

**REPORT TO THE HOUSE AND SENATE COMMITTEES ON EDUCATION AND  
HEALTH AND SENATE COMMITTEES ON HEALTH AND WELFARE  
OF THE LOUISIANA LEGISLATURE**



**RESPONSE TO THE  
LANGUAGE EQUALITY AND ACQUISITION FOR DEAF KIDS (LEAD K)  
TASK FORCE REPORT**

## OVERVIEW

Act 455 of 2018 established the Language Equality and Acquisition for Deaf Kids (LEAD K) task force to study and make recommendations relative to matters including, but not limited to, developing the framework for assessing children who are deaf or hard of hearing and selecting language developmental milestones from existing standardized norms. It further charges the task force to submit a report to the Louisiana Legislature on the following:

- Review and make recommendations relative to existing tools or assessments for educators to use to assess the language and literacy development of children who are deaf or hard of hearing
- Determine how often the tools or assessments reviewed should be used for children from birth to age five.
- Identify language milestones for children who are deaf or hard of hearing by consulting with professionals trained in the language development and education of such children
- Identify procedures and methods for reporting language acquisition, assessment results, milestones, assessment tools used, and progress of such children to parents and teachers and other professionals involved in their early intervention and education
- Make recommendations relative to ensuring that state law and state and local policies are adequately addressing the language developmental need of such children

Act 455 (2018) further charges the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) to submit a response to these findings and recommendations.

The LEAD K taskforce report made the following recommendations to the Louisiana Legislature in their February 1, 2019 report.

<b>Responsibility</b>	Review and make recommendations relative to existing tools or assessments for educators to use to assess the language and literacy development of children who are deaf or hard of hearing.
<b>Recommendation</b>	<p>Louisiana should use the SKI-HI Language Development Scale to assess the language milestones of students who are deaf or hard of hearing.</p> <p>Louisiana should produce a resource document that outlines tools available to measure language skills, requirements for administration of each tool, and the ability to be administered in spoken English and/or American Sign Language.</p>

<b>Responsibility</b>	Determine how often the tools or assessments reviewed should be used for children from birth to age five.
<b>Recommendation</b>	The task force recommends that assessments should be completed and reported every six months to ensure ongoing monitoring of language development.

<b>Responsibility</b>	Identify language milestones for children who are deaf or hard of hearing by consulting with professionals trained in the language development and education of such children.
-----------------------	--

<b>Recommendation</b>	The task force recommends the formation of a subcommittee to develop a Louisiana Milestones document that focuses on nationally accepted milestones while also featuring milestones for American Sign Language and English.
-----------------------	---

<b>Responsibility</b>	Identify procedures and methods for reporting language acquisition, assessment results, milestones, assessment tools used, and progress of such children to parents and teachers and other professionals involved in their early intervention and education.
<b>Recommendation</b>	<p>The task force recommends that the state’s data system to support the monitoring of language acquisition include the following information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Person who made identification</li> <li>• Type, degree, and configuration of hearing loss</li> <li>• Mode of communication and language at home</li> <li>• Other diagnosis</li> <li>• Information dissemination to families</li> <li>• Child progress towards milestones, assessment results</li> <li>• Any technology used</li> <li>• Language of choice</li> <li>• Mode of communication</li> </ul> <p>Additionally, the task force recommends that the designated data system allow authorized providers to input assessment results and other necessary information.</p> <p>Lastly, the task force recommends that the data system allow for state agencies to analyze data to identify systemic trends.</p>

<b>Responsibility</b>	Make recommendations relative to ensuring that state law and state and local policies are adequately addressing the language developmental needs of such children.
<b>Recommendation</b>	(From amended LEAD K Task Force Report, submitted on February 28, 2019 following final convening on February 25, 2019). The task force recommends that the department of education and the department of health work with local school systems to establish regional early childhood education classrooms that offer full language access to children who are deaf and/or hard of hearing.

## FINDINGS

In 2012 the LDOE began implementing *Louisiana Believes*, the state's plan to ensure every child is on track to a college degree or a professional career. *Louisiana Believes* is built on the premise that Louisiana students are just as capable as any students in America, and that those closest to children- parents and teachers- are best positioned to help students achieve those expectations. As such, the LDOE is dedicated to supporting educational advancements of children who are deaf and/or hard of hearing. Some of the primary supports and services for children who are deaf and/or hard of hearing and their families include:

### ***Local Education Agencies:***

Local education agencies (LEA) directly administer public education programs in their communities. Among many other things, each LEA in Louisiana is required to locate and deliver services to student who have disabilities and reside in their jurisdiction.

### ***Early Childhood Community Networks***

Prior to the passage of Act 3 in 2012, Louisiana had no statewide unified system of early childhood care and education. In 2013, the state introduced the early childhood community network model that is now in place. This model started with 13 pilot programs and expanded statewide by 2015.

Today, Louisiana has 65 early childhood networks. Each network is led by a "lead agency", a state-approved entity, such as a school system or organization, that serves as the point of contact for local care providers and as the liaison with the state education department. Currently, lead agencies serve a primarily administrative role, overseeing data collection and reporting, ensuring the observations that inform annual performance profiles conducted twice a year, and coordinating enrollment. They are not responsible for the quality of sites within their community. The responsibility for quality services falls with each program.

### ***Ready Start Community Networks***

The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) recently established pilot programs with seven communities to pilot new strategies to increase access to and improve the quality of early childhood care and education. The pilots, called Ready Start Community Networks, will spend two years developing new local governance structures, assessing local demand for early care and education; providing resources and training to teachers to improve classroom quality; implementing fundraising strategies; and sharing their findings with state leaders to inform future policymaking.

Rather than acting only as a consortium of care providers, the pilot networks will take a more collaborative approach to decision-making by establishing formal governance structures that support all early childhood care and education efforts in a community. Moreover, the pilot networks will be charged with assessing local demand for seats and for implementing the supports and resources necessary to improve the quality of local sites.

### ***Early Learning Partnerships***

The LDOE is working with local school systems to provide support for building structures for early and accurate identification of students with developmental and learning needs to ensure that they receive appropriate and effective supports, interventions and specialized services to accelerate their learning

### ***Louisiana Special School District***

The Louisiana Special School District (SSD) was established by the Louisiana Legislature to provide education to students residing in state or privatized facilities and hospitals or enrolled in one of Louisiana's three special schools. The SSD strives to be a model of excellence in serving students with low incidence disabilities and needs and recently outlined a strategic plan to improve the services in its schools and programs and provide greater supports to students with low incidence needs across the state.

The SSD administers the Louisiana School for the Deaf which was established in 1852 with the mission of educating children in Louisiana who are deaf and hard of hearing. In addition to providing direct services to students enrolled at LSD, the school operates the Parent Pupil Education Program (PPEP) to provide support to families of children with hearing loss.

As described in the Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) response, the following programs exist under LDH and are support the needs of children who are deaf and/or hard of hearing:

***Louisiana Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) Program***

The LDH Office of Public Health (OPH) is responsible for the state’s newborn screening mandate for the [early identification and follow-up](#) of infants who may be deaf or hard of hearing. Through the tracking of newborn hearing screening results conducted at birth, the Louisiana Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) program is able to support timely diagnosis for children who are identified as deaf or hard of hearing and conduct timely referrals to early intervention services for those children. Newborn hearing screening results of children born in Louisiana are maintained in a database that is called the Louisiana Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Information System, LAEHDI-IS. Through the use of LAEHDI-IS, the EHDI program is able to track hearing screening results, date and degree of diagnosis as deaf or hard of hearing, date of referrals to early intervention programs and whether or not a family accepts early intervention services.

The EHDI program also currently contracts with the Louisiana Hands and Voices, Guide by Your Side (GBYS) program. Hands & Voices is a non-profit, parent-driven organization dedicated to supporting families of children who are deaf or hard of hearing. They are charged with offering non-biased education and support around communication modes. This program is grounded in the principle that families can make the best choices for their child if they have access to good information and support. They also offer the support through Deaf or hard of hearing guides to share insight on life experiences and on developing a personal identity as a Deaf adult.

***Louisiana EarlySteps***

[EarlySteps](#) is Louisiana’s [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\) Part C](#) early intervention program which provides services to families with infants and toddlers aged birth to three years (36 months) who have a medical condition likely to result in a developmental delay, or who have developmental delays. Children with delays in cognitive, motor, vision, hearing, communication, social-emotional or adaptive development may be eligible for services. EarlySteps services are designed to improve the family's capacity to enhance their child's development. These services are provided in the child's natural environment, such as the child's home, child care or any other community setting typical for children aged birth to 3 years (36 months). These services include but are not limited to physical, occupational, and/or speech therapy; sign language interpreters; audiology services; and special instruction.

Children who are deaf and hard of hearing qualify for EarlySteps services based on a medical diagnosis of hearing loss. Supports are based on individualized needs identified through an evaluation process and an assessment of the family’s priorities. Children enrolled in EarlySteps are served until the child’s third birthday. During their enrollment, families are supported to make choices about their child’s needs after age 3. Included in the transition plan for after age 3 is the eligibility determination process for IDEA part B services provided through local school systems.

## CONCLUSION

The LDOE recognizes that local communities are best suited to address the unique early childhood care and education needs of their families and children. When those unique needs are met, more children enter Kindergarten prepared, and in turn, more children are positioned for success in the early elementary grades and beyond.

The focus of LEAD K is to ensure children who are deaf and/ or hard of hearing enter kindergarten with the language skills they need to be successful. The LDOE reviewed the recommendations from the LEAD K task force and believes there is a unique opportunity for the SSD, specifically LSD and PPEP, to pilot a partnership with a local school system and EHDI focused on ensuring children who are deaf and/or hard of hearing have the language skills they need to be successful in kindergarten.

This partnership would focus on building a framework for establishing early childhood education classrooms that offer full language access to children who are deaf and/or hard of hearing, enhancing educator capacity for helping deaf and/or hard of hearing students meet language milestones through resources and professional development, establishing local procedures for connecting children identified as deaf and/or hard of hearing and their families to services, and collecting and evaluating data about deaf and hard of hearing children's language development to inform service delivery.

Once this framework is established through a pilot partnership, the LDOE will collaborate with the LDH to determine how it can expand to other school systems and early childhood networks across the state.