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Louisiana Just Merged Its Deaf School Out of Its Own Budget Line

Heather Grizzle · November 20, 2026

Louisiana's 2026-27 budget folded its deaf school into a combined line. A 2023 audit found 36.5 percent of staff below the school's own ASL standard.

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A legislative staffer in Baton Rouge is reading the 2026-27 state budget for the Special School District, agency 19-656. In last year's budget she could find the Louisiana School for the Deaf on its own line, program 6562, with its own dollars and its own positions. This year that line is gone. In its place is program 6565, the Louisiana School for the Deaf and Visually Impaired, at about $31 million. The only place the deaf school's own share still appears is one sentence in the budget highlights: $8.49 million and 102 positions, "consolidated" with the blind school and the shared administration.

She is a composite. The sentence is not. Louisiana's enacted budget for fiscal 2026-27 merged its deaf school's program line out of existence. From this year, no state budget instrument isolates what Louisiana spends on its school for deaf children except a highlight that will not be repeated next year.

Version 2.0 of the National Deaf Education Data Index read the state's statutes, its education board's bulletins, three budgets and the websites of all 162 Louisiana school systems and charter sponsors. Louisiana has some of the strongest deaf education law in the series. It is also making its school harder to see.

IN BRIEF

- The Louisiana School for the Deaf in Baton Rouge counted 76 students in October 2025. It is run by the Special School District, a state agency that also runs education programs inside state facilities.
- The 2026-27 enacted budget merged the deaf school's program line with the blind school's and the shared administration's. The deaf school's share now appears only in a highlight sentence: $8.49 million and 102 positions.
- A 2023 state audit found 36.5 percent of the school's staff did not meet the ASL proficiency in their own job descriptions and that the school "lacks a clear ASL/English bilingual implementation plan."
- Louisiana has two live rules for classroom interpreters: the education board certifies at EIPA 3.0, while the Commission for the Deaf requires 4.0 for registration in K-12 settings.
- Of 162 school systems and charter sponsors, 15 publish their own deaf or hard of hearing services. None names the state school as its provider.

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 Louisiana, version 2.0 of the state file read 162 units on two calendar days in October 2026: 64 parish systems, 5 city systems, the Special School District, the Office of Juvenile Justice, 4 state special schools, one other state unit and 86 charter sponsors with local education agency status. The statutes, the education board's bulletins, three budgets and the Department of Education's enrollment and special education 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. A PROGRAM row resting on a single staff line carries a weak-evidence flag. 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. The Index never estimates a missing figure, and where two published figures disagree it records both. Before release, the bodies the file names received notice and ten business days to correct it.

A school inside a special district

Louisiana does not run its school for the deaf as a freestanding agency. Under R.S. 17:1945, the Special School District is "an educational service agency, subject to the limitations of such units which shall include no authority to levy tax." It comprises two kinds of things: the Louisiana Special Schools, which are the deaf school and the school for the visually impaired in Baton Rouge, and the Special School Programs, which are the education programs inside state-operated facilities, available to students "until their twenty-fifth birthday."

In practice that means the deaf school shares its district with education programs at Pinecrest Supports and Services Center, Central Louisiana Supports and Services Center, Renaissance Home for Youth and, in February 2026, Dixon Correctional Institute. Of the district's 261 students that month, 76 attended the deaf school.

The state pays for all of it directly: "The state shall be responsible for funding the costs of special education and related services for students enrolled in the special school district and special schools," says R.S. 17:1947(B). Students' home districts pay nothing. The school's services "shall be available to all eligible students ... regardless of their place of residence within the state."

The strongest board in the series

R.S. 17:1945.1 builds a board that most deaf communities would recognize as theirs. One seat must go to someone who "Demonstrates competency in American Sign Language" and "Possesses expertise in educating students who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind." Another goes to a person representing deaf or hard of hearing people, chosen from nominees put forward by the Louisiana Commission for the Deaf, the Louisiana Association of the Deaf and a third body. The Index has not found a stronger statutory deaf presence on a state school board anywhere in the series.

Louisiana's law also carries a Deaf Child's Bill of Rights, R.S. 17:1960, which requires public schools and "all publicly funded early intervention programs" to provide deaf children "individualized and appropriate early intervention to support the acquisition of solid language bases," to strive to provide deaf adult role models, and to include "a communication plan in the Individualized Education Program." One quirk: the section number that once held the state's LEAD-K language milestones law, R.S. 17:1960.1, now holds a Blind and Visually Impaired Child's Bill of Rights. The milestones law expired in 2019, and its number was reused.

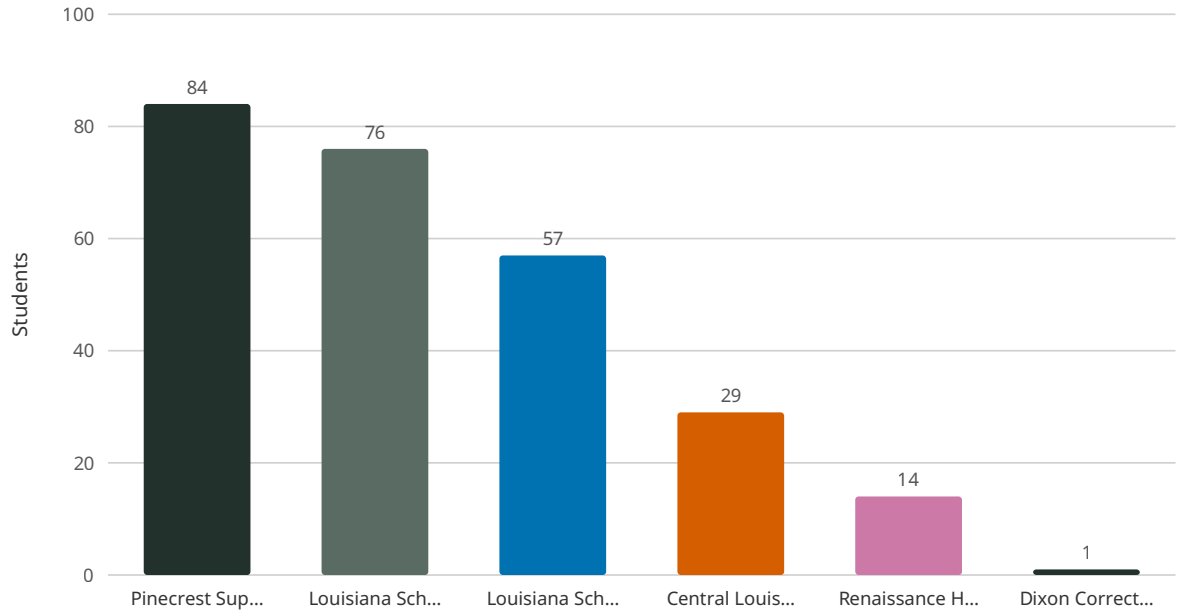
The school on Brightside Drive

The Louisiana School for the Deaf sits at 2888 Brightside Drive in Baton Rouge, on a campus it shares with the blind school and the district offices. Its application page says "LSD provides instruction in a bilingual environment of American Sign Language and English." Students must be deaf or hard of hearing, aged 3 to 21 and living in Louisiana. A parent can apply at any IEP conference, a district can refer, or the school can evaluate.

It is a residential school, with a residential activity in its budget designed to "simulate a home-like atmosphere." Yet the federal file for fall 2024 reports no Louisiana stu-

dents with hearing impairment in a residential facility, and 67 in a separate school. The Index records the conflict and does not resolve it.

The enrollment figures do not agree with each other either. The Department of Education's certified files count 76 students at the deaf school on 1 October 2025 and 76 on 1 February 2026. The 2025-26 state budget says it "served 79 students" as of 1 February 2025. The 2026-27 budget says the whole Special School District "served 205 students" as of 1 February 2026; the Department's file for the same day counts 261. The Index prefers the Department's certified file and prints every figure.



Louisiana Special School District students by site, February 2026

View data

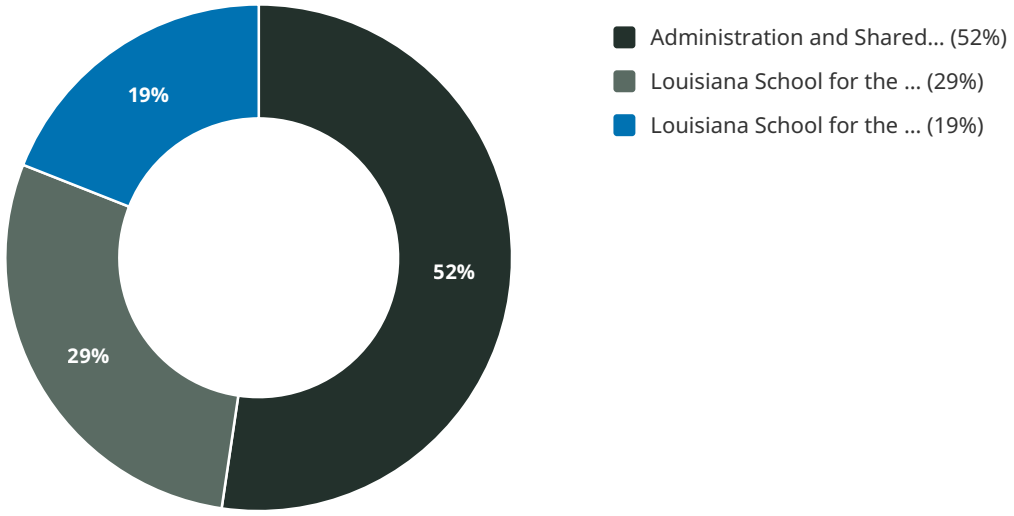
Category	Students
Pinecrest Supports and Services Center	84
Louisiana School for the Deaf	76
Louisiana School for the Visually Impaired	57
Central Louisiana Supports and Services Center	29
Renaissance Home for Youth	14
Dixon Correctional Institute	1

The district is led by an interim superintendent, Shirley Lewis.

The line that disappeared

Through fiscal 2025-26, the deaf school had its own budget identity, program 6562 of agency 19-656. The governor's executive budget for 2026-27 carried it at an existing operating budget of $8,808,327 and 107 positions, with a recommendation of zero. In its place it proposed a new program, 6565, for the deaf and visually impaired schools together, at $31.1 million and 254 positions.

The Legislature enacted it. The highlights for agency 19-656 read: "Consolidates the Administration and Shared Services ($15.52 million and 87 authorized T.O. positions), Louisiana School for the Deaf ($8.49 million and 102 authorized T.O. positions), and Louisiana School for the Visually Impaired ($5.64 million and 65 authorized T.O. positions) Programs into the Louisiana Schools for the Deaf and Visually Impaired Program." The district's total appropriation is $37,609,362 and 327 positions, against $36,330,366 and 337 the year before.



What the 2026-27 consolidation combined (Louisiana enacted budget highlights)

View data

Category	Dollars
Administration and Shared Services	15520000
Louisiana School for the Deaf	8490000
Louisiana School for the Visually Impaired	5640000

The program description keeps the deaf school's activities visible in words: instruction "providing children who are deaf with the necessary tools to achieve academically, socially, and physically compared to their hearing counterparts," residential care, and outreach. But from next year's budget forward, a legislator, a parent or a reporter who wants to know what Louisiana spends on its deaf school will find a combined number. The Index has seen this pattern before. In Arkansas, the merger of the school for the deaf with the school for the blind was followed by the disappearance of the school's separate count from public reporting. Louisiana is arriving at the same place through the budget.

The money around it is also moving. The district's Minimum Foundation Program allocation arrives as an interagency transfer of $9,735,197 a year. On 1 July 2026 an executive order cut $168,000,000 from the statewide MFP to pay a stipend.

What the auditor found

The Legislative Auditor's performance audit of June 2023 is the last outside review of the school in hand, and its findings go straight to the school's stated identity. It found that 54 of 148 deaf school employees, 36.5 percent, did not meet the ASL proficiency their own job descriptions required. It found that the school "lacks a clear ASL/English bilingual implementation plan." And it found that the outreach arm "served 302 children on average per year."

LOUISIANA LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR, JUNE 2023 PERFORMANCE AUDIT

54 of 148
employees not meeting their job's ASL proficiency requirement

36.5%
of staff below the school's own ASL standard

302
children served by outreach per year, on average

0

clear ASL/English bilingual implementation plans

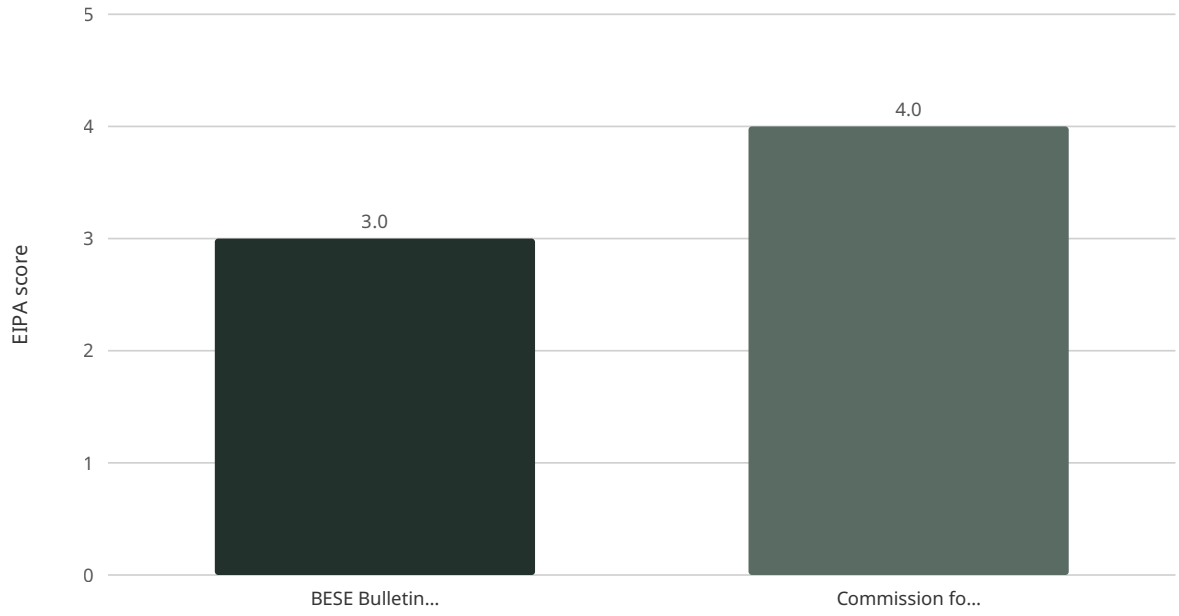
Source: Louisiana Legislative Auditor, Louisiana School for the Deaf performance audit, June 2023

A school that publishes a bilingual philosophy and does not have an implementation plan or a staff that meets its own sign language standard is not unusual in the series. Florida's state school has been cited three times for the same proficiency gap. What is notable in Louisiana is the combination: the strongest deaf presence on any board the Index has read, and an audit saying the school's own staff fall short of the language the board was built to protect. Board minutes from March 2025 note that state tests are not administered in ASL.

Two thresholds for one interpreter

Louisiana's interpreter rules contradict each other, and both are in force. The education board's Bulletin 746 issues the qualified educational interpreter certificate at an EIPA score of 3.0. The Louisiana Commission for the Deaf's registry, created by Act 128 of 2022, sets qualified registration at 4.0 and says registration is required in "PreK-12 educational settings under the purview of the Louisiana Department of Education."

So an interpreter who scores 3.5 holds a valid certificate from the state education board and falls short of the registration the Commission says is required for the same classroom. Neither instrument acknowledges the other.



Two Louisiana thresholds for a classroom interpreter (EIPA score)

View data

Category	EIPA score
BESE Bulletin 746 certificate	3.0
Commission for the Deaf registry	4.0

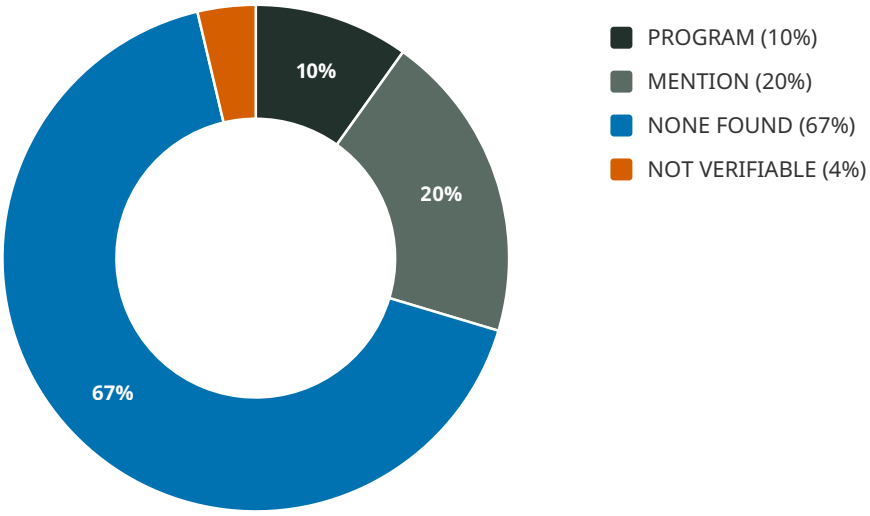
The Commission is also charged by statute to "promote the training of interpreters and assist in the establishment of interpreter training programs." No college in Louisiana prepares teachers of the deaf.

The systems around it

The Index read every parish system, city system and charter sponsor. Fifteen publish their own deaf or hard of hearing teachers, programs or services; three of them, Ascension, Jefferson and Lafayette, rose to that level in version 2.0 on pages the first reading did not reach. Bossier fell back, because its "Educational Interpreter Services" turned out to be a list item and nothing more. Thirty-two mention deaf students only

in an eligibility list, a screening form or a policy. One hundred eight publish nothing. Six could not be read.

None of them names the state school or its outreach arm as its provider. Two, St. James and St. Mary, name the deaf school only as an example of a separate campus in their classroom camera policies under R.S. 17:1948.



Louisiana's 162 school systems and charter sponsors, by what they publish

View data

Category	Units
PROGRAM	16
MENTION	32
NONE FOUND	108
NOT VERIFIABLE	6

A count blanked below five percent

Louisiana publishes no count of deaf students by category anywhere. Its annual Sped-Book prints the percentage of each system's students with disabilities by category, with every value under five percent blanked. Every system in the state except one prints "<5%" for hearing impairment. The one exception is the Special School District itself, where hearing impairment is 25 percent of students with disabilities. So the Index's publication measure cannot be computed.

The federal file fills the statewide gap: 959 Louisiana children with a primary classification of hearing impairment in fall 2024, 876 of school age and 83 in early childhood, and 17 who are deafblind.

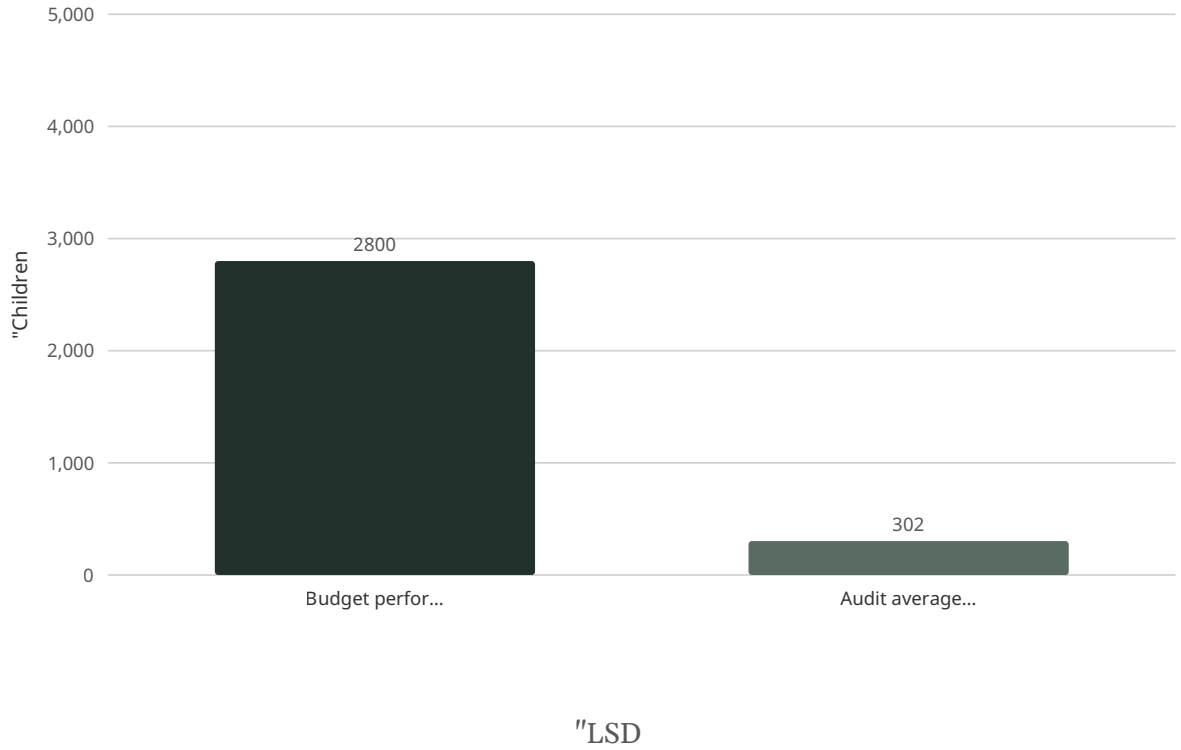
The state's education board removed one barrier in December 2025. Bulletin 1508's eligibility section, as the board now publishes it, carries no decibel threshold: the criteria are "audiological evidence that the student is either deaf or hard of hearing" and evidence of educational impact, with the interview held "in the student's primary mode of communication." Version 1.0, reading an older mirror, had carried audiometric thresholds.

Fifteen programs that never name the school

The parishes that publish a deaf program in Louisiana describe real work. St. Tammany's Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program page names its coordinator and five itinerant teachers, and runs a separate ASL Interpreting Services program beside it. East Baton Rouge describes a cluster model for students who need a teacher of the hearing impaired every day, with audiology, FM systems and interpreters. Lafayette runs its program in home-zone schools or through the Lafayette Deaf Education Consortium of five parishes. Iberia keeps a continuum from the regular class to a self-contained room. Webster says services "are available to Deaf/Hard of Hearing students aged 3 years through high school." Monroe offers hearing impaired services at every grade with certified teachers and interpreters.

As noted above, none of the fifteen names the school, its outreach arm or the statewide assessment center as a provider. That is striking in a state that has built its deaf school into a statewide service. LSD Outreach offers free early intervention "from birth up to age 5 or school entry," and "Pre-K-12 support services" to school districts. It lists four outreach instructors by region: Greater Baton Rouge, Greater New Or-

leans North, Greater New Orleans South, and Central and Southwest Louisiana. The executive budget describes the activity more broadly, with "Sign Language instruction, evaluation, and interpretation," summer programming and virtual workshops, and sets a performance standard of 2,800 student and family contacts at a cost of 2,450 dollars per child.



View data

Category	"Children
Budget performance standard, contacts	2800
Audit average, children served per year (FY2021-2023)	302

The two figures measure different things, contacts against children, so they are not a contradiction. But they show the distance between what the budget describes and the last count anyone published. The districts doing the daily work do not mention the outreach program, and the outreach program does not publish which districts it

serves. The one unit whose page names the Special School District's arm is the Office of Juvenile Justice, and it names it for special education in general.

The Index's interpretation, marked as such. In Louisiana, the state school and the parish programs look like two parallel systems that rarely say each other's names in public. No outreach region on the school's staff page covers the north of the state, around Shreveport and Monroe.

A milestones law that repealed itself

Louisiana passed a LEAD-K Act in 2018. It created a task force. The section that created it repealed itself on 1 March 2019, after the task force reported on 1 February 2019 and before the Department of Health answered under Act 455 on 21 March 2019. No state instrument now publishes a language or literacy milestone measure for deaf children.

The state's rules still speak to communication in three places. Bulletin 1508 requires the evaluation interview to happen in the child's primary mode. The Deaf Child's Bill of Rights requires "a communication plan in the Individualized Education Program." And Bulletin 746 admits teachers to the deaf education endorsement on proof of signed, cued or oral proficiency, three modes side by side. What Louisiana does not do is measure whether any of it produces language.

A baby's three front doors

A Louisiana baby who does not pass a hearing screen meets three programs. The Early Hearing Detection and Intervention program in the Office of Public Health carries the screening. EarlySteps, the federal Part C system in the Department of Health, lists hearing among the domains of delay that may qualify a child and publishes no count. LSD Outreach offers free early intervention directly to families. The CDC's 2022 data year shows 107 infants identified and 76 enrolled in early intervention. No source states how the three refer to one another.

The deafblind count follows the national pattern: 158 served and 148 counted on the National Deafblind Child Count for 2024. The Louisiana DeafBlind Project at LSU Health Sciences Center offers family support, consultation, transition planning and intervener training for children and youth up to 22.

Vouchers that tier by disability

Louisiana's education savings account, LA GATOR, pays "Up to $15,253 for students with a qualifying disability (tiered by disability type)" in 2025-26, against $7,626 for low-income students and $5,243 for others. The disability figure is 160 percent of the state and local per-pupil amount. Students with a disability under federal law sit in the second priority group if money runs short. The page that printed the tiers by disability in v1.0 now returns an error, and no instrument publishes GATOR participation by disability.

The older School Choice Program for Certain Students with Exceptionalities, in parishes over 190,000 people, does not list hearing impairment among its eligible categories, so a deaf child cannot use it on that classification. The tuition donation credit does name "hearing loss (including deafness)."

The one deaf-specific private school the Index identified, The Bright School for the Deaf in Metairie, describes a mission "to improve the speech, language, and auditory skills of children who are Deaf, hard of hearing, or language delayed." It is absent from the Department's 2025-26 nonpublic schools directory. Whether it operates in 2026-27 is unresolved.

Questions Louisiana is positioned to answer

- Will future budgets report the deaf school's appropriation and positions separately, as they did through 2025-26?
- What has the school done since 2023 about the staff who did not meet its ASL standard, and does it now have a bilingual implementation plan?
- Which interpreter standard governs a Louisiana classroom, 3.0 or 4.0, and will the board and the Commission reconcile them?
- How many residential students does the deaf school serve, and why does the federal file report none?
- How many deaf and hard of hearing students does each system serve, as a count rather than a blanked percentage?
- Who will be the district's permanent superintendent?
- Where will Louisiana train teachers of the deaf?

Go back to the staffer reading the budget. She can still find the deaf school's number this year, in a sentence. Next year she probably will not. Louisiana wrote a deaf presence into its school's board, a bill of rights into its code and a communication plan into every deaf child's IEP. It is now writing its deaf school out of its own budget. A state that cares this much about who governs the school should care at least as much about whether anyone can still see what the school costs and how it is doing.

The full Louisiana file covers all 162 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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