

ROB SAXTON  
Deputy Superintendent of Public  
Instruction



OREGON DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
Public Service Building, 255 Capitol Street NE, Salem, Oregon 97310  
Phone (503) 947-5600 • Fax (503) 378-5156 • www.ode.state.or.us

**HB 2757:**  
**House Education Committee**  
**Cindy Hunt and Laura Petschauer**  
**February 25, 2013**

Good afternoon Chair Gelser and members of the House Education Committee. For the record, we are Cindy Hunt and Laura Petschauer speaking on behalf of the Oregon Education Department. We are here today to provide information about HB 2757.

## **Background**

The Department supports the use of sign language during appropriate assessment subject areas and has recently approved "Signed Interpretation of Assessments" for the subject areas of mathematics, science, social science, and writing as an accommodation available to students with an identified need. Pursuant to the Department's actions, signing will be available for those subject areas across the state beginning with the 2013-14 school year. The signing accommodation is not available for the subject area of reading because ASL and English are two separate languages with different vocabulary and grammar (the way the sentences of a language are constructed). Some research states that individuals who learned ASL as their primary language are English language learners due to the significant differences between the two languages. In addition, ASL is not a gestural form of English. The statewide assessment for reading is measuring the level of proficiency of English reading. If the signing accommodation was allowed for reading, it would be considered a modification because it would alter the construct of what is being measured by the assessment and make the results invalid.

School districts use the assessments to determine whether students are meeting standards and whether they are on track to graduate. One of the challenges that students who are deaf sometimes face with taking assessments is related to access. For the subject areas of mathematics, science, social science, and writing, school districts want to measure content proficiency, not reading ability. The signing accommodation addresses the issue of accessibility for these subject areas.

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~~For students who are deaf, often learning to read is a significant challenge for several reasons. They cannot hear the words, their parents don't sign, or because of a lack of services. For example, when a student who is deaf enters the Oregon School for the Deaf, they are typically four grade levels behind their hearing peers for reading.~~

As the Department reviewed the issue of offering the signing accommodation to students who are deaf for appropriate subjects, another issue that arose is the accurate interpretation of assessment language. To address this issue, the Department has identified qualified sign language interpreters

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for this purpose as those that meet existing minimum standards required for all sign language interpreters in public schools by ORS 185.225 and the rules of the State Board of Education adopted under this statute. The Department is also convening a workgroup to develop guidelines for sign language interpreters who will be providing this service.

This summer the Department will be distributing these guidelines and information to school districts about Signing Interpretation of Assessments to ensure that this is fully implemented in the 2013-14 school year.

## Legislation

House Bill 2757 requires the Department of Education to allow students whose primary language is American Sign Language to use American Sign Language while participating in the statewide assessment system. If ASL is not available, the Department is to develop an alternative to the statewide assessment system and the State Board must exempt students from any requirements related to assessment of content standards.

While the Department of Education is generally supportive of the intent of HB 2757, we are concerned that the effect of the bill will be to delay the work that has already been done in this area as we would need to review our previously developed guidelines to ensure that they are in compliance with the bill.

The bill would also allow an assessment in American Sign Language for reading which is currently not included in the list of subjects for which ASL is allowed. The Oregon Accommodations Panel includes members from universities, school districts, individual with disabilities, parent of an individual with disabilities and Department staff. This panel initiated the current recommendations for the signing accommodation and concluded that students who are deaf should be held to the same standards in reading as their peers and therefore, didn't recommend this accommodation for reading.

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