

Legislators:

I hope that in considering H.B. No. 1632 (or 3419) and S.B. 780, you also discuss the impact and potential impact of existing technology on Deaf students. Technology immersion — including DVD's, streaming video, web-casting, and so on — can provide exciting educational opportunities for Texas children. But Deaf children are often left out in the cold. In an age when “accessibility” is a buzz-word for handicapped and disabled children, and indeed is a legal requirement in the development of Individualized Educational Plans for these children, it is appalling to realize that many of our electronic state-adopted educational materials are not even closed-captioned. It is equally appalling that *no* state-adopted educational materials are available in the language most accessible to deaf children: American Sign Language.

What we at Texas School for the Deaf would like to ask you to do will not cost the state any additional money, and will go a long way towards improving accessibility for Deaf students in Texas. Go into any movie rental store, and you will find that almost every title is closed-captioned or subtitled for the hearing impaired. Requiring publishers of electronic educational media to do the same thing seems elementary, but until such a requirement is written into law, it is unlikely to happen. There would be a relatively slight investment of time and money on the part of publishers to provide captioning, but the cost for Texas taxpayers would be zero dollars.

In addition, not all Deaf children can read fluently, so captions alone, while the most basic form of accessibility, may not meet the needs of many Deaf children. Unlike hearing children, who learn to read by “sounding a word out,” most Deaf children lack the auditory language base for a phonics approach to work. They must learn the English language at the same time as they are learning to read.

Although Texas law provides for accessibility of state-adopted educational materials through Braille or audio recordings for the blind and visually impaired, there is no such provision for Sign Language. Again, we are not asking for anything that would cost Texans additional money. We are simply asking for *permission* to translate state-adopted materials into sign language, and to share those translations with other schools and programs serving Deaf children in Texas. Again, the cost for Texas taxpayers would be zero dollars.

There is precedent for these accessibility proposals. In addition to several states, including Texas, which have statutes focusing on the blind and Visually Impaired, the California Educational Code section 60061 (a) subsection (7) provides the right to transcribe, reproduce, modify, and distribute state-adopted materials in American Sign Language videos for the Deaf; and section 60061.8 (a) subsection (2) requires that video products for students in grades K-12 shall be closed-captioned. We are asking you to do much the same thing.

So while I would urge you to increase the technology allotment for schools, I also urge you to increase accessibility of educational media and technology for Deaf students by

requiring textbook publishers to provide captions on videotapes, DVD's, and other electronic media; and to allow alternative forms of state-adopted educational materials to be created for students with disabilities — i.e., sign language versions for the Deaf. Neither of these proposals results in additional funds needed to support them, and would go a long way toward improving accessibility for Deaf students in Texas.

Thank you.

*L. Denise Hazelwood*