

Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Funds (CSFRF)

PROMOTING SUPPORTS FOR STUDENTS WITH
DISABILITIES SPECIFIC TO STUDENTS WHO ARE DEAF
OR HARD OF HEARING

THE NEBRASKA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, OFFICE
OF SPECIAL EDUCATION



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Promoting supports for students with disabilities specific to students who are Deaf or hard of hearing through Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Funds (CSFRF)

The needs of children and youth who are deaf or hard of hearing are diverse, ranging from a need for access supports to highly specialized instruction. For all children, and especially children who are deaf or hard of hearing, there are windows of opportunity for learning that should be maximized. When children, along with their families, are supported with appropriate language and learning opportunities that address the nuances of their hearing status, most will thrive and achieve their chosen educational and occupational aspirations.

LB 1014 - Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Funds (CSFRF) Appropriations

As part of LB 1014e, the legislation stipulates the following requirements to ensure federal compliance, accountability, and reporting obligations are met:

1. *“All grants utilizing Federal Funds allocated to the State of Nebraska from the federal Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund shall meet the eligible uses under the federal American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 and any relevant guidance on the use of such funds by the United States Department of the Treasury.” (Page 2, section 10, 1st paragraph)*
1. *“Each agency, board, or commission shall complete guidance documents related to the distribution of the Federal Funds appropriated pursuant to this act within sixty days after the effective date of this act.” (Page 2, section 10, 2nd paragraph)*

Appropriate and quality learning opportunities should exist for all children. The education of students who are deaf or hard of hearing requires specialized programs, and appropriately certified personnel with effective communication skills. Appropriate and quality learning experiences for children who are deaf or hard of hearing should accommodate not only their disabilities but should also recognize and build on their unique strengths and learning styles.

The communication and language environments for children who are deaf or hard of hearing must be varied and rich. The individual communication and language needs of children who are deaf or hard of hearing may present special challenges during naturally occurring interactions. All

communication modes and languages are to be provided for and respected, whether oral/aural language or manual language, whether American Sign Language or English signing systems, regardless of the type or use of hearing assistive technology (i.e. cochlear implant, hearing aids, etc.). Early identification followed by timely and appropriate intervention must form a safety net of support around all programs and services if quality and equity are to be made a reality for all. The state system is a distinct yet fluid network of connected options that allow students to move to appropriate programs and receive services as needs and circumstances change, all of which are determined by the student's IFSP or IEP team.

LB 1014 reads in Section 13:

There is included in the appropriation to this program for FY2022-23 \$1,000,000 Federal Funds for state aid, which shall only be used for such purpose.

The State Department of Education shall spend the funds appropriated in this section exclusively for programs and interpreters that provide services to students who are deaf or hard of hearing in the following manner: (1) \$300,000 for equipment; (2) \$300,000 for service; and (3) \$400,000 for an enhanced educational interpreter training and mentoring program.

To ensure the continued progress is made on reaching the goals set forth in the NDE State Plan: Statewide Educational Programs and Support Services for Children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing and that the Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Funds (CSFRF) Appropriations are used to enhance the progress towards these goals, the NDE, Office of Special Education has developed the following outline for planning for use of funds.

Developing Stakeholder Input Plan for obligations of Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Funds (CSFRF) appropriations.

The Nebraska Department of Education, Office of Special Education will hold several stakeholder engagement activities to garner feedback on the use of each fiscal appropriation. These activities will include, but are not limited to; stakeholder engagement activities, meetings with advocacy and support agencies, needs assessments conducted of state-level programs and district-level programs, and surveys of families and parents.

\$300,000 – Services:

Qualified providers are critical to a child’s success. Early intervention providers must have core knowledge and skills to assist families in promoting language development and other pertinent developmental growth for their infants and toddlers. Teachers of students who are deaf or hard of hearing, speech-language pathologists, educational interpreters, educational audiologists and other specialized instructional support personnel must meet professional standards that include minimal qualifications and ongoing performance monitoring. State and local education agencies should provide professional development and training specific to the needs of infants, toddlers and students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Without qualified staff and appropriate support services, the ability of children to achieve appropriate outcomes is jeopardized.

The NDE, Office of Special Education will be conducting a needs assessment in collaboration with The NDE, OSE - Deaf or Hard of Hearing Regional Programs to see what services are needed or training for service providers are needed in each of the regions. A survey of parents, families, and service providers will also be conducted to see what additional supports are needed to support families in understanding services that are available through the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act for students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing.

Timeline: Needs Assessment and Survey will be conducted by October 2022.

\$300,000 – Equipment:

There are many devices and systems available to assist individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing in accessing the environment. Some devices convey information visually, and some devices enhance auditory information. There are a variety of Hearing Assistive Technologies, referred to as HATS, designed to overcome distance, background noise, and reverberation. Some of the assistive listening devices most commonly used are Frequency Modulation systems, called FM systems, Infrared systems, Audio Induction Loop systems, and other accessories to couple hearing aids to media such as phones, music players, computers, and tablet devices. There are also a variety of assistive visual technologies including visual alerting devices, technologies to convert spoken language to text, and technologies to support telecommunication.

The NDE, Office of Special Education will be conducting a needs assessment in collaboration with The NDE, Assistive Technology Partnership (ATP) to capture a statewide picture of what needs for equipment are currently present in the state. Currently D/HH equipment run through the NDE, Office of Special Education Regional Programs, allowing for regional equipment needs to be met. The NDE, Office of Special Education will work with ATP to build out a statewide repository of all equipment specific to supports for students who are Deaf or hard of hearing purchased with CSFRF funds as well as the equipment that is intended for statewide distribution and loan within school districts. ATP in coordination with The NDE, Office of Special Education Regional Programs will gather information regarding current equipment in the regions to ensure that appropriate purchases of new or updated equipment is being purchased for districts to utilize in a loan fashion for students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Timeline: Needs Assessment will be conducted by October 2022.



\$400,000 – Educational Mentoring Support:

Interpreter mentorship programs have been created to address the increased demand for high quality interpretation services and the need for ongoing support for new and experienced interpreters. ASL/English interpretation is a complex social-linguistic task. The NCIEC states that “interpreting takes a high level of fluency in each language, keen ability to focus on what is being said, vast world knowledge, and professional, ethical conduct.” The National Association of Interpreters (NAIE) in Education Guidelines cite an array of professional competencies needed by ASL/English interpreters, including proficiencies in use of American Sign Language and English; broad liberal arts knowledge; critical thinking and problem solving skills; appreciation of diversity and cross-cultural competence; knowledge in social and behavioral science, linguistics and communication; understanding of theories of interpretation and translation, human resources, professional ethics, and certification; and stress and health management.

Increased demand for qualified ASL/English interpretation led to growth of professional training opportunities for aspiring as well as working interpreters. However, the interpreting community’s efforts to increase the numbers and availability of qualified ASL/English interpreters met with several challenges:

- Time lag between new interpreters’ graduation from an interpreter preparation program and their attaining national certification
- A skills gap, including the level of ASL proficiency, among new and working interpreters
- Need for more professional development opportunities and networking support for interpreters
- Alternative entry pathways into professional interpreting, often by members of diverse racial/ethnic groups
- Lack of awareness of the role and acceptance of Deaf interpreters
- Lack of persistence in or dropping out of the interpreting profession

For students who are deaf who are attending school in general education settings, the provision of an educational interpreter is an important accommodation. The demand for educational interpreters has soared in recent years and has paralleled the increase in the number so students who are deaf who are attending local schools. Rapid growth in the field of educational interpreting has resulted in a shortage of well-prepared interpreters, a situation that is even worse in rural settings. Many individuals employed as interpreters have not completed formal preparation through interpreter preparation programs, and even fewer still have had appropriate training for employment in

educational settings. The paucity of interpreters, coupled with the concern about the quality of interpretation puts a high emphasis on the need to “grow your own” in rural and high shortage areas.

One way of addressing these challenges is through the design and implementation of interpreter mentoring programs to support new interpreters, interpreters from diverse populations, Deaf interpreters, and working interpreters seeking professional growth.

Beyond formal postsecondary interpreter preparation programs, interpreter mentoring programs are particularly suited to fostering refined skills and deeper understanding and sensitivities that come only through guided practice, feedback from other interpreters, and self-assessment in increasingly challenging situations.

The NDE, Office of Special Education currently administers 2 activities funded through the IDEA-Part B 611 Discretionary Funding made available to the state to support Educational Mentoring support.

The NDE, Office of Special Education will scale up the current activities with the CSFRF funds to enhance the current mentoring projects.



Current Activities:

1. TASK12 – Training and Assessment Systems for K-12 Educational Sign Language Interpreters (IDEA Regulations CFR 34.300.18 and 300.34)

a. Goals:

- i. Provide oversight to the overall TASK12 Project, budget, and Advisory Board.
- ii. Administer the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA) for educational sign language interpreters to improve their services for children and youth who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- iii. Provide comprehensive State reports from assessment data.
- iv. Provide access to training modules for educational sign language interpreters.

b. Activities and Deliverables:

- i. TASK12 will provide networking and support to elevate the quality of services being provided by sign language interpreters in K-12 settings. Each member State has a representative who serves on the TASK12 Advisory Board to provide guidance and direction for the TASK12 project. The TASK12 project will administer assessments for K-12 educational sign language interpreters at a location in Nebraska.
- ii. TASK12 staff will collect and save data from the assessment results as measured by the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA) of the Boys Town National Research Hospital. This data will be used to create and submit comprehensive reports which help States target the necessary supervision, intervention, support, and training for their interpreters.
- iii. The Advisory Board will meet annually to receive reports on TASK12 activities and provide recommendations for improvements.
- iv. TASK12 will provide access to all available, self-directed, online, training modules for K-12 educational sign language interpreters Statewide during this contract period.

c. Project Activities:

- i. TASK12 staff will work under the direction of the appointed State Special Education Services (SES) staff member.
- ii. TAESE will facilitate assessments for all interested educational interpreters from Local Education Agencies (LEAs) Statewide.
- iii. TAESE will provide the SES a comprehensive report of data collected from all the Nebraska assessment results.
- iv. TAESE will coordinate and conduct an annual TASK12 Advisory Board meeting where members can provide recommendations of improvement and growth for



the TASK12 project. TASK12 staff will report on related project data and activities to the Advisory Board during the meeting. Each member State will be represented at the Advisory Board meeting by a person of their choice.

- v. Maintain and facilitate a TASK12 Advisory Board listserv for the purpose of ongoing communication among Board members.
- vi. TAESE will coordinate and oversee activities related to assessment registration, data collection, assessment administration, State reporting, and the Advisory Board.
- vii. TAESE will provide access to all available self-directed online training modules for K-12 educational sign language interpreters Statewide with the option to earn continuing education credit.

d. Outcomes:

- i. Interpreters will have the opportunity to take the EIPA for their skills to be evaluated to establish strengths and areas for improvement to target the necessary supervision, support, and training for them.
- ii. Resources will be collaborated together through the network of the multi-State Advisory Board.
- iii. Interpreters will have access to a rich array of professional development opportunities to improve language and interpreting competency.
- iv. Overall interpreting services will improve for students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

**2. TASK12 Mentoring for Sign Language Interpreters
(IDEA Regulations CFR 34.300.18 and 34.300.34)**

- a. **Goal:** Enhance the signing skills of school-based sign language interpreters in Nebraska through onsite and virtual mentoring.
- b. **Activities:**
 - i. TASK12 staff and the Nebraska TASK12 Board representative will conference together to discuss and refine the training and mentoring activities.
 - ii. Nebraska will serve as a mentoring pilot State to provide support to their sign language interpreters and help sustain their signing skills.
 - iii. If needed, and if the interpreters meet the 3.0-3.9 EIPA standard, interpreters will participate in a TIPS cohort to help them continue to improve their signing.
 - iv. TASK12 staff and Nebraska SEA staff will work together in developing and implementing virtual mentoring services for 5-9 other qualified interpreters in the State.
- c. **Outcomes:**



- i. TASK12 staff and the Nebraska Advisory Board representative will communicate and network with each other during each training and mentoring activity.
- ii. Nebraska interpreters (5-9) will receive training and virtual mentoring services to help sustain and improve their signing skills.

In addition to the current projects, The NDE, Office of Special Education will be developing an online submission process where individuals or agencies can submit project proposals to enhance education interpreter training and mentoring programs in Nebraska that are aligned to the following priority goals.

Priority Goals:

- I.** Provide for development of and/or access to training modules for educational sign language interpreters
- II.** Enhance the signing skills of school-based sign language interpreters in Nebraska through onsite and virtual mentoring.
- III.** Provide opportunities for providers to network on Low Incidence issues.

The scale up of current projects will enhance the ability to meet goals II and III, however, there is a great need to continue to enhance the ability to attract and prepare individuals to the Educational Interpreting profession and then support the individual to becoming a highly qualified educational interpreter, goal I.



To continue to ensure meeting goals II and III there is continued need to support Educational Interpreters through mentoring and professional development to ensure they meet requirements. Currently 92 NAC 51 requires the following for Qualified Educational Sign Language Interpreters:

010.06A In order to be a qualified educational sign language interpreter for the purposes of 92 NAC 51-010.06, an individual must have a high school diploma, high school equivalency diploma or higher, and meet the requirements of 92 NAC 51-010.06A1 or 010.06A2:

010.06A1 Receive a passing score on the EIPA written exam, and attain and maintain one or more of the following competency levels as measured by the following assessments:

010.06A1a Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA), Competency level 4.0 or above

010.06A1b Registry of Interpreters of the Deaf Certification (RID)

010.06A1c National Association of the Deaf (NAD) Competency level 4.0 or above

010.06A1d National Interpreter Certification (NIC)

010.06A1e Quality Assurance Screening Test (QAST) Competency level 4.0

Additional scale up of the current educational interpreter mentoring and professional learning opportunities will assist districts in providing for individuals to meet these requirements.

Projects can be submitted that meet one or more of the priority goals, with each goal area being met scoring higher in the selection process. Projects will be selected based on scoring within a rubric regarding the alignment to enhance goals, project proposed costs, and ability to sustain the project beyond funding opportunities within regions.



Activity Timeline

Year	Year 1 – FY2021-22	Year 2 – FY2022-23	Year 3 – FY2023-24	Year 4 – FY2024-25
	July 1, 2021, through June 30, 2022	July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2023	July 1, 2023, through June 30, 2024	July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2025.
All	Development of Project Activities and Guidance Document related to the distribution of the Federal Funds – will be completed by June 13, 2022	Stakeholder Engagement – October 2022 through February 2023 Development of State Plan for use of funds – February 2023 through April 2023	Obligate all funds and begin State Plan – July 2023 through June 2024 Monitor Progress on State Plan - July 2023 through June 2024	Expend funds and evaluate State Plan
Services		Needs Assessment and Survey for use of funds re: Services - will be conducted by October 2022	Obligate funds based on State Plan for use of funds - July 2023 through June 2024	
Equipment		Needs Assessment will be conducted by October 2022	Obligate funds based on State Plan for use of funds - July 2023 through June 2024	
Mentoring		Scale up of current activities – July 2022 through June 2023 Development of Project Proposal Process – June 2022	Obligate funds based on State Plan for use of funds	

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		<p>through October 2022</p> <p>Deploy Call for Project Proposals – October 2022 through December 2022</p> <p>Form Review Committee – October 2022</p> <p>Review Submitted Project Proposals – November 2022 through January 2023</p> <p>Announcement of Project awards – February 2023</p> <p>State Plan for use of funds from selected projects – March 2023 – June 2023</p>		
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The Nebraska Department of Education intends the following uses of the funds, supporting a strong and equitable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and economic downturn.

Amount:	Intended Use:	Timeframe:
\$300,000	Selection of Specific Services that can be enhanced to support students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing or training on services provided to service providers based on Needs Assessment.	Purchases or Contracts entered into for the 2023-24/2024-25 School Year(s).
\$300,000	Selection of Specific Equipment that can be enhanced to support students who are Deaf of Hard of Hearing or training on equipment provided to service providers based on Needs Assessment.	Purchases or Contracts entered into for the 2023-24/2024-25 School Year(s).
\$400,000	Selection of Projects to support students who are Deaf of Hard of Hearing regarding Educational Mentoring Support.	Purchases or Contracts entered into for the 2023-24/2024-25 School Year(s).

How is this eligible under the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)? As referenced in SLFRP final rule, pages 6-7, “an expanded set of households and communities are “impacted” or “disproportionately impacted” by the pandemic, thereby allowing recipients to provide responses to a broad set of households and entities without requiring additional analysis. Further, the final rule provides a broader set of enumerated eligible uses available for these communities as part of COVID-19 public health and economic response, including making affordable housing, childcare, and early learning services eligible in all impacted communities.

Infants, toddlers, and students who are deaf and hard of hearing often face significant barriers to receiving effective communication accommodations in educational settings. Effective communication in educational settings between students/families and their providers is critical for improved outcomes for students with disabilities. Complex, sensitive, and vital information is often conveyed in educational settings, and effective communication is essential to ensure that all information shared is understood clearly by all parties. But a lack of effective communication remains a significant barrier to education for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. In addition

to the already existing barriers faced by the deaf and hard of hearing in educational settings in normal times, the COVID-19 pandemic, which has disrupted all aspects of educational services, poses additional issues for this population.

Barriers to effective communication, which exist across educational settings, include providers and staff not having the requisite knowledge of what is required of them by federal law and regulations and protocols that assume a “one-size-fits-all” approach to effective communication across most situations. The cost of providing services, and staff not understanding what services may aid in effective communication or how to access those services, also pose challenges. When facing barriers to effective communication, deaf or hard of hearing individuals often experience dissatisfaction with their education, are unable to successfully navigate educational systems, and face negative outcomes.

Ironically, many of the communication challenges posed to the deaf or hard of hearing in educational settings during the COVID-19 pandemic are the result of safety precautions. To slow the spread and reduce the risk of exposure, many educational entities implemented mandated precautions such as the wearing of personal protective equipment including masks; visitation and capacity restrictions, which may limit or eliminate access to in-person sign language interpreters; and increased use of tele education, all of which create communication challenges.

Some individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing rely on lip reading, visual cues, and residual hearing. With the proliferation and common use of face masks during the pandemic, individuals who rely on residual hearing and visual cues to understand others were not be able to do so if the person they were communicating with was wearing a mask. Since a mask covers the mouth and much of the face, it takes away the ability to observe lip movement and facial expressions. For infants, toddlers, and students who wear hearing aids, mask wearing also posed challenges; both masks and hearings aids are worn around the ears, and when wearing a mask, deaf or hard of hearing individuals who use hearing aids may faced increased discomfort and may even lose their hearing aids.

The switch to remote learning and the need for social distancing continues to limit many kids' ability to interact with their peers in-person. And that lack of in-person engagement has had a social impact on many students in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community.

The Nebraska Department of Education’s use of funds would help support a strong and equitable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and economic downturn for students who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families.



Project and Expenditure Report - Quarterly

Period Covered	State Due Date	US Treasury Due Date
April 1 – June 30, 2022	July 18, 2022	July 31, 2022
July 1 – September 30, 2022	October 17, 2022	October 31, 2022
October 1 – December 31, 2022	January 16, 2023	January 31, 2023
January 1 – March 31, 2023	April 17, 2023	April 30, 2023
April 1 – June 30, 2023	July 16, 2023	July 31, 2023
July 1 – September 30, 2023	October 17, 2023	October 31, 2023
October 1 – December 31, 2023	January 16, 2024	January 31, 2024
January 1 – March 31, 2024	April 15, 2024	April 30, 2024
April 1 – June 30, 2024	July 16, 2024	July 31, 2024
July 1 – September 30, 2024	October 16, 2024	October 31, 2024
October 1 – December 31, 2024	January 16, 2025	January 31, 2025
January 1 – March 31, 2025	April 15, 2025	April 30, 2025
April 1 – June 30, 2025	July 16, 2025	July 31, 2025
July 1 – September 30, 2025	October 16, 2025	October 31, 2025
October 1 – December 31, 2025	January 16, 2026	January 31, 2026
January 1 – March 31, 2026	April 15, 2026	April 30, 2026
April 1 – June 30, 2026	July 16, 2026	July 31, 2026
July 1 – September 30, 2026	October 16, 2026	October 31, 2026
October 1 – December 31, 2026	March 16, 2027	March 31, 2027

Other Dates of Note:	Due Date
State Guidance Documents Due:	June 13, 2022
Report to Executive Board Due:	July 13, 2022

Note: The administrative expenditures of any agency, board, or commission related to the use of the Federal Funds appropriated pursuant to this act shall not exceed fifteen percent of the Federal Fund appropriation to such agency, board, or commission for such purpose. The expenditures for permanent and temporary salaries and per diems for FY2022-23 as provided for in this act shall not be considered in the basis for continuation funding for any fiscal year of a succeeding biennium.

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