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Kansas Wrote the Country's First Deaf Language Milestones Law. Its Results Are Hard to Find.

Heather Grizzle · November 24, 2026

Kansas requires a yearly language assessment for every deaf child under nine. The Index found no published 2024-25 result. 5 of 286 districts publish a deaf program.

Contents

1. An entitlement written in plain words
2. A school between superintendents
3. What the school costs
4. The language law and its missing numbers
5. Where deaf education actually happens
6. The school no one names
7. The count and its edges
8. Money for districts, and for interpreters
9. What changed between two readings
10. The chair at the top
11. What the earlier version found and this one did not test
12. Questions Kansas is positioned to answer

Every year since July 2018, Kansas law has required something few states require. Each deaf or hard of hearing child under nine must be given a language assessment, in American Sign Language, English or both, so the state can "assess, monitor and track the language developmental milestones" of every deaf child from birth through age eight. Kansas was the first state to pass that kind of law, in 2016, and advocates across the country have pointed to it ever since.

Picture the mother of a deaf seven-year-old in Garden City who hears about the law and wants to know how Kansas's deaf children are doing. She wants the statewide pic-

ture, not her own son's scores. She looks on the state commission's website, the state school's website and the Department of Education's. Version 2.0 of the National Deaf Education Data Index looked too, in November 2026. It did not find the count for the reference year.

She is a composite. The law is real, and so is the rest of what the Index found when it read all 337 of Kansas's public education bodies. Kansas has one of the strongest entitlements in the country for deaf children and one of the earliest language laws. What it publishes about how either works is thin.

IN BRIEF

- Kansas law makes admission to the Kansas State School for the Deaf an entitlement: a resident who cannot benefit from public school because of hearing loss "shall be entitled to admission," with no tuition.
- Since 2018, Kansas has required an annual language assessment for every deaf or hard of hearing child under nine. The Index did not find the 2024-25 results.
- The school spent $16,047,979 in fiscal 2025, including $3.4 million on building work. In November 2026 its home page carried a request for proposals for a superintendent search.
- Of 337 public education bodies read, 16 publish a deaf or hard of hearing program or staff, nine of them thinly. Ten are regional cooperatives, interlocals or service centers. Five of 286 districts publish.
- The federal count found 563 Kansas children with hearing impairment in fall 2024. The national deafblind count found 138 deafblind children served, against 16 in the federal category.

HOW THIS WAS MEASURED

The National Deaf Education Data Index reads what a state and its schools publish about deaf and hard of hearing students. It does not visit classrooms, survey families or rate services. For Kansas, version 2.0 of the state file read 337 units on 11 and 12 November 2026: 286 unified school districts, 23 special education cooperatives, 16 interlocals, 8 education service centers, the two state schools and two state-operated agencies. Statutes, the Legislative Research Department's budget summary and the federal files were read as original documents.

Each unit receives one code. PROGRAM means the unit publishes something specific to deaf and hard of hearing students: a named program, a service, or a named post such as a teacher of the deaf. A PROGRAM row resting on a single staff line carries a weak-evidence flag, and nine of Kansas's 16 do. MENTION means hearing appears only in a general way. NONE FOUND means the pages were read and nothing specific was published. Six units could not be read.

The codes measure publication, not service. In Kansas, the regional cooperative or interlocal often employs the teachers of the deaf, so a district coded NONE FOUND may be fully served. The Index never estimates a missing figure. Before release, the bodies the file names receive notice and ten business days to correct it.

An entitlement written in plain words

Many states describe their school for the deaf as one option on a continuum. Kansas wrote a right. K.S.A. 76-1001b says: "Every resident of the state who is within the age of eligibility for admission, as determined by the state board of education, and who is unable to materially benefit from attendance in the public schools because of hearing loss ... shall be entitled to admission to the Kansas state school for the deaf." Students "may be admitted as day students or as resident students." K.S.A. 76-1006 adds that residents "shall not be charged tuition, fees or for maintenance."

The same section lets the state charge a home district for a "special teacher" a child's plan requires at the school. That is the one statutory money link between a district and the school.

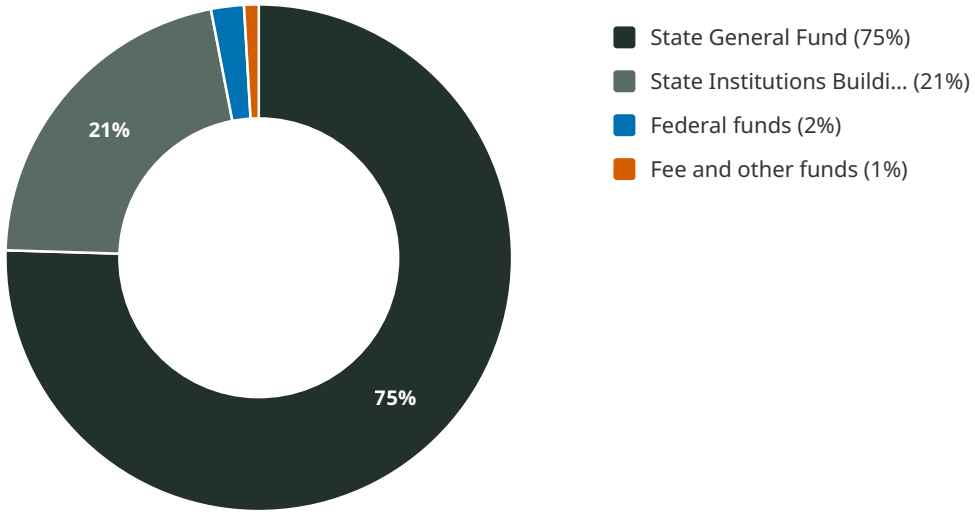
The school itself, in Olathe, is "a state institution under the control and supervision of the state board of education." The State Board is elected, appoints the school's superintendent, and the superintendent "shall serve at the pleasure" of the board. The Legislative Research Department describes it as "an independent state agency" and "an accredited K-12 school campus." Its teachers, by statute, must be paid at least what Olathe Unified School District 233 pays its own.

A school between superintendents

Version 1.0 of the Index, in August 2026, recorded that the succession of the school's superintendent was unresolved. On 11 November 2026, the school's home page carried a notice: "RFP: Executive Search Services for KSD Superintendent." The State Board's minutes were not re-read for v2.0. A state school that is searching for a leader is not unusual. A state school whose leadership question has been open across two reads three months apart is worth watching, particularly with an accreditation report from the national deaf school administrators' association sitting on its home page, which the Index did not open.

What the school costs

The Legislative Research Department's January 2026 summary prints the school's actual spending for fiscal 2025: $16,047,979 from all funds, across 140.65 positions. Of that, $12,111,850 came from the State General Fund and $3,449,606 from the State Institutions Building Fund. By object, salaries were $9.9 million and capital improvements $3.4 million.



Kansas State School for the Deaf, FY2025 actual spending by fund

View data

Category	Dollars
State General Fund	12111850
State Institutions Building Fund	3449606
Federal funds	336530
Fee and other funds	149993

Fee revenue includes "reimbursements from unified school districts (USDs) for para-professionals, tuition from out-of-state students." The general fee fund spent $26,712 in the year. The Index offers no cost per student: the total covers a residential campus, statewide outreach and more than $3 million in construction, and no published enrollment for the year was re-read.

The language law and its missing numbers

The Kansas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, established within the Department for Children and Families, coordinates the Language Assessment Program under K.S.A. 75-5397e. The statute is specific. "The purpose of the program is to assess, monitor and track the language developmental milestones of children who are deaf or hard of hearing from birth through the age of eight." It names two languages: "The recognized languages used in the education of children who are deaf and hard of hearing are English and American sign language." And from 1 July 2018, "an annual language assessment shall be given to each child who is deaf or hard of hearing and who is less than nine years of age."

The school's website hosts the program's page, which describes it as tracking "the ASL and/or English language developmental milestones of each child who is deaf or hard of hearing from birth through age eight in Kansas." The number of children assessed in 2024-25 was not transcribed in the Index's reading, and the Index did not find a published statewide result. That is the first item on the file's list of records requests.

The point is not that Kansas is failing to assess. It may well be assessing every child. The point is that a law written to make deaf children's language visible has, eight years in, not produced a public number a parent or legislator can find. Iowa, which passed its own version later, now publishes an annual count down to the regional agency. Kansas wrote the template and has not published the results.

> An annual language assessment shall be given to each child who is deaf or hard of hearing and who is less than nine years of age.
>
> K.S.A. 75-5397e

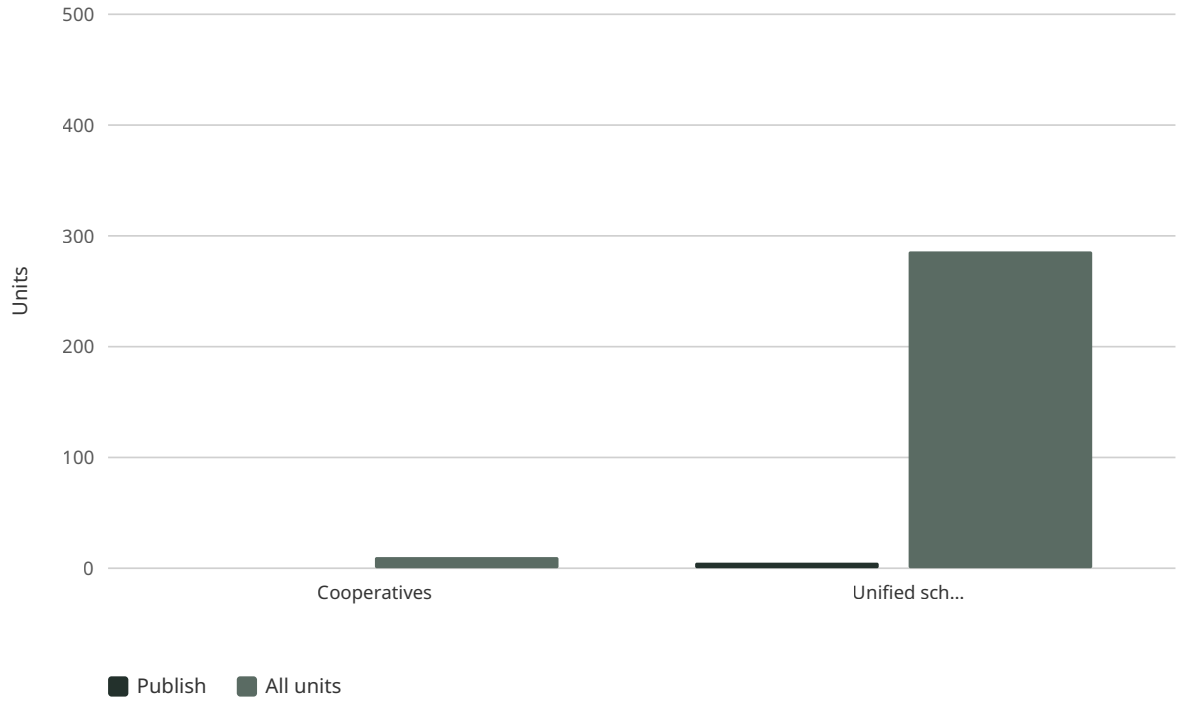
Where deaf education actually happens

Kansas districts share special education through 23 cooperatives, 16 interlocals and 8 education service centers. The Index read those as units of their own, because that is where the capacity sits.

Ten of those 47 regional bodies publish deaf or hard of hearing capacity. Four describe a real service. The Southeast Kansas Education Service Center, known as

Greenbush, runs audiology and low incidence services. The South Central Kansas Special Education Cooperative says "The teacher for the Deaf/Hard of Hearing provides direct, specialized instruction to hard of hearing students." The Central Kansas Cooperative in Education runs an audiology program for several counties. Marion County Special Education says its program "is provided through a consultant for the hearing impaired and services from the Kansas school for the deaf." Six more publish only a position.

Five of 286 districts publish their own. Wichita says it "offers a continuum of supports for students with hearing loss" and names a lead teacher of the deaf and a supervisor of interpreting services. Haysville describes "Hearing Impaired Services" with "Signing Exact English (SEE) interpreters throughout the day," one of the few places in the series where a district names that signing system. Shawnee Mission, Douglass and Garden City rest on thinner evidence.



Kansas units publishing deaf or hard of hearing capacity

View data

Type	Publish	All units
Cooperatives	0	10
Unified school districts	5	286

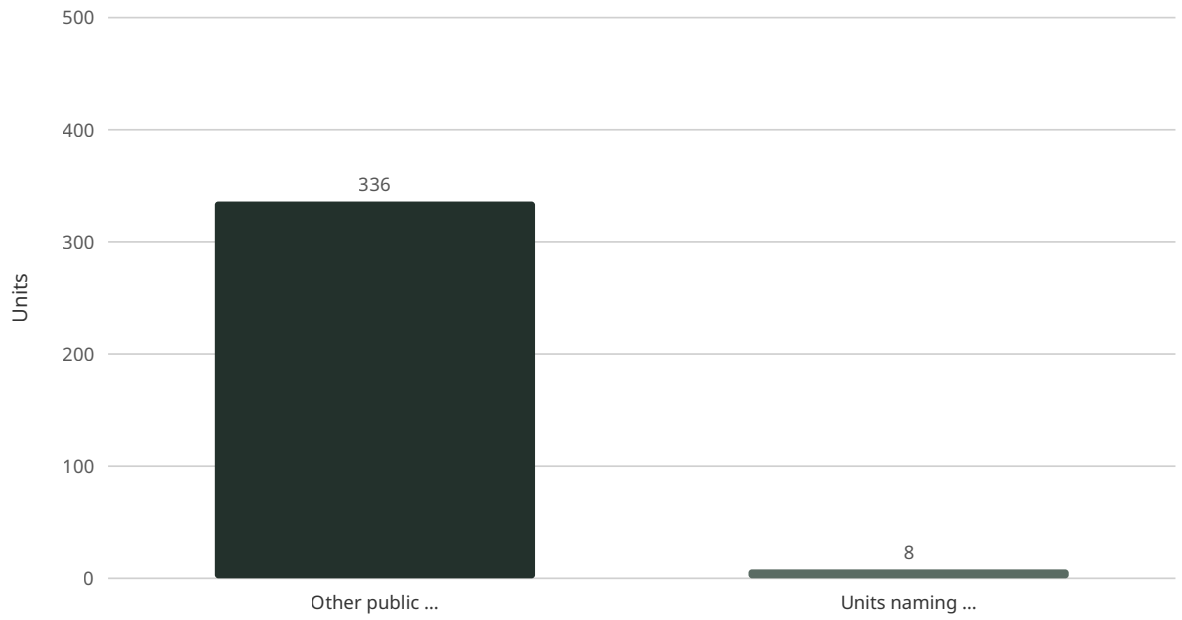
Sixty-seven units mention hearing in passing. Two hundred forty-eight publish nothing. Six could not be read: the Department of Corrections, Galena, Brewster, Southern Cloud, Healy and Copeland. Kansas City's staff roster, which version 1.0 read, could not be found again.

The school no one names

The school describes "a statewide outreach program that serves D/HH students, their families, and their local school districts," extending "not only to students attending KSD's center-based program but also to students enrolled in programs throughout the state." It leases remote microphone hearing equipment to local districts. Its birth-to-

three program, Sound START, aims "To ensure that families of infants and toddlers who are deaf/hard of hearing receive comprehensive, unbiased information and support," and says "We service children regardless of communication mode."

It publishes no list of the districts it serves. And 8 of the 336 other units in Kansas name the school on their own pages. A family in western Kansas whose child is entitled by statute to attend the state school would, in most districts, never see it mentioned.



Who names the Kansas State School for the Deaf

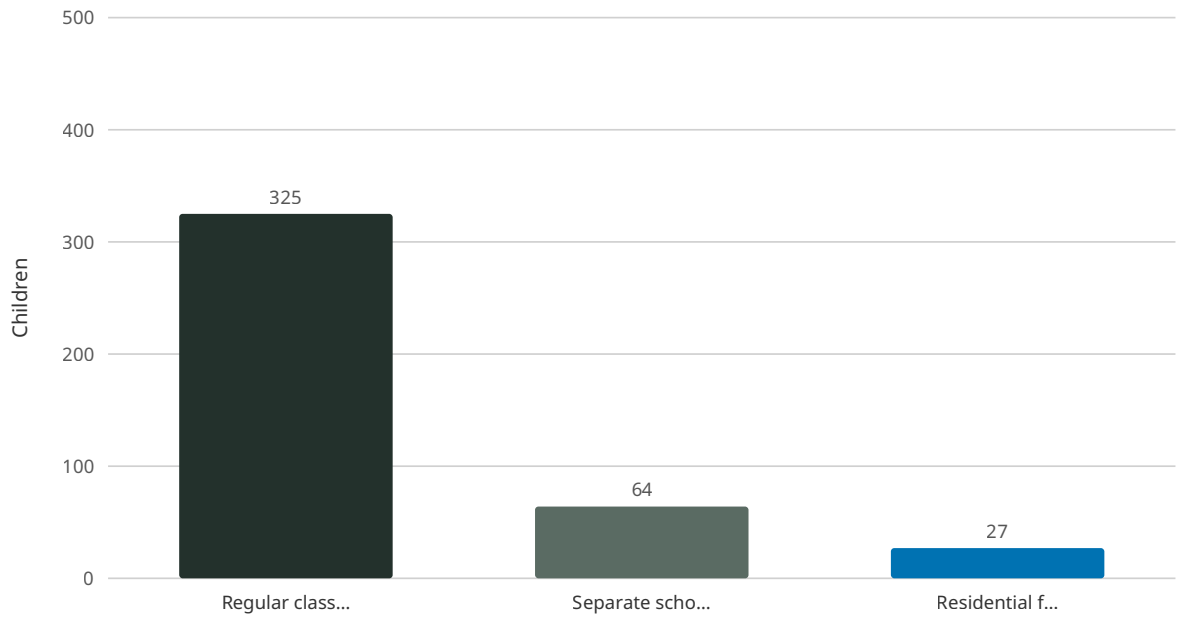
View data

Category	Units
Other public education units	336
Units naming the school	8

The count and its edges

Kansas publishes prevalence percentages by district, according to version 1.0, and no counts by category by district. So the Index's publication measure cannot be computed.

The federal file, which version 2.0 held for the first time, counts 563 Kansas children with hearing impairment in fall 2024: 495 of school age and 68 in early childhood. Of the 495, 325 spent 80 percent or more of the day in a regular class, 64 attended a separate school and 27 a residential facility.



Kansas school-age children with hearing impairment, selected settings, fall 2024

View data

Category	Children
Regular class 80% or more	325
Separate school	64
Residential facility	27

The deafblind gap is wide even by the series' standards. The federal category counts 16 Kansas children with deaf-blindness. The national deafblind count, which counts every child with combined vision and hearing loss, counts 138 served during the year. The state's deafblind project, which version 1.0 placed at the Kansas State School for the Blind, was not re-read.

At birth, Kansas law requires that "Every child born in the state of Kansas, within five days of birth … shall be given a screening examination for detection of hearing loss." Part C early intervention runs from the Department of Health and Environment.

Money for districts, and for interpreters

Special education aid in Kansas reimburses excess cost, with no weight for any disability. K.S.A. 72-3422 multiplies the computed amount by 92 percent and sets a floor of $601,018,818 a year from fiscal 2025. A separate catastrophic aid section covers the most expensive students. Federal special education grants to Kansas were $141.3 million for the year.

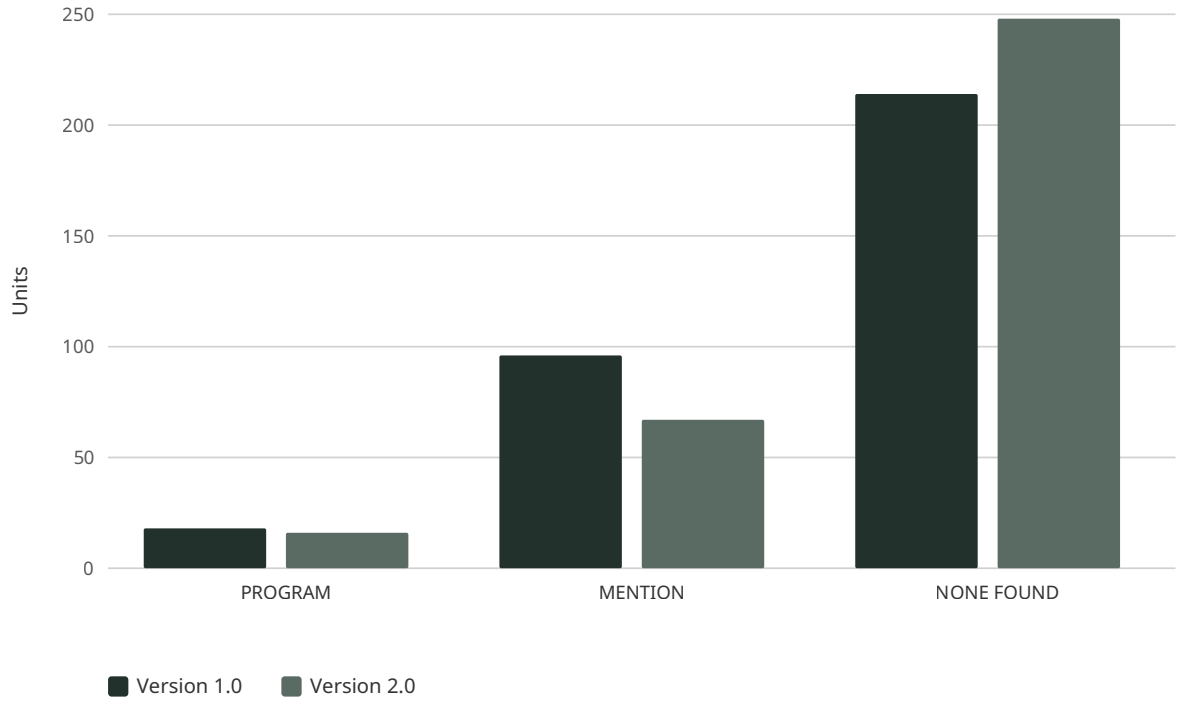
The federal personnel file counts 56.53 full-time interpreters in Kansas schools, 53.98 of them fully certified, and 25.62 audiologists. Version 1.0 recorded the interpreter standard as a commission registration policy rather than a statute or regulation; the Index did not find a school-specific standard on the pages read for v2.0. A state project, the Kansas Teachers of the Deaf Endorsement and Professional Development Project, exists. No count of teachers of the deaf is published.

What changed between two readings

Kansas is one of the states the Index has now read twice, and the comparison shows how fragile a public record can be.

Version 1.0 read 332 units. Version 2.0 read 337. Between the two, the number of units coded PROGRAM fell from 18 to 16, and the number coded MENTION fell from 96 to 67. The number publishing nothing rose from 214 to 248. Some of that movement reflects better reading: v2.0 decided every weak code again, and 9 of its 16 PROGRAM codes still rest on thin evidence. Some of it reflects pages that are simply gone.





Kansas units by code, version 1.0 and version 2.0

View data

Code	Version 1.0	Version 2.0
PROGRAM	18	16
MENTION	96	67
NONE FOUND	214	248

Kansas City is the clearest example. In v1.0 the district's staff roster carried enough to code a program on weak evidence. In v2.0 the roster could not be found again by navigating the site, and the row dropped to a mention on the deep review list. Nothing about the district's services need have changed. A page moved or disappeared, and with it the only public trace.

The Index's interpretation, marked as such. A family looking for help in Kansas is reading the same websites the Index reads, at whatever moment they happen to look. When thirty units stop mentioning hearing between one year and the next, the family

experiences that as less help available, whether or not the services underneath changed.

The chair at the top

The School is a freestanding state agency under the elected State Board of Education, and its superintendent "shall serve at the pleasure of the state board of education." The Index's first reading, in August 2026, found the succession unresolved. On 11 November 2026, the School's home page carried a notice: "RFP: Executive Search Services for KSD Superintendent." The State Board's minutes were not re-read.

For a school whose teachers must be paid at least what Olathe pays its teachers, and whose budget runs through the same board that oversees every district in the state, the superintendent's chair is the one point where the agency's direction is set. It has been open, or in search, for at least three months.

What the earlier version found and this one did not test

Some findings from v1.0 were carried forward without being re-tested, and the file marks each one. Version 1.0 recorded a tax credit scholarship program capped at 10 million dollars, and two bills of 2026 that fall after the reference year. It cited a Legislative Post Audit study of special education costs. It recorded that the School's enrollment printed differently depending on which instrument was read, and that its admission criteria asked for an audiogram but set no hearing threshold. And the School's home page carries a "CEASD Accreditation Report," which was not opened.

None of those is asserted afresh here. They are listed because each one, if confirmed, would add something Kansas does not now publish in one place: the size of the voucher channel, an outside audit of what special education costs, a single enrollment figure for the state school, and an accreditor's account of how the School is doing. Each is a short records request away.

Questions Kansas is positioned to answer

1. How many children were assessed under K.S.A. 75-5397e in 2024-25, and what did the assessments show, in ASL and in English?

2. How many students attend the Kansas State School for the Deaf, day and residential, and how many come from each district?
3. Who will lead the school, and when will the State Board decide?
4. How many deaf and hard of hearing students does each district or cooperative serve?
5. What standard must an educational interpreter in a Kansas classroom meet, and who enforces it?
6. How much did home districts pay the school for special teachers under K.S.A. 76-1006?

Go back to the mother in Garden City. Kansas gave her son two rights that many states never wrote down: a right to attend the state school for free, and a right to have his language tracked every year until he is nine. She can read both in the statute books. What she cannot find is any public sign that either is working. Her district probably does not name the school. The language results are not posted where she can see them. Kansas led the country on paper. It has not yet shown the country, or its own parents, what the paper produced.

The full Kansas file covers all 337 units, each row with its source link, retrieval date and method, and is available under the Index's licensing terms. Corrections are welcome and are published with the next version.

Heather Grizzle-Odland is the founder of Novara Consulting Group and principal investigator of the National Deaf Education Data Index. She is DeafBlind and lives in Minnesota.

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>
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