



# COMMUNICATION CONSIDERATIONS A-Z™

## ***Mainstreaming***

### **What is mainstreaming?**

At the most basic level, mainstreaming refers to the education placement of a student alongside his or her hearing peers.

In reality, mainstreaming has as many definitions as there are individuals with hearing loss. Ideally, each student's mainstream experience should be as unique and individual as the specific needs of the individual. A student can be placed with his hearing peers from 30 minutes to a full day placement. If a student has good access to the curriculum and she is consistently demonstrating understanding and mastery of the curriculum, then she is appropriately mainstreamed.

### **What issues are at the forefront of mainstreaming?**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) had an impact on the practice of mainstreaming. The concept of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) was introduced with Public Law 94-142 (later evolved into IDEA). Since President Ford signed PL 94-142 in 1975 into law, LRE has become almost synonymous with mainstreaming. Recognizing the cost effectiveness of removing a student from a self-contained special education model and placing them in a typical classroom, many school districts embraced the idea of LRE and interpreted it as a mainstreaming model that would allow children with hearing loss to be educated with their hearing peers. LRE does not necessarily equal a mainstreamed environment. LRE refers to an educational placement. Mainstreaming is a demonstration of mastery of the curriculum by the student as he sits in the seat next to his

hearing peers.

Special Education support services and classrooms are expensive for school districts to sustain. It's important to genuinely question the practice of mainstreaming children with hearing loss into typical classrooms, regardless of their ability to perform; the issue here is educational placement based on student need vs a significant cost savings for districts. Additionally, this practice adheres to the guidelines of IDEA so it has legal support. In this circumstance, students with hearing loss are not held to the same expectations as their hearing peers and can travel through the education system without becoming appropriately educated as their instruction is watered-down through numerous accommodations that will allow them to remain in the typical classroom without having to perform at the same level as the other students in the class.

Another mainstreaming issue that has enormous consequences is the one-size-fits-all concept. Students often find themselves in a setting that does not provide adequate access to the communication in the classroom. Auditory-oral children are often required to use a sign interpreter for support and conversely signing students frequently do not have qualified interpreters to appropriately impart the teacher's instruction to the student. In both cases, the student is the loser as the instruction is passed through a faulty filter.

### **What should every parent or professional know about mainstreaming?**

All children deserve a free and appropriate education (FAPE). It is the common thought that a student with hearing loss in a mainstream placement will receive a superior education through exposure to typical peers and the instruction in the typical classroom. Certainly there are mainstreamed students who have thrived in mainstream settings because they were well prepared to enter the mainstream and/or because they received excellent support services while in the typical classroom. Being in the hearing classroom does not automatically guarantee a superior education.

There are some critical issues that parents need be aware of when their child enters the mainstream:

- Is the student on or close to grade level before he enters the classroom? If not, are considerable supports in place to assist the student in gaining more than one year's growth during the school year?
- Is the student mastering the curriculum or are accommodations preventing her from mastering the information at the same level as her hearing peers?
- Is the student annually assessed with standardized tests for language, academics, and speech (if appropriate). Annual assessments should demonstrate a year's growth for each year of instruction.
- Parents and professionals should consider the importance of a high school diploma. Students with an IEP are often put on a separate track towards a Special Education diploma. This type of diploma will limit the student's opportunities for post-high school education. A successful mainstream performance will assist the student in obtaining a standard diploma that will be attractive to a variety of colleges/universities.

## Where can I find more information about mainstreaming?

There are a variety of resources available with an equal variety of opinions about the benefits and challenges of mainstreaming a student with hearing loss. Below is a limited list of resources that reflects a diversity of opinions:

- Ross, Mark, *Hearing-Impaired Children in the Mainstream*, York Press
- Nevins and Chute, *Children with Cochlear Implants in Educational Settings*, Singular Publishing Group, Inc.
- Estabrooks, Warren, *Auditory-Verbal Therapy*, “Chapter 6 Auditory-Verbal Children Go to School,” by Dorothy Boothroyd-Turner, Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf
- King, Freeman, *Introduction to Deaf Education*, “Chapter 6: Educational Placement Options and the Unwritten Curriculum,” by Mervin Garretson, Butte Publications, Inc.

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Ruth Fouts Mathers is the Campus Director of St. Joseph Institute for the Deaf – Kansas City. She holds a BA in English from the University of Colorado, and an MS in Speech and Hearing with a focus on oral deaf education from Central Institute for the Deaf at Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri. Her teaching license certifies her ability to teach deaf children from birth to 12th grade. Additionally, Mathers has earned interpreter training certification for Professional Sign Language and Oral Interpreting. Her credentials are widely recognized to be unique in their breadth of methodologies and experience with deaf culture. It is this broad perspective of the field of deafness that brought Ruth to the Hands & Voices National Board. Her passion for the field of deaf education stems from growing up with an older brother who is profoundly deaf.

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*Communication Considerations A to Z™ is a series from Hands & Voices that's designed to help families and the professionals working with them access information and further resources to assist them in raising and educating children who are deaf or hard of hearing. We've recruited some of the best in the business to share their insights on the many diverse considerations that play into communication modes & methods, and so many other variables that are part of informed decision making. We hope you find the time to read them all!*