

Date of Hearing: June 17, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Darshana R. Patel, Chair
SB 1381 (Cervantes) – As Amended April 16, 2026

SENATE VOTE: 39-0

SUBJECT: State special schools: information

SUMMARY: Requires local educational agencies (LEAs) to provide parents and guardians of students who are deaf or hard of hearing (DHH), blind, visually impaired, or deaf-blind with information about state special schools (SSS), including the California Schools for the Deaf and the California School for the Blind, through annual parent notifications and during the individualized education program (IEP) process. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires that the annual parent notification, for the parent or guardian of a pupil who is deaf, hard of hearing, blind, visually impaired, or deaf-blind, include information regarding the option for the pupil to attend the California School for the Deaf or the California School for the Blind, as applicable.
- 2) Requires that, commencing with the 2027–28 school year, if an LEA develops, reviews, or revises an IEP for a pupil who is DHH, blind, visually impaired, or deaf-blind, the IEP team provide the pupil’s parent, guardian, or educational rights holder with information about the California School for the Deaf or the California School for the Blind, as applicable, as provided by the California Department of Education (CDE).
- 3) Requires that, on or before July 1, 2027, the CDE provide LEAs with information about the California School for the Deaf and the California School for the Blind to be used for the parent notification during the IEP process.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) In federal law, establishes the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), in order to ensure that all children with disabilities have a free appropriate public education (FAPE) that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living, among other purposes. (20 U.S.C. Section 1400)
- 2) In federal law, requires each public agency to ensure that a continuum of alternative placements is available to meet the needs of children with disabilities for special education and related services, including:
 - a) Instruction in regular classes;
 - b) Special classes;
 - c) Special schools;
 - d) Home instruction: and

- e) Instruction in hospitals and institutions. (34 C.F.R. 300.115; 20 U.S.C. 1412)
- 3) Requires an IEP team, when developing an IEP, to do the following:
- a) In the case of a student who is visually impaired, the need to provide for instruction in braille, and the use of braille, unless the IEP team determines, after an assessment of the student's reading and writing skills, needs, and appropriate reading and writing media, including an assessment of the student's future needs for instruction in braille or the use of braille, that instruction in braille or the use of braille is not appropriate for the student.
 - b) Consider the communication needs of the student, and in the case of a student who is DHH, consider the student's language and communication needs, opportunities for direct communications with peers and professional personnel in the student's language and communication mode, academic level, and full range of needs, including opportunities for direct instruction in the student's language and communication mode. (EC 56341.1)
- 4) Requires an IEP or an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) team, when determining the least restrictive environment (LRE) for a DHH or a deaf-blind student to:
- a) Consider the language needs of the student, including the student's language and communication needs, opportunities for direct communications with peers and professional personnel in the pupil's language and communication mode, academic level, and full range of needs, including opportunities for direct instruction in the student's language and communication mode; and
 - b) Consider reviewing placements and services available to the student, including those provided by a school district, a county office of education (COE), a regional program, a nonpublic, nonsectarian school or agency (NPS or NPA) certified by the state, and the California School for the Deaf. (EC 56000.5)

FISCAL EFFECT: According to the Senate Appropriations Committee, pursuant to Senate Rule 28.8, negligible state costs.

COMMENTS:

Need for the bill. The author states, "My district proudly hosts the California School for the Deaf in Riverside. In alignment with Senate Bill 1381, we are committed to ensuring that parents or guardians of students who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, visually impaired, or deaf blind receive comprehensive notification regarding the option for their child to attend a state special school. While interdistrict transfers may sometimes be met with reservations, it is essential that we consider the individual needs of each child and prioritize their best interests.

The California School for the Deaf Riverside (CSDR) provides specialized resources, tools, and expertise designed to support the unique needs of deaf students. We have seen firsthand how students in such dedicated environments can achieve not only academic success but also personal growth, with some even reaching remarkable milestones such as winning CIF championships.

This is the motivation behind my introduction of this bill: to make sure families are informed about available opportunities and can access the most fitting educational environments for their children. By expanding access to these specialized schools, we are not diminishing the resources of local districts; rather, we are fostering a collaborative environment where all can thrive. This alignment allows districts to utilize their resources more effectively while placing students in settings that cater specifically to their needs. Ultimately, our shared goal is to do what is right for our students. We all understand that education is a critical pathway to social mobility, and it is our duty to advocate for equitable access for every child.”

Existing law requires IEP and IFSP teams to consider reviewing the full continuum of placements with parents, including the State Special Schools. Federal regulations, through the IDEA (34 C.F.R. 300.115), require each public agency to ensure that a continuum of alternative placements is available to meet the needs of children with disabilities for special education and related services, including:

- a) Instruction in regular classes;
- b) Special classes;
- c) Special schools;
- d) Home instruction: and
- e) Instruction in hospitals and institutions.

Existing state law, enacted through AB 1938 (Gallagher), Chapter 903, Statutes of 2024, requires IFSP and IEP teams to consider reviewing the full continuum of placements and services available to a DHH or deaf-blind student, as well as their language needs, when determining LRE for the student. This continuum includes placements at the SSS.

Existing law also requires IFSP and IEP teams to consider the pupil’s language and communication needs, opportunities for direct communication with peers and professional personnel in the pupil’s language and communication mode, academic level, and full range of needs when determining the appropriate educational placement for a student. Existing federal guidance, which states that the placement decision for a pupil who is DHH, or deaf-blind, must be made only after the pupil’s IFSP or IEP has been developed that addresses the full range of the pupil’s needs.

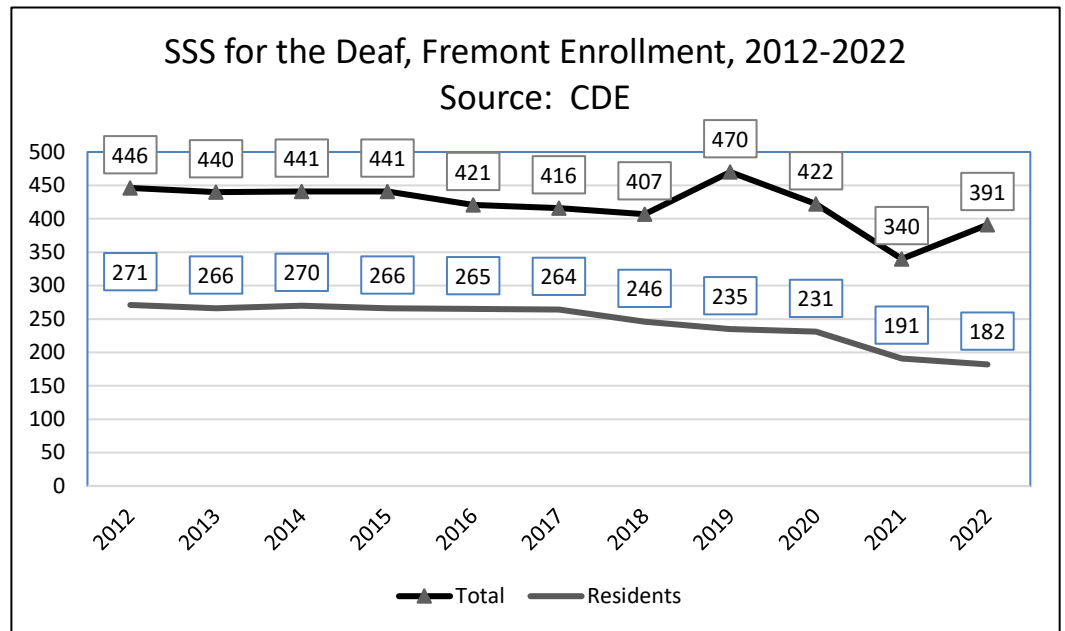
The Committee may wish to consider that the requirements of this bill to provide information about one placement option should be consistent with LEAs’ responsibilities to ensure that IEP teams consider the full continuum of placements available to a DHH student. ***Staff recommends that the bill be amended*** to require that the information state that this option is one of the placements available to the pupil and that the parent or guardian may request more information about placement options pursuant to paragraph (2) of subdivision (b) of section 56040.6.

The State Special Schools for the Deaf and the Blind. California operates three State Special Schools: the California School for the Deaf, Fremont, the California School for the Deaf, Riverside, and the California School for the Blind (also located in Fremont). The CDE also operates three Diagnostic Centers, located in Fremont, Fresno, and Los Angeles. The SSS and

Diagnostic Centers are administered through the CDE and are funded by an appropriation in the annual Budget Act.

The School for the Deaf, Fremont, was established in San Francisco in 1860, and the School for the Deaf, Riverside, was founded by legislation in 1946 (opening in 1953). The California School for the Deaf, Fremont, moved to Berkeley in 1869 and to Fremont in 1980.

In 2022, these schools provided instructional programs to over 900 deaf students in California. In addition, both schools serve as resources to educational and community service agencies. Students are enrolled in either a day school or a residential program, depending upon their individual needs and their residences.

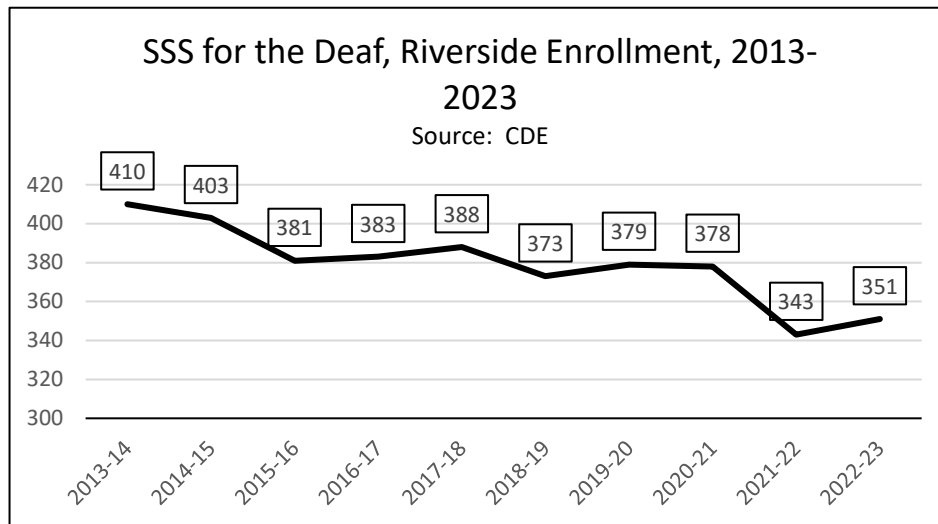


According to the Legislative Analyst’s Office (LAO), as of 2016 about 60% of students at the SSS live on campus throughout the week but return home during weekends and school holidays. The remaining 40% of students live nearby and return home after school each day. The schools use the state curriculum frameworks and adopted or standards-aligned instructional materials as the basis of instruction. Students are referred through their LEAs.

Beyond the academic and vocational/career education programs, both schools offer comprehensive support services and extracurricular activities. Outreach and technical assistance are provided to parents, LEAs, consumers, and the business and professional communities. The Schools for the Deaf operate a resource center that serves parents and community members who wish to learn more about deafness, infant/preschool programs, comprehensive school activities, and enrollment procedures.

The California School for the Blind was founded in San Francisco in 1860 and moved to Berkeley and then to its current location in Fremont. Originally part of the same institution as the School for the Deaf, it became a separate school through legislation in 1922.

The School for the Blind provides educational programs for approximately 100 blind, visually impaired, and deaf-blind students in both residential and day school programs. Students range from five through twenty-two years of age. Preparation for adult life in the home community is the long-term goal for each student. The School for the Blind also provides LEAs with a variety of staff development programs to assist with local efforts in the areas of assistive technology and instruction for blind students.



According to the CDE, the enrollment (resident and non-resident) of the three schools as of the 2022-23 school year has generally declined at each of the programs. Like LEAs, the SSS experienced enrollment declines during the school disruptions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the 2022-23 school year, enrollment at the three SSS was as follows:

- School for the Deaf, Fremont: 391 students
- School for the Deaf, Riverside: 351 students
- School for the Blind: 64 students

The Deaf Children's Bill of Rights. This bill requires LEAs to provide parents and guardians of students who are DHH, blind, visually impaired, or deaf-blind with information about SSS through annual parent notifications and during the IEP process. Current law requires IFSP and IEP teams to review the full continuum of placements and services available to a DHH or deaf-blind student, as well as their language needs, when determining the LRE for the student. This continuum includes placements at the SSS.

AB 1836 (Eastin), Chapter 1126, Statutes of 1994, established the Deaf Children's Bill of Rights. This measure codified a set of legislative findings and declarations regarding the education of deaf children, including the need for placement in settings that ensure access to communication.

With regard to the determination of the LRE for DHH children, the CDE states, "the Deaf Child's Bill of Rights plays a key role when an IFSP or an IEP team convenes to consider the needs of Deaf and hard-of-hearing children. This bill stipulates that when the IFSP or IEP team is developing goals and objectives for a Deaf or hard of hearing child, it must consider several factors." The CDE lists as examples of these factors:

- Does the student have a sufficient number of schoolmates who are similar in age, language, and learning ability?
- Are the teachers and other professionals who work with the child skilled in the child's language and way of communicating?

- Are the critical elements of the educational program (i.e., academic instruction, school services, and extracurricular activities) available in the child’s language and way of communicating?

Language deprivation among DHH students in California. Historically, many DHH students have struggled academically because of their limited exposure to language early in life. This lack of access to language is sometimes called “language deprivation.”

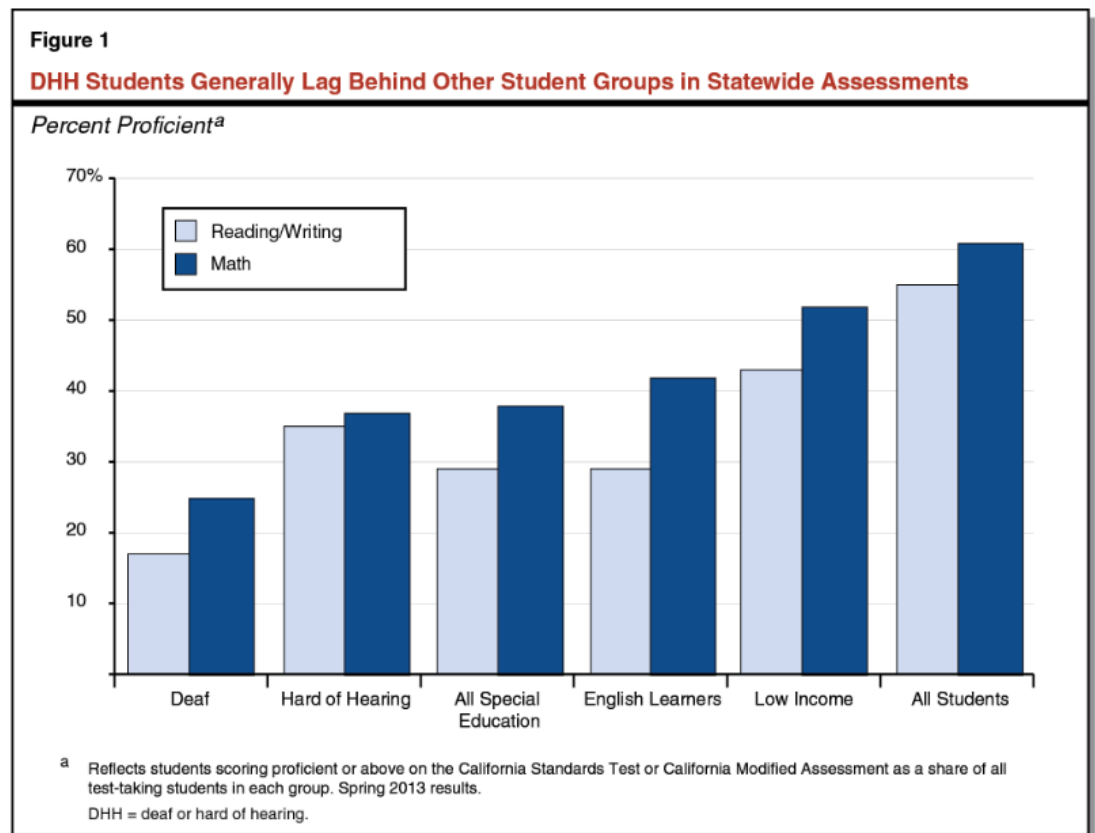
The LAO notes that “young children develop important cognitive skills by listening and responding to the language that surrounds them every day. As DHH children cannot listen and respond to spoken language as early as their hearing peers, they often develop early language delays that hinder future academic progress. These delays tend to be more pronounced in DHH children born to hearing parents, as hearing parents tend to be less familiar with modes of communication that help DHH children develop in their early years. About 90% of DHH children are born to hearing parents.”

However, research has demonstrated that children who are deaf are identified and enrolled in appropriate Early Start services by six months of age can develop language and cognitive skills commensurate with their non-deaf peers.

The largest data set representing the language development of DHH students on standardized tests comes from a longitudinal study using the Stanford Achievement Test.

This research began in 1969 and ran for over thirty years. It measured normative performance of DHH students ages 8 to 18 years old on reading comprehension tests, and found that, between 1974 and 2003, median performance never exceeded the fourth-grade equivalent for any age cohort. It also noted persistent problems in designing a valid and reliable way to measure the academic performance of DHH students.

As shown in the table above, data obtained by the LAO through a request to the CDE indicate that, in the 2012-13 academic year:



- DHH students performed relatively poorly on statewide assessments, with fewer than 35% scoring at or above grade level on reading/writing and mathematics; and
- Among DHH students, deaf students performed worse than those who are hard of hearing, particularly on assessments of reading/writing; and DHH students also generally performed worse on statewide assessments than other groups of students, including students from low-income families, English learners, and other students with disabilities.

The Committee may wish to consider that outcome data disaggregated by disability is not published by the CDE, and that more recent data, which would reflect scores on the current summative assessments of ELA and mathematics and the accommodations those assessments offer, is not publicly available.

Data from the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP), which assesses children ages 0-3 years old, was reported pursuant to SB 210 (Galgiani), Chapter 652, Statutes of 2015. These data show, for 2018:

- 74.7 % of children who are deaf were at age expectation compared to the sample of same-age children; and
- 92.1% of children who are hard of hearing were at age expectation compared to a sample of same-age children.

Arguments in support. State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond writes, “California’s State Special Schools provide unique and highly specialized learning environments designed to meet the needs of students with sensory disabilities.

However, families and students are not always consistently informed about these schools as potential placement options during the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process. Ensuring that families receive clear and timely information about all appropriate educational options is essential to meaningful participation in special education decision-making.

SB 1381 addresses this need by requiring that, when developing or revising an IEP for a pupil who is deaf, hard of hearing, blind, visually impaired, or deaf-blind, the IEP team can provide the pupil’s educational rights holder with information about the California School for the Deaf or the California School for the Blind. The bill also requires that parents and guardians receive notification that eligible pupils may attend the California School for the Deaf or the California School for the Blind. To support consistent implementation statewide, the bill directs the California Department of Education to provide informational materials to local educational agencies for distribution to families.”

Related legislation. AB 784 (Hoover), Chapter 44, Statutes of 2025, states that nothing in the existing definitions of special education and related services shall be construed to prohibit an IEP from including specialized DHH related services as the only service.

AB 1938 (Gallagher), Chapter 903, Statutes of 2024, requires LEAs, when implementing inclusion and universal design for learning (UDL) initiatives and when developing specified plans for students who are DHH or deaf-blind, to consider specified law and guidance related to

these students, and requires the CDE to communicate this information to LEAs and other entities, as specified.

AB 1051 (Cervantes) of the 2023-24 Session would have required, commencing with the 2024-25 fiscal year, contingent on an appropriation, that the amount of funding apportioned to the State Special Schools for the Deaf and the Blind and the Diagnostic Centers be annually adjusted by a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA), and would have required the Superintendent of Public Instruction to calculate this COLA. This bill was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

AB 2541 (Quirk Silva) of the 2021-22 Session would have added funding to the Special Education Early Intervention Preschool Grant for the purpose of school districts contracting with the State Special Schools for the Deaf and nonpublic schools or nonpublic agencies for specified early language intervention services for children who are DHH, ages 0-5. This bill was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

SB 210 (Galgiani), Chapter 652, Statutes of 2015, requires the CDE to develop a parent resource and select existing educator tools for measuring the language and literacy development of DHH children age 0-5 years, and to report annually on the language and literacy outcomes of these children.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tony Thurmond

Opposition

None on file

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