# CALIFORNIA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF, RIVERSIDE

## Communication Philosophy

Part A

The California School for the Deaf, Riverside, is committed to being a student-centered learning environment. The school serves deaf and hard-of -hearing students from all parts of Southern California, and recognizes that its students come from a variety of language, communication, and cultural backgrounds. The school is challenged by the diversity of its students, and is dedicated to providing a language-rich environment of clear communication, which is accessible to everyone for maximum language learning and development. A visual language approach is one that is most accessible to all students. To accomplish this, the languages of instruction at CSDR shall be primarily American Sign Language (ASL) and written English.

**Principles:**

These principles guide the School's communication philosophy:

- American Sign Language, as a visual language, is ultimately accessible to all CSDR students whether they are deaf or hard of hearing.
- American Sign Language is a legitimate, natural language, separate from English. It is the leading minority language in the United States after Spanish, Italian, German, and French. (Lane, Hoffman, & Bahan, 1996)
- A solid foundation in American Sign Language can lead to the development of English literacy.
- Development of fluency in both American Sign Language and English literacy is essential for academic, intellectual, socioemotional, and social growth at CSDR and must begin as early as possible.
- The development of English literacy is of paramount importance for success in academics and careers.
- Language growth and conceptual learning are facilitated when communication is clear, consistent, meaningful, and accessible.
- American Sign Language and English coexist at CSDR in complex and mutually enriching ways.
- Students are best served by staff who are capable users of both American Sign Language and written English.
- No student shall be denied access to instruction because of unmet communication needs.

(For more information, see Part B.)

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## Communication Philosophy

Part B

**Rationale:**

While the population of students at CSDR is diverse in many ways, one thing which all CSDR students (both deaf and hard-of-hearing) share is the ability to access and process information through a visual channel. American Sign Language (ASL) is a natural language, which is based upon parameters of visual processing. Based upon this common strength, which is shared by all students, ASL will maximally promote access to the language of the classroom and school, and to the content of the curriculum. A print form of English is also a visually accessible representation of the English language, and will thus enhance CSDR students' access to knowledge and life-long learning.

A growing body of literature supports the central role of ASL in educational programs for deaf students. A rich developmental literature supports the notion that deaf children acquire ASL in a manner similar to that of hearing children leaning spoken languages (Hoffmeister & Wilbur, 1980; Newport & Meier, 1985; Pettito & Marentette; 1991), brain research attests to the suitability of American Sign Language to the cognitive processing capacity of deaf individuals' (Bellugi, 1991; Poizner, Klima & Bellugi, 1987); and literature on educational outcomes supports the enhanced achievement and literacy skills of deaf students who have a firm foundation in ASL as a first language(Strong, 1988; Strong & Prinz, 1977; Wilbur, 2000).

As students become proficient in ASL and English literacy, new avenues of formal and informal leaning will continue to open for them. Each language will be used to develop and refine skills in the other. By focusing delivery of instructional communication on ASL and written English, the school provides maximum opportunities for all students to become self-sufficient citizens.

**Diversity and transition:**

The languages of instruction at CSDR shall be primarily ASL and written English. The consistent application of this communication philosophy is essential to fostering language development and eventual literacy. The consistent application of this communication philosophy will facilitate effective group instruction, linguistic and cultural growth, and enhance opportunities for incidental learning.

Majority of CSDR students learn and converse primarily through ASL. Students will be assisted in developing competency in the two campus languages, ASL and written English. The school is committed to creating and supporting an environment of clear and accessible communication for all students of this diverse learning community, whether they are initially proficient in ASL, written English, another language, or no language at all.

After information is presented through ASL or English print (consistent with the school communication philosophy), individuals and contexts may necessitate a repetition of information in

a second language. In acquiring first language, every student must achieve Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), which are the skills required for social, conversational communication. Then he or she will be able to achieve Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). CALP is the communication skills that school requires in the formal learning of a language. In other words, language needs to be first acquired and then taught. When learning a second language, every student needs go through the same process of achieving BICS and then CALP. But the process is on a much faster pace because they already have their first language (Cummins & Swain, 1986).

The school is committed to assisting students in making the transition from other spoken and written languages into written English and from other sign systems into ASL. Students who are not native or fluent ASL signers should be provided opportunity to receive ASL instruction to develop their ASL competence. Then they may take full advantage of opportunities for classroom and incidental learning, socialization, and community involvement. Staff members should provide students with clear, consistent models of both ASL and written English. In addition, the school should provide assessment and training program to ensure that all staff members have the opportunity to refine their skills in both languages.

Deaf and hard-of-hearing students benefit from an accessible visual communication for educational and social development. The school will maximize this potential through the use of ASL as the language of instruction and the development of English literacy through all grade levels. When students become fluent users of both ASL and written English, they will have the communication tools needed for success in American society, the Deaf community, the workplace, and their homes.

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