

## Alaska State School for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing 06-07 Budget Session Information

### 1. Program description

ASSDHH provides an educational option for deaf and hard of hearing students from across Alaska- early childhood through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, which fosters and supports the development of both American Sign Language and English. This gives students the tools necessary to achieve their own personal, academic, social, and vocational goals and by doing so, making significant contributions to society in general and to the Deaf community in particular.

The service is centralized in Anchorage and serves the state as a resource for deaf education. The school offers comprehensive academic instruction from preschool through high school. Some students are in self-contained classrooms and others are integrated into regular classrooms with part or full time educational interpreters, assistants, and /or Typewell services. Interpreters are also available for extracurricular activities to promote student acquisition of social skills and involvement in school life. A wide variety of special and regular education classes supplement the core classes. Students receive services at Russian Jack Elementary, Hanshew Middle School, East High, and KCC/Alternative Career Education. A separate state contract provides the residential component for students who come from outside of Anchorage to attend ASSDHH.

### 2. Class size information

	Total student count	Teachers	Paras	Interpreter
Russian Jack Elem.	27.25	6	10	1
Hanshew Middle Sch.	5.00	1	1	2
East High School	18.00	4	1	4
Altern. Home setting	1.00		1	
ACE	1.00		1	
ACT	2.00			1

There are also 2 speech teachers at ASSDHH (.70 & 1.0 FTE)

### 3. Department Trends and Challenges

#### Staffing Concerns:

Deafness is not only a low-incidence disability but a challenging one in that finding highly qualified professionals trained in the area of Deaf education and/or those that are trained in area of signed communication does not come easily regardless how hard we actively recruit.

The estimated cost for replacement of audiological technology at Russian Jack elementary, Hanshew middle school, and East high school as well as projected yearly maintenance costs is shown:

RJ Elementary	05-06	\$45,905	06-07	\$4,785
Hanshew M.S.	05-06	\$ 7,005	06-07	\$4,820
East H.S.	05-06	\$19,575	06-07	\$2,335

## **RELATED SERVICES PROGRAMS**

**School Psychology**  
**Speech-Language Services**  
**Occupational & Physical Therapy**  
**Adapted Physical Education**  
**Blind & Visually Impaired Services**  
**Audiology & Hard of Hearing Services**  
**Assistive Technology**

**Special Education Records**  
**Special Education Staff Development**  
**Special Education Technology Support**

### **Leadership Team Members**

Diane Poage, Director  
Cindy Higgins, Supervisor  
Joan Bohmann, Coordinator

#### *What is a 'Related Service?'*

Related services means any supportive services that are required to assist a child with disabilities to benefit from *special education*. If a child does not need special education there can be no related services provided under an IEP. Some related services, such as speech therapy or adapted PE, might qualify by itself as special education under the certification of Speech Impaired or Other Health Impaired.

## ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

### **Program Description:**

Assistive technology is provided to students ages 3-21 who require such devices to benefit from their special education programs. AT specialists collaborate with school teams to conduct assessments to determine if a student requires assistive technology. Extensive training and hands-on instructional support is offered on a wide variety of devices, including voice output, adaptive written output, adaptive reading, adaptive computer access and environmental access. Today, many of our most challenging students can live independently or semi-independently as adults, due in part to the advances in assistive technology.

For the past 5 summers 8- 15 students who use advanced voice output devices attend a specialized AT classroom for intensive skill development. This classroom is in high-demand by parents because students demonstrate significant increases in academic areas, social skills and independence.

### **Class Size/ PTR:**

- Staffing includes: 2.5 AT Specialists (certified), 1 Instructional Associate (classified)
- During 04-05, 75 assistive technology assessments were conducted.
- 35 nonverbal students require advanced dynamic screen voice output devices for communication and access to the curriculum.
- 100 students require low- and high-tech devices for written expression.

### **Program Trends and Challenges:**

- Increasing numbers of students require assistive technology. In the past 4 years, the number of students requiring assistive technology for communication has risen by approximately 14% (5 devices to 35 devices currently). Concurrently, the number of students requiring devices to support written expression, adaptive reading, adaptive computer access and environmental access has risen dramatically. This trend is expected to continue based on the increasing numbers of severely impaired students with complex learning and adaptive needs.
- With increasing numbers of students using assistive technology, there is a critical need for special and regular educators to receive the necessary training and subsequently the time to implement and support this technology. This presents a logistical challenge for school teams and AT specialists; as the devices are sophisticated and require additional time to learn, program and maintain.
- Devices and equipment are expensive to purchase and maintain. A DynaMyte voice output device costs about \$7500 to purchase and up to \$1000 per year for software updates and repairs. Each year, a greater percent of the budget is spent on required student-specific AT equipment.
- As the District adopts new computer platforms (OS X, for instance), it becomes increasingly difficult for the AT department to support existing AT equipment and software that is incompatible.
- Assistive Technology is a specialized field. Currently, the ASD AT program consists of 1 Speech Pathologist and 1.5 Occupational Therapists who have received advanced training in assistive technology. There is an increased need for AT specialists and a shortage of professionals willing and able to fill these positions.

## Audiology & Hard of Hearing

### Program Description

Licensed audiologists and certified hard of hearing teachers provide assessment and treatment of students ages 3-21 who are hearing impaired. Audiologists conduct hearing testing, assist families with the purchase of proper hearing devices, repair and maintain equipment and provide direct student instruction. HOH teachers complete assessments and provide direct instruction for auditory/oral skill habilitation to ensure that students have access to the curriculum.

### Student/ Program Data

- Staffing: 3 Audiologists, 3.5 HOH teachers, 1 TA, 1 program secretary (a school psychologist assists as needed with assessment and counseling for HOH students)
- Total students served (10-27-05): 258 (53 HOH, 205 Audiology)
- 563 regular and special education students received full audiological testing in 04-05
- 73 classrooms district-wide are equipped with sound-field systems for specified students.

### Trends and Challenges:

- Young, deaf/HOH children are now able to access cochlear implant surgery. Increasing numbers of infants and young children are being implanted and subsequently remaining in state--with their families--for school. This is creating an immediate need for an educational setting to address the habilitation needs of these newly implanted students. The HOH program opened an oral/auditory classroom (as opposed to a 'signing' classroom) at Russian Jack this fall to serve 6 HOH/ cochlear implant preschool students. The department anticipates at least 3 new CI students transitioning from the Program for Infants and Children next year, plus any students who arrive from out-of-state/ military. **Research demonstrates that CI children who receive early, appropriate intervention perform at levels commensurate with their hearing peers by the third grade.**
- It is difficult to recruit qualified staff who are trained to provide oral/auditory habilitation. Existing staff must travel out-of-state to access costly training in this area.

### Facilities Issues:

- As the population of students with cochlear implants grows, we will need to find appropriate classroom space in schools for these students and the itinerant staff that accompany the program.

## **Blind and Visually Impaired Program**

### **Program Description:**

BVI teachers provide itinerant services to students ages 3-21 who are totally blind, partial sighted or deaf-blind. Instruction is provided in visual skills, orientation & mobility, self-help, activities of daily living, Braille reading and writing, pre-vocational training and personal management. BVI teachers work collaboratively with school-based teams to address the student's needs across all aspects of the school day. The department maintains a Braille library containing 2500 books and collaborates with the disability center at UAA to assist with materials preparation for low-vision students.

### **Student/ Program Data:**

- Staffing: 5 BVI teachers (2 open), 1 Braillest (1 open), 3 TA
- Total students served: 72 (9 students require intensive Braille instruction, represents an increase of 4 additional students from 04-5)
- Caseloads vary based on individual student needs/ IEP services and the skills/ qualifications of the teacher. Each teacher has a 'specialty' area; some areas of BVI instruction require a specialized certificate (O&M, Braille, Deaf/Blind).

### **Trends and Challenges:**

- Recruitment of qualified personnel continues to be the primary challenge. Teachers must travel out-of-state to access teacher preparation programs. Existing staff must travel out-of-state for continuing education opportunities. It is difficult to sponsor time-intensive graduate interns when the department is chronically under-staffed. The department teaches beginning and intermediate Braille classes for interested teachers and teaching assistants in hopes of attracting professionals to this field.
- Assistive technology for the visually impaired population continues to explode, requiring specialized training for staff and additional funding for the purchase of highly specialized equipment.
- The number of students requiring intensive Braille instruction increases each year.

## OT/ PT/ APE

### Program Description:

Licensed occupational and physical therapists and licensed assistants support special education students to promote hand-function, oral-motor function, accessibility, mobility and independence in the school environment for children ages 3- 21. Adapted PE teachers support special education students ages 5-21 who require modified or adapted teaching techniques, curriculum or equipment in order to achieve the goal of lifetime physical fitness. These professionals are highly itinerant, traveling between numerous locations throughout the week.

### Student/ Program Data:

- Staffing: 44 FTE OT/ PT/APE (1.5 open for OT), 2 physical therapy assistants, 2 occupational therapy assistants, 2 TA (non-licensed)
- Total students served (10-27-05): 1397 (742 OT, 245 PT, 410 APE)  
(Represents an increase of nearly 300 students since 2000)
- Average caseload for full-time OT/PT = 24 students across 2-12 locations  
APE = 43 students across 2- 16 locations

### Program Trends and Challenges:

- Our ability to fill positions with certified, licensed therapists is decreasing, while the numbers of students requiring services is increasing. Retention and recruitment of qualified staff is an ongoing challenge. It is difficult for the public school system to compete with the private sector to attract licensed therapists. Currently, there are no university programs in the state of Alaska for OT/PT or APE. Similar to speech pathologists, OTs and PTs must accrue professional Continuing Education Units in their area of endorsement, which are not available through our university system.
- With more students and staff, there is an increased need for equipment and materials funding. The current budget available for the purchase of instructional materials, such as oral motor tools, splints and other consumables necessary for therapy is insufficient.
- The current professional emphasis includes assisting regular and special education teachers to effectively use a variety of pre-referral intervention strategies via staff trainings, in-class presentations and teacher consultation.
- The trend toward increasing numbers of severely impaired students (Autism, Multiple Disabilities, Other Health Impaired) requiring specialized equipment and integrated programming is expected to continue and grow.
- The integrated therapy approach is considered best practice for students with complex learning and adaptive needs. This model has been highly successful in schools where the team members remain stable and there is adequate training and collaboration time. In schools with high special education staff turnover, the model has been less effective. It is difficult to recruit and retain special education staff for the intensive needs classrooms and equally difficult to provide time for teams with numerous itinerant staff members to collaborate.

### Facilities Issues:

As this high-need student population increases, there is a commensurate increase in the need for appropriate therapy space and adequate space for equipment in the schools. The focus of OT, PT and APE is on motor skill development. Dedicated, adequate, safe space is crucial for appropriate student programming. When new special education classrooms open, it is important

to consider the related services space needs in order to support students (e.g. additional student equipment, therapy space, etc.).

## SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY

### **Program Description:**

School psychology services (assessment, behavior and academic interventions, consultation, crisis response and counseling) are provided to students age 3-21 in all ASD schools. In addition, school psychologists are required to assess students in local private schools, residential treatment programs and home schools when these students are referred to special education. School psychologists collaborate with ASD staff and parents to meet the academic, social and emotional needs of students.

Our program has 44 school psychologists, three behavior strategists (one position is open), 2 psychology technicians, one bilingual consultant and two school psychology interns. Each Behavior Strategist provides support at three elementary schools to students with behavioral issues. They work under the direction of the school psychologist.

The psychology technicians assist 17 school psychologists who serve secondary schools. The technicians administer achievement tests to students who require reevaluations for special education. Our bilingual consultant assisted with the referral process and assessment for 70 English Language Learners during the 2004-2005 school year.

### **Student/Program Data**

- The school psychology department evaluated 3108 students during the 2004-2005 school year. Of these, 1,948 were reevaluations and 1,160 were initial evaluations for special education.
- We have three voluntary crisis response teams. Many times school personnel can handle a death or significant loss without calling on the teams. The teams were called upon for eleven events during the 2004-2005 school year.
- School psychologists reported conducting 176 suicide assessments during the 2004-2005 school year.
- As of October 27, 2005 195 students were receiving school psychology services as part of their IEP.
- Average caseload for full-time psychologist in ASD:  
Elementary = 1:1000 students  
Middle School = 1: 1300 students  
High School = 1:1600 students  
(The NASP standard is 1:1000 students)

### **Department Trends & Challenges**

- Discussion and training is centered on a Response to Intervention model for special education identification as encouraged with the reauthorization of special education law.
- Implementation of IDEA has increased our focus on improving our methods for monitoring student progress in response to interventions. We have also increased our focus on improving our student assistance teams.
- Increasing numbers of English language learners require more sophisticated methods of identifying appropriate academic and behavioral interventions as well as appropriate instruments for evaluating the need for special education. Finding interpreters in order to communicate with parents who do not speak English is an increasing challenge.
- Increasing numbers of high-needs students who require more complex evaluations.

- Assessment instruments are continually being revised and are quite expensive to purchase. Consumable items (test protocols) are also more costly. The current budget does not support revised test adoptions.
- Response to emotional crises within the schools remains a challenge in part because team members must leave their assigned schools resulting in work left undone. This work requires high levels of emotional and mental energy on part of the responders. School personnel highly valued this entirely voluntary support.

### **Facility issues**

School psychologist share space in most schools. Other itinerant personnel use the psychology office on days the school psychologist is assigned elsewhere. When the school psychologist needs to provide additional time to his/her school there is not a space in which to work. Other times, the school psychologist shares the same space on the same days/times as other professionals. A few school psychologists do not have access to a workable space for the full day. One does not have telephone or internet access in her office. Some psychologists work in supply rooms/closets or converted darkrooms.

Our new location at Boniface does not allow for confidential or private telephone calls to parents. Two of our itinerant cubes do not have power.

## SPEECH-LANGUAGE

### Program Description:

Speech pathologists and speech-language implementers (working under the supervision of a certified Speech Pathologist) provide assessment and treatment of communication disorders of language, voice, stuttering and articulation for students ages 3-21 district-wide, including students attending private and charter schools. Service delivery models vary and may include a combination of direct therapy, small group intervention, classroom lessons and consultation. Early, appropriate speech-language intervention provides the foundational skills required for young disabled students to learn to read and write. The program emphasis on early intervention and evidence-based language and literacy intervention directly supports the reading goals established by the District.

A growing number of students require augmentative and alternative communication systems. Therapists design and implement functional communication programs that enable students with complex communication needs to benefit from instruction and to participate in school functions.

### Student/ Program Data:

- Staffing: 62 FTE speech pathologists (5 open), 11 speech implementers (classified), 24 speech TA
- Total students served (10-27-05): 2893  
389 Preschool; 2171 Elementary; 333 Secondary
- Average caseload for full-time SLP= 45-50 students (consistent with national average)
- In ASD, 6-8% of the total student population receives speech-language services (consistent with American Speech & Hearing Association guidelines)

### Program Trends and Challenges:

- Retention and recruitment of qualified staff is an ongoing challenge that worsens each year. We continue to explore options for providing quality intervention to students using alternative service delivery models. The department has implemented a 'supervision model' to assist with the delivery of required IEP services. In this model, a certified speech pathologist supervises several speech implementers who deliver IEP services. Many speech pathologists do not support this model and are unwilling to supervise non-certified providers.
- Our ability to fill positions with certified therapists is decreasing while the number of school sites is increasing. In addition to the regular k-12 schools, services must be provided to students in charter schools, special schools, private schools, alternative schools, home-bound and community special education preschool sites (homes, daycare/childcare sites, Headstart). The department must rely on contracted services with private providers, numerous part-time employees and the use of retiree/rehires, which are limited resources. For sites that remain uncovered, the department is obligated to arrange compensatory IEP services for students, generally provided by ASD SLPs working after school hours, on Saturdays or during the summer.
- The administrative aspects of managing this department is exceptionally challenging.
- ASHA (American Speech and Hearing Association) is joining with NASP (National Association of School Psychologists) to support the trend promoted by IDEA toward assisting regular educators to effectively use a variety of pre-referral intervention strategies. ASD speech therapists are increasing their support to classroom staff via in-service trainings, classroom lessons and consultation services to the regular education teacher.
- The trend toward increasing numbers of severely impaired/ nonverbal students requiring assistive technology and alternative communication systems is expected to continue. This presents a need for advanced training for SLPs and special education classroom teachers with the associated challenges of time and funding.
- The trend toward increasing numbers of bi-lingual and ELL students is expected to continue and grow, presenting a challenge for school teams to work with the Bilingual Department to appropriately identify, assess and serve ELL students with suspected disabilities.
- Certified speech pathologists must accrue Continuing Education Units in their area of endorsement. The current UAA graduate program is unable to accommodate this need.

To meet this requirement, the department must sponsor ASHA-accredited CEU activities or provide opportunities for staff to travel out-of-state.

- Assessment instruments are continually being revised and are expensive to purchase. The cost of consumable test protocols increases annually. The current budget does not support revised test adoptions.

**Facility Issues:**

Lack of professional space is a significant staff retention issue. Access to appropriate therapy space varies from school to school. Some staff must 'make-do' with space in a storage or book room. In some instances, the therapist does not have a therapy space and must seek an available spot each day. New programs are added to schools without consideration for the needs of the students or the itinerant staff required to support the program.