.S. Department of Education to monitor states on these requirements and regularly update its policy guidance on deaf and hard of hearing students.
- Clarify that natural environments under Part C of IDEA include specialized schools, centers, and other programs that focus on deaf and hard of hearing students.
- Ensure that Individualized Family Service Plans for deaf and hard of hearing infants and toddlers specifically address their unique language and communication needs.

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