

Cowley County Special Services Cooperative

Member Districts:

USD 470 Arkansas City, USD 465 Winfield,
USD 285 Cedar Vale, USD 462 Central Burden,
USD 471 Dexter, USD 463 Udall

March 7, 2016

**Senate Committee on Education
Opposition to Senate Bill 444
Creating a Language Assessment Program for Students
Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing
Written by Ronald L. Sarnacki, Ph.D.
Director of Special Education**

Our Cooperative provides services for 24 students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Each of these students is unique in his/her own way, including the means in which they communicate with others. Although school district personnel are neutral on the concept of a establishing a language assessment program for students who are deaf or hard of hearing, we are opposed to Senate Bill 444 as written for the following reasons:

1. This bill endorses a single methodology, American Sign Language (ASL), to assess all deaf or hard of hearing children. Our students, as mentioned above, communicate in a variety of ways. ASL is only one of these.
2. Deaf or hard of hearing students may use sign ASL, CASE, SEE , Fingerspell, and Pidgin Sign English (PSE), as well as the oral approach.
3. Special education law requires that the IFSP or IEP team consider the communication needs of each exceptional child. A single methodology cannot accurately assess all individuals diagnosed within the hearing impaired spectrum. Therefore, IFSP and IEP teams are required to consider multiple methods of communication for deaf or hard of hearing students.
4. This bill takes away the right of the parent to have input on the decision for their child's method of communication.
5. The bill appears to create an unfunded mandate for specialized assessment. This could potentially require districts to fund additional training and hire additional staff to meet any requirements set out by the bill.

Creating a language assessment using a single methodology for students who are deaf or hard of hearing is wrong and actually violates federal law. In addition, the bill as written creates an unfunded mandate to assess the language needs of deaf or hard of hearing students. Please carefully consider this information as you work this bill.