

Sara Burgan, MS, is a speech-language pathologist at the Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center's Model Secondary School for the Deaf on the Gallaudet University campus in Washington, D.C. She has a master's degree in speech-language pathology from Nova Southeastern University in Davie, Florida.

Amanda Connelly, AuD, is an audiologist at the Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center's Model Secondary School for the Deaf on the Gallaudet University campus in Washington, D.C. She has a doctoral degree in clinical audiology from Gallaudet University, with a focus on pediatric/educational audiology.

The authors welcome questions and comments about this article at sar.burgan@gmail.com and Amanda.Connelly@gallaudet.edu, respectively.

Reflections on Changing Education: What If Classroom Professionals Had an IEP?

By Sara Burgan and Amanda Connelly

As a speech-language pathologist (SLP) who knew few d/Deaf people and had little knowledge of the Deaf community, Sara Burgan, co-author of this article, reports experiencing firsthand ways in which the field of speech-language pathology has promulgated areas of weakness in the education of SLP professionals, too often resulting in a mismatch in the skills we teach, the education we nurture, and the tools we use. She notes that a few interactions with Deaf people and the Deaf community piqued her interest and led her to work in a school for the deaf where her beliefs and practices were established and shaped by the Deaf community. She is grateful for her Deaf coworkers and friends who empowered her by sharing their experiences working with SLPs, both negative and positive. She also notes that she is part of the currently shifting mindsets within the broad field of speech-language pathology. Notably, write Burgan and co-author Amanda Connelly, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) that originally supported an oral approach to deaf education is undergoing a change in perspective, and deaf-friendly resources and tools are becoming more available.

Photos courtesy of Sara Burgan



Left: Students are sure to achieve their maximum potential when they have a Student Services Team that advocates for their exposure to fully accessible visible language as early as possible.

Flashback ... It is Fall 2014, and I am a student studying to become an SLP in a class focused on augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). “AAC” describes multiple means of expressing language in ways other than spoken, the professor noted, and might include picture boards, special devices, apps, and American Sign Language (ASL). This—ASL presented only as another device to clarify speech—was my professional introduction to sign language. For me and my fellow students, a language as fully developed as our own was portrayed simply in relationship to spoken English. With no knowledge of d/Deaf people or the Deaf community, we had no reason to question the presentation. It wasn’t until three years later that I began to realize how astray I and my colleagues in the field of speech-language pathology had become.

To try to remedy this situation—a disservice not only to SLP students but to deaf and hard of hearing students and the Deaf community—we are suggesting changes in the education of speech-language therapists. And what better way to change a program than through a device with which we are all familiar: the Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP is a personalized roadmap that outlines the specific instruction, support, and services a student needs to thrive in the school environment (Belsky, n.d.). We, educators of deaf

and hard of hearing students, create IEPs to help our students achieve their maximum potential and to ensure inclusivity and full accessibility. Here, we present an IEP for SLP students.

An IEP for an SLP

Just like for our deaf and hard of hearing students, our IEP for SLP candidates goes straight to the point.

Members of the IEP Team

- SLP candidate
- SLPs and supervisors
- Audiologists
- ASL specialists
- Deaf community members

Determination for Eligibility

The SLP candidate demonstrates an interest in deaf and hard of hearing students as individuals in their own right, with a right to visual language and participation in community. The SLP candidate’s goal for future employment is to promote a language-rich environment for all deaf and hard of hearing children and to be an advocate to end language deprivation for those children.



Background Information

The SLP candidate should be aware of statistics related to deaf and hard of hearing children:

- One percent of American students receiving special education services have “deaf and hard of hearing” as their only area of eligibility (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

Right: Field trips, such as this one with a Project-Based Learning class to Union Station in Washington, D.C., allow students to practice learned communication techniques.

Left: Creating a bilingual ASL and English environment that is highly visual, fully accessible for communication, and incorporates cultural understanding ensures deaf and hard of hearing students feel welcome and supported.

- Eighty percent of deaf and hard of hearing students attend mainstream schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).
- Ninety to 95 percent of deaf children are born to hearing parents (Mitchell & Karchmer, 2004). For most of these parents, their child is the first deaf person they meet, and they have no previous exposure to ASL (DesGeorges, 2016).
- Less than 10 percent of deaf children learn ASL (Watts, 2023).
- Ninety-eight percent of babies are screened for hearing loss before they leave the hospital. The Joint Commission on Infant Hearing (2019) recommends the following schedule: screening by 1 month of age, identification by 3 months of age, and early intervention by 6 months of age.
- In 1990, the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) approved use of cochlear implants in children. In 2020, the FDA lowered the age of implantation to 9 months (Cochlear, 2020).
- The medical community considers cochlear implantation the “standard of care” for deaf children (Tamati et al., 2022).



Impact Statement

The SLP candidate requires knowledge of how to set up and exploit a bilingual ASL and English environment that is highly visual, fully accessible for communication, incorporates cultural understanding, and includes culturally Deaf children and adult role models. The SLP candidate requires culturally appropriate training and resources to ensure optimal learning and a language-rich environment for deaf and hard of hearing learners.

Postsecondary Transition

The SLP candidate requires a course of study that supports the postsecondary goal of working in the field of deaf education. Features of SLP and audiology education in the U.S. are:

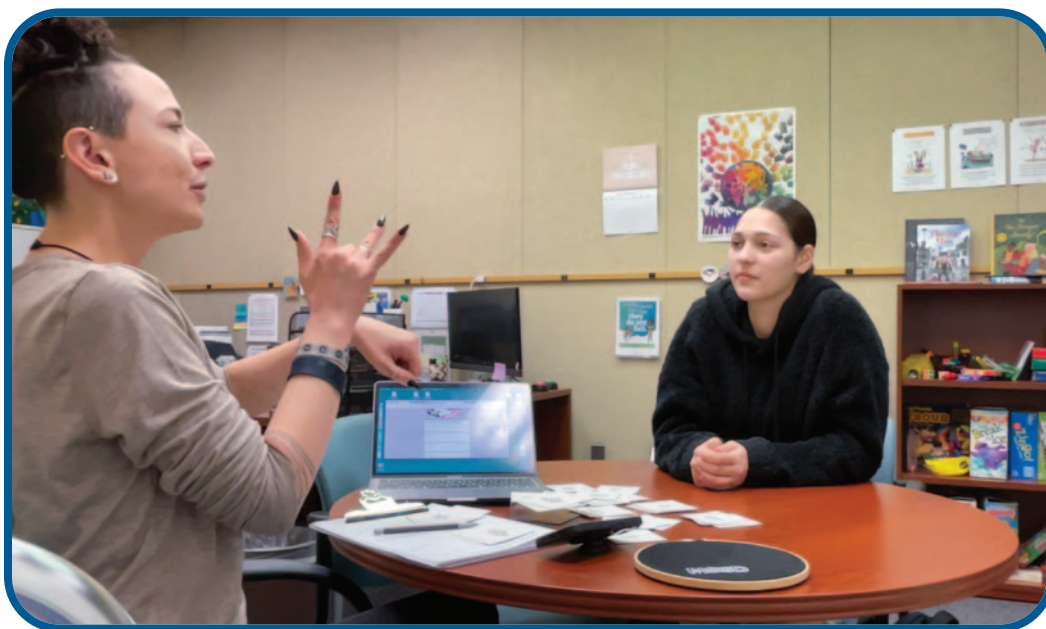
- Approximately 163,000 licensed SLPs work in the United States (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023).
- Speech-language pathology and audiology cover a wide range of issues. SLPs work with adults and children on issues such as stuttering, speech production, spoken and written language, executive function, voice quality, feeding and swallowing, and listening skills (ASHA, 2016); culturally Deaf consumers are a small percentage of the consumers with whom these clinicians work (ASHA, 2022b).
- To be licensed in speech-language pathology, a clinician must complete a master's level training program and a nine-month clinical fellowship.
- Two hundred and eighty-four accredited master's degree programs in speech-language pathology exist in the United States (Council on Academic Accreditation, 2024); a handful offer coursework related to deaf consumers (Language First, 2024). These are:
 - Gallaudet University, Washington, D.C.
 - Iona University, New Rochelle, N.Y.
 - Nazareth College, Pittsford, N.Y.
 - Emerson College, Boston, Mass.
 - Worcester State University, Worcester, Mass.

Postsecondary Transition Services

The SLP candidate will become affiliated with ASHA (www.asha.org), the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 234,000 members, certificate holders, and affiliates who are audiologists; SLPs; speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and SLP assistants; and students.

ASHA is undergoing a change in perspective, and deaf-friendly resources and tools are becoming more available and continue to be developed from a wide variety of sources. To date, ASHA has expressed a range of viewpoints and actions:

- Maintaining a practice portal to share evidence-based recommendations on a variety of topics, including the importance of providing a language-rich environment (ASHA, n.d.b.).



CREDIT: MATTHEW VITA

Above: A top priority for Burgan when working with students is ensuring their right to visual language.

- Increasing support for ASL; ASHA (2019) released a position paper affirming that ASL should no longer be treated as an AAC as it is a complex language distinct from English.
- Prioritizing the family's right to decide which language they feel is most appropriate (ASHA, n.d.a.) over the Language Equality and Acquisition for Deaf Kids (LEAD-K) mandates, which call for state-level legislative changes to prevent language deprivation in deaf and hard of hearing children (LEAD-K, 2016).
- Providing a profile of multilingual service providers;



Above: Burgan supports students in the classroom as they complete a project to ensure the carryover of skills learned in therapy sessions.

currently only 830 of their 217,886 members—SLPs and audiologists—report that they are fluent in ASL (ASHA, 2022a).

Goals

1. The SLP candidate will learn to advocate for deaf and hard of hearing children's exposure to fully accessible visible language as early as possible.
2. The SLP candidate will be proficient in ASL.
3. The SLP candidate will develop a "language first" approach and emphasize access to language before access to speech (Hall et al., 2019).
4. The SLP candidate will learn and recognize the importance of learning from Deaf people (CDC, 2022).

Specially Designed Services

The SLP candidate will be encouraged to explore the following:

The SLP candidate requires culturally appropriate training and resources to ensure optimal learning and a language-rich environment for deaf and hard of hearing learners.

- **Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center's portal** (<https://clerccenter.gallaudet.edu/ndec>) is filled with a wealth of resources for families and professionals working in deaf education.
- **Language First** (<https://language1st.org>) is a source of information for parents of deaf and hard of hearing children and for the professionals and schools that serve them. They also maintain a list of pro-ASL SLPs and other professionals.
- **Gallaudet University's Hearing and Speech Center** (<https://gallaudet.edu/hearing-speech-center/>) staff and alumni maintain a list (www.deaffriendlyaudiology.com) of signing audiologists and SLPs.
- **Most states have a state-run residential school for the deaf**, many of which offer statewide outreach services. Check out your individual state's school for the deaf online for more information.

Transportation to Related Services

Transportation will be provided to the SLP candidate to visit the local school for the deaf as well as for seminars, events, and conferences for continued education.

Extracurricular Activities

The SLP candidate will be encouraged to attend gatherings and events hosted by Deaf community members.

General Factors

The SLP candidate is eligible for Extended School Year services due to emerging skills and breakthrough opportunities.

Accommodations

Accommodations to be used by the SLP candidate with deaf and hard of hearing students to ensure an optimal learning environment include, but are

not limited to:

- Sign language interpretation—English/ASL interpreters and Certified Deaf Interpreters
- Captioning on all media
- Visual aids

Signatures

____ SLP candidate
____ SLPs and supervisors
____ Audiologists
____ ASL specialists
____ Deaf community members

References

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (n.d.a.). *White paper: Kindergarten readiness for children who are deaf or hard of hearing*. <https://www.asha.org/siteassets/uploadedFiles/LEAD-K-White-Paper.pdf>

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (n.d.b.). *Language and communication of deaf and hard of hearing children* [Practice Portal]. Retrieved from <https://www.asha.org/practice-portal/professional-issues/language-communication-deaf-hard-of-hearing-children/>

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2016). *Scope of practice in speech-language pathology*. <https://www.asha.org/policy/sp2016-00343/#Domains>

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2019). *American Sign Language (ASL)* [position statement]. <https://www.asha.org/policy/PS2019-00354/>

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2022a). *Profile of ASHA multilingual service providers, year-end 2022*. <https://www.asha.org/siteassets/surveys/2022-profile-of-multilingual-service-providers.pdf>

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2022b). *2022 schools survey: SLP caseload and workload characteristics*. www.asha.org/Research/memberdata/Schools-Survey/

Belsky, G. (n.d.). *What is an IEP?* Retrieved from <https://www.understood.org/en/articles/what-is-an-iep>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022). *Embracing cultural humility and community engagement*. CDC Global Health Equity. <https://www.cdc.gov>

Cochlear. (2020, March 18). *Cochlear receives FDA approval to lower the age of pediatric cochlear implantation to 9 months*. <https://www.cochlear.com/us/en/corporate/media-center/media-releases/2020/fda-ped-9-months>

Council on Academic Accreditation. (2024). *Programs*. <https://caa.asha.org/programs/>

DesGeorges, J. (2016). *Avoiding assumptions: Communication decisions made by hearing parents of deaf children*. *AMA Journal of Ethics*, 18(4), 442-446. <https://doi.org/10.1001/journalofethics.2016.18.4.sect1-1604>

Hall, M. L., Hall, W. C., & Caselli, N. K. (2019). Deaf children need language, not (just) speech. *First Language*, 39(4), 367-395.

Joint Commission on Infant Hearing. (2019). *Year 2019 position statement: Principles and guidelines for early hearing detection and intervention programs*. <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/jehdi/vol4/iss2/1/>

Language Equality and Acquisition for Deaf Kids. (2016, August). *LEAD-K FAQ*. <https://www.lead-k.org/wpcontent/uploads/2016/08/LEAD-K-Website-At-A-Glance-FAQ.pdf>

Language First. (2024). *Deaf-friendly SLP graduate programs*. https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1uMysUffjunUaUd3sJaW_8DGzVIYzeUtrQU03aMislGKk/edit#gid=0

Tamati, T. N., Pisoni, D. B., & Moberly, A. C. (2022). Speech and language outcomes in adults and children with cochlear implants. *Annual Review of Linguistics*, 8(1), 299-319. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-linguistics-031220-011554>

U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2023, April 25). *Speech-language pathologists*. [https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes291127.htm#\(1\)](https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes291127.htm#(1))

U.S. Department of Education. (2018). *Digest of education statistics, 2018*. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18_204.60.asp

U. S. Department of Education (2022). *2022 annual report to Congress on the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*. <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/2022-individuals-with-disabilities-education-act-annual-report-to-congress/>

Watts, P. (2023, June 17). *Why advocates say early sign language learning for deaf children is crucial*. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/why-advocates-say-early-sign-language-learning-for-deaf-children-is-crucial>