## Ensuring Accessibility to Students who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing

These tips from the National Deaf Center can help educators and schools ensure that everyone has access to the same resources and instructional content during these challenging times.

### Tip 1: Remain Flexible. It Won't Be 'One Size Fits All'

For specific questions about ARD committee decisions/IEP documentation, please see the TEA guidance documents located here: ARD guidance. Students who are deaf or hard of hearing vary in communication preferences, and accommodations change across settings and context. When classes move from in-person to online, expect changes in accommodations as well. Accommodations for synchronous (everyone online at the same time) versus asynchronous (self-paced) style learning will also vary. For example, a student who is deaf that uses an assistive listening system in a small- classroom setting might need speech-to-text services (i.e., CART, C-Print, or TypeWell) in a virtual classroom. Expect that not every service or support will be right for every student.

The National Deaf Center provides links to resources to help educators modify online communication at https:// www.nationaldeafcenter.org/communication101, http://www.nationaldeafcenter.org/als101, and http:// www.nationaldeafcenter.org/introstt

### Tip 2: Capitalize on Using Captions

Research shows video captions benefit everyone, including fluent English users, students with ADD/ADHD or learning disabilities, English as Second Language users, and more. To add captions, follow FCC Closed Captioning Rules, check out DIY captioning resources, or contact a captioning vendor. Please note, the list of vendors in the link is for information purposes only, TEA does not endorse the use of a particular vendor. For self-produced videos, be wary of apps or programs that provide auto-generated captions, which are not considered equitable access due to their high error rate.

### Tip 3: Set A Few Ground Rules

Just a few online class ground rules about communication will reap major benefits. Establish turn-taking and participation protocols, such as using the raise hand feature, the chatbox, or identifying your name before commenting. Ask students to only turn on their video to ask a question, since limiting the number of participants on screen at the same time can increase video quality and size. Tell students to stay in mute mode until they have something to say to reduce background noise.

## Tip 4: Test Your Video Conferencing Platform

Zoom, Adobe Connect, Lifesize, GoToMeeting and other platforms are commonly used, yet their features vary widely, especially in how they customize the end-user view. Be mindful that incorporating service providers such as remote American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters or remote speech-to-text professionals onto the platform means testing various view options and features to ensure interpreters or real-time captions are easily seen on screen, and that any other accommodations work properly. Also consider:

- For interpreting services, does the platform split the screen view or pin a video in order to permanently keep the interpreter's video feed on screen?
- For speech-to-text services, can the platform connect and sync the real-time captions on screen?
- If the view is not conducive within the platform, are there other programs or equipment that can be considered for separately casting interpreters or captions? For example, provide an iPad to a student who is deaf or hard of hearing to cast interpreters through FaceTime, Whereby, Skype or other video software.
- Video conferencing etiquette recommends that backgrounds be dark, solid colors and that presenters wear clothing that is not "busy" and provides ample contrast with the skin and making sure there is enough light in the room that is sufficiently diffused to reduce or eliminate shadows.
- Best practice is to limit Zoom meetings to no more than two hours maximum, with breaks, to reduce "Zoom Fatigue".

## Tip 5: Don't Cancel Service Providers

- Consistent service providers are critical for students who are deaf. Classroom providers assigned to the face-to-face version of the learning should continue providing services in the online setting. Vocabulary and other signed concepts may already be established between the student and the interpreters, while speech-to- text professionals may already have a dictionary of specific terminology prepared.
- Interpreters and speech-to-text professionals cannot be replaced by auto-generated captions for real-time communication needs. This does not provide equal access.

## Tip 6: Reach Out For Help

You are not alone. The National Deaf Center provides year-round support to teachers, disability services professionals, students who are deaf and their families, and service providers, including frequent listserv updates for educators.

**Additional Accessibility Resources:**

- Teach Anywhere: https://teachanywhere.stanford.edu/best-practices

- Mapping Access: https://www.mapping-access.com/blog-1/2020/3/10/accessible-teaching-in-the-time-of-covid-19

- National Center on Deaf-Blindness: https://www.nationaldb.org/

- Google for Education Covid-19 resource page: https://edu.google.com/latest-news/covid-19-support-resources/?modal_active=none&topic=view-all

- Google for Education Teach From Home site: https://teachfromhome.google/intl/en/

- Google Accessibility video series: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL590L5WQmH8dvW6kLjd5jRDN0IiCJHLZZ&disable_polymer=true

- Accessibility ideas for distance learning during COVID-19: https://www.blog.google/outreach-initiatives/education/distance-learning-accessibility-covid19

- Chromebook accessibility tools for distance learning: https://www.blog.google/outreach-initiatives/education/chromebook-accessibility-covid19/