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Nevada Never Built a School for the Deaf. The Law It Used Instead Is a Husk.

Heather Grizzle · November 23, 2026

Nevada's 1956 law paying for out-of-state deaf placement was gutted in 2015. Two studies died, and 15 of 20 school agencies publish nothing on deaf students.

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A deaf six-year-old in Ely, in White Pine County, is the only child in her school who signs. Her parents have heard there is a deaf program in Las Vegas, four hours south, and another in Reno, four hours west. They ask the district who serves deaf children in White Pine. The county's website does not say. The state Department of Education's website does not have a deaf and hard of hearing page. Nevada has never had a school for the deaf, and the law it once used to send children like her to other states' schools was quietly gutted a decade ago. A regulation still describes the application. The statute it relies on no longer exists.

She is a composite. Everything else in that paragraph is on the record, and version 2.0 of the National Deaf Education Data Index read all of it. Nevada is the series′ clearest case of a state that never built a school, let its substitute lapse, and twice declined to study whether it needs one. It is also, oddly, the state whose own data makes its silence easiest to measure.

IN BRIEF

- Nevada has never had a school for the deaf. From 1956 it paid for deaf children to attend school elsewhere, choosing "the least expensive to the State" among appropriate placements. A 2015 law repealed the sections that did the work.
- A state regulation still prescribes the application, the paperwork and travel reimbursement "to a residential school," citing statutes that no longer exist. Whether any child is placed out of state today is published nowhere.
- The Legislature has twice killed a study of whether Nevada needs a deaf school, in 2019 and 2025. A 2026 draft bill for a hub-and-spoke Nevada School for the Deaf, with a $20.5 million appropriation, has no sponsor.
- Two of 20 local education agencies, Clark and Washoe, publish a deaf program. Fifteen publish nothing, including the charter authority that sponsors 90 schools and 70,534 students.
- Nevada publishes its count of deaf students by district every year. On the 2024 count, 553 students had hearing impairment, and Clark County held 408 of them.

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 Nevada, version 2.0 of the state file read the twenty local education agencies the Department of Education itself counts: the seventeen county school districts, the State Public Charter School Authority, the University School District and the Correctional School District. The statutes, the regulations, the bill histories and the state's child counts by district 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. MENTION means hearing appears only in a general way. NONE FOUND means the pages were read and nothing specific was published.

The codes measure publication, not service. The Index never estimates a missing figure, and where two published figures disagree it records both. The bodies the file names received notice and ten business days to correct it before release.

Buying a school instead of building one

In 1956 Nevada answered the deaf school question by purchase. Former NRS chapter 395 let a county district that could not educate a deaf or blind child apply through its board to the Superintendent of Public Instruction, who chose a placement, in state or out, and the state paid. The surviving regulation still shows the two criteria: "the least restrictive environment which is appropriate" and "the least expensive to the State of those possible placements which are equally appropriate."

In 2015 the chapter was moved into NRS 388.5211 to 388.5243. In the same session, section 30 of Senate Bill 508 repealed the sections that did the work, the application, the superintendent's duty, the state payment and the definitions, effective 1 July 2016. The same bill built the funding system that replaced it: a single statewide multiplier for students with disabilities, capped at 13 percent, with no weight for deafness.

What remains is a husk. NRS 388.5223 still says who "is eligible to receive the benefits provided pursuant to NRS 388.5223 to 388.5243, inclusive." No surviving section provides a benefit. The last number in the range, 388.5243, is now the Account for

State Special Education Services, the vehicle for the whole state special education appropriation.

A regulation from another era

The regulation never caught up. NAC 388.460 to 388.488, amended as recently as 2019, still tells district staff to "verify that all requirements for eligibility set forth in NRS 388.5223 have been met and submit the application to the board of trustees." It still lists the five documents the board sends the superintendent, including the parents' "agreement to accept responsibility for the medical, dental and personal expenses" and an authorization to release the child's records "to other residential schools." It still binds the Department to "search for an appropriate educational placement." It still promises reimbursement of the family's "initial trip to a residential school." And it cites NRS 388.5211 and 388.5219, which no longer exist.

1956
Chapter 395: the state pays for out-of-state placement, choosing the least expensive appropriate option

→ 2015

2015
Chapter moved into NRS 388.5211 to 388.5243

→ 1 July 2016

1 July 2016
SB 508 section 30 repeals the operative sections

→ 2019

2019
SB 203 feasibility study deleted by amendment; regulation amended, still citing repealed sections

→ 2025

2025
AB 247 study dies in Ways and Means

→ 2026

2026
Commission circulates a draft Nevada School for the Deaf bill with no sponsor

Whether any Nevada child is placed in another state's school today, and who pays, is published nowhere. The Index's interpretation, marked as such: a placement would now be a district obligation paid from its share of the general disability multiplier. No page confirms one is made.

Two studies, two deaths

The Legislature has been asked twice to study whether Nevada needs a school for the deaf. Twice it declined.

Senate Bill 203 of 2019, the state's language development act, was introduced with a section 15 directing the Legislative Commission to appoint six legislators "to conduct an interim study concerning the feasibility of establishing a public school for pupils who are blind, visually impaired, deaf or hard of hearing," including "potential sources of funding for such a school." The enrolled bill reads: "Sec. 15. (Deleted by amendment)."

Assembly Bill 247 of 2025, which the state's deaf commission calls the "Big Deaf Bill," carried a section 4 requiring the Department of Education to study "the need for a school for pupils who are deaf or hard of hearing," including "statistical information on the number of pupils in each school district who are deaf or hard of hearing," with a report due 31 December 2026. It survived committee, was sent to Ways and Means on 15 April 2025, and died there when the session ended.

The Nevada Commission for Persons Who Are Deaf and Hard of Hearing, an advisory body inside the Aging and Disability Services Division, adopted a "Position on Deaf

Schools" on 12 February 2025, asking the state to "Explore the Establishment of Deaf Schools in Nevada." By January 2026 a senator had advised the commission's chair "to consider requesting a bill to establish a school for the Deaf, rather than requesting a bill that merely asks for a study." A draft bill on the commission's July 2026 meeting page would create a Nevada School for the Deaf with a hub in Clark County, a spoke in Washoe County, rural partnership classrooms wherever three deaf students share a grade band, a state interpreter pool and a $20,500,000 appropriation. It has no bill draft number and no sponsor.

NEVADA AND A SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF

0
schools for the deaf Nevada has ever built

2
feasibility studies the Legislature killed

$20.5M
appropriation in the commission's 2026 draft bill

0
legislative sponsors for that bill

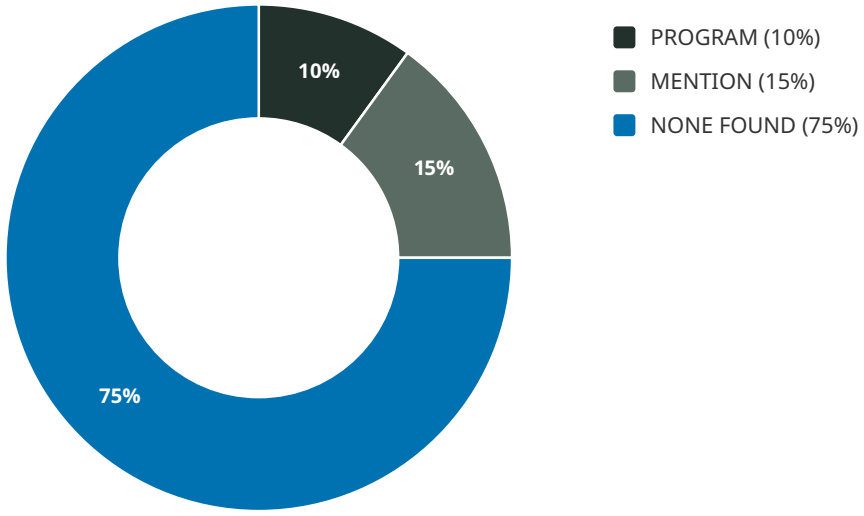
Source: SB 203 (2019); AB 247 (2025); Nevada Commission for Persons Who Are Deaf and Hard of Hearing, 2025-2026

Two counties and a silence

What Nevada has instead of a school is two county programs.

Clark County's Student Services Division publishes a Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program offering "direct instruction, consultation, and transition services to students in both Aural/Oral (non-signing) and Total Communication (signing) settings," with its own interpreting and audiology departments. Washoe County's Hearing Impairment page describes "semi-self-contained programming for students with hearing loss who require direct instruction in their primary communication modality (i.e. sign language and/or spoken English)" and mainstream support, with a district audiologist.

Three districts mention hearing. Churchill lists it among screening areas, Elko reproduces the eligibility list and Lyon names the state's dual sensory impairment project. Fifteen publish nothing at all. Among them is the State Public Charter School Authority, which sponsors 90 schools and 70,534 students and whose special education page is two links: one to the statute and one to the regulation. Under NRS 388A.088 the sponsor, not the school, is the local education agency, so every one of those students depends on the authority for a free appropriate public education.



Nevada's 20 local education agencies, by what they publish

View data

Category	Agencies
PROGRAM	2
MENTION	3
NONE FOUND	15

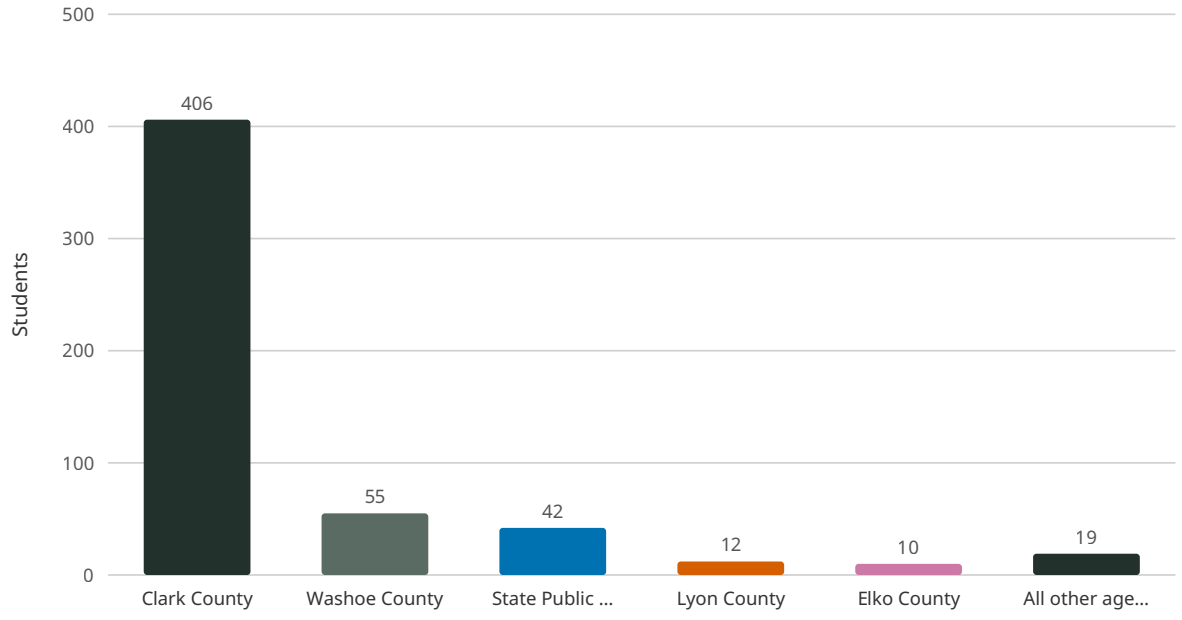
No state page names a regional program, an itinerant service, a contract or a provider for any of the fifteen. The Department of Education has no deaf and hard of hearing page. Its technical assistance index names state projects for behavior, transition, early childhood and visual impairment, and none for hearing. Who serves a deaf child in Esmeralda, Eureka or Lincoln County is not published by the county, by the state or by anyone.

The data that makes the silence measurable

Here is the paradox. Nevada publishes more data about where its deaf children are than almost any state in the series. The Department posts an IDEA child count by district by primary disability every October, back to 2008, with small cells suppressed.

On the 1 October 2024 count, Nevada had 553 students with hearing impairment and 10 with deaf-blindness, among 69,397 students with disabilities. Only two units print a hearing impairment number. Clark County shows 408. The charter authority shows 43. Together that is 451 of 553, 81.6 percent. Every other cell, Washoe's included, is suppressed at nine or fewer.

The October 2025 count shows more: 544 students, with five units printing a number. Clark 406, Washoe 55, the charter authority 42, Lyon 12, Elko 10. The two program districts, Clark and Washoe, hold 461 of the 544, about 85 percent.



Nevada students with hearing impairment by agency, 1 October 2025

View data

Category	Students
Clark County	406
Washoe County	55
State Public Charter School Authority	42
Lyon County	12
Elko County	10
All other agencies (suppressed)	19

So most of Nevada's deaf students are in the two counties that publish a program. But the third-largest group, 42 or 43 students, sits under a charter authority that publishes nothing, and the rest are scattered through rural counties where the state names no provider at all.

The federal file adds the setting. Of 518 Nevada students with hearing impairment aged 5 to 21, 307 spent 80 percent or more of the day in a regular class, 108 between 40 and 79 percent and 99 less than 40 percent. None was in a separate school. None was in a residential facility. In a state with no deaf school and no published out-of-state placements, that zero is consistent. It is also the number the 1956 law existed to change.

Two decibel gates

Nevada is one of the few states that sets a decibel threshold for eligibility, and it sets two. Under NAC 388.390, a student is deaf with "an average hearing threshold level, at 500, 1,000 and 2,000 Hz, of 92 decibels or more" and hard of hearing at "30 decibels or more." The eligibility team must include three people with expertise in audiology, hearing impairment or assessment, and "may include a teacher or specialist in the field of hearing impairment." It does not have to. A teacher's caseload is capped at twenty students with hearing impairment.

Interpreters and teachers

Nevada's interpreter standard is real and is not the education department's. Under NRS 656A, anyone interpreting in a school must register with the Aging and Disability Services Division at an EIPA score "at least at level 4.0 or its equivalent," or provisionally at 3.5 for "not more than a total of 5 years." New applicants have needed a bachelor's degree since August 2023. But the division's administrator told the Nevada Current in March 2026 that it "maintains a statewide registry of interpreters but does not have any oversight over a school district's actions beyond taking complaints."

Teachers of the deaf need an endorsement under NAC 391.340. No Nevada college prepares them. The commission's May 2026 minutes record a proposal to let candidates "major in both Special Education and Deaf and Hard of Hearing education," because under current law "students must choose only one."

A language law with no tool

In 2019, in the same bill from which a deaf school feasibility study was deleted by amendment, Nevada wrote a law about language. Senate Bill 203, now NRS 388.5155 to 388.5195, is Nevada's LEAD-K-type statute. It set up a thirteen-member advisory

committee, "at least seven members who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind or visually impaired," to recommend criteria for assessing language and literacy in children under six. It required the Department of Education to write a parent resource telling families they "have the right to select whether to evaluate" in "American Sign Language, spoken or written English." And it required a report each 31 July of "aggregated data comparing the development of language and literacy skills" of these children with children who have no disability.

On the Department's own pages, implementation is thin. The committee does not appear on the boards page. It sits as an "SB203 Subcommittee" of the special education advisory committee, with a roster dated 21 April 2021 and no posted meeting. A December 2020 recommendation exists and endorses no assessment tool. No parent resource was found. Reports are posted for 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2024, for birth to three only, with no breakdown by disability and no comparison group. The 2024 report counts 140 children and states that "in Nevada, there are no standardized assessments for determining the development of language and literacy skills in children with or without disabilities who are less than age 6."

That sentence is the law's own failure condition, printed by the agency charged with carrying it out. The statute asks the state to measure something the state says it has no instrument to measure.

The commission that keeps writing

If the Department is quiet, the Nevada Commission for Persons Who Are Deaf and Hard of Hearing is not. Its 2026 record is the liveliest set of documents in the file.

On 8 January 2026 its education subcommittee wrote to the Department asking for "a response and collaborative engagement" on the language law. The minutes of its 3 February meeting record: "There has been no response from the Nevada Department of Education, but the subcommittee will continue to reach out." At the same meeting it voted to ask the Legislature "to consider a bill to establish a school for the Deaf in Nevada." In May, still without an answer, it met a California LEAD-K organizer who advised contacting the bill's original sponsors "to inform them that no action has been taken on it." A survey of deaf pupils, parents and staff was being interpreted into ASL on volunteer labor because a college partner had not replied.



The Department answered on 30 June 2026. Its director of comprehensive student services wrote that she "would be happy to present our new resources" and that "late August or September would be the best time to connect."

NEVADA COMMISSION AND DEPARTMENT, 2026

8 January
Commission subcommittee writes to the Department about the language law

→ 3 February

3 February
No response; vote to seek a bill for a deaf school

→ May

May
Still no response; advised to contact the 2019 sponsors

→ 30 June

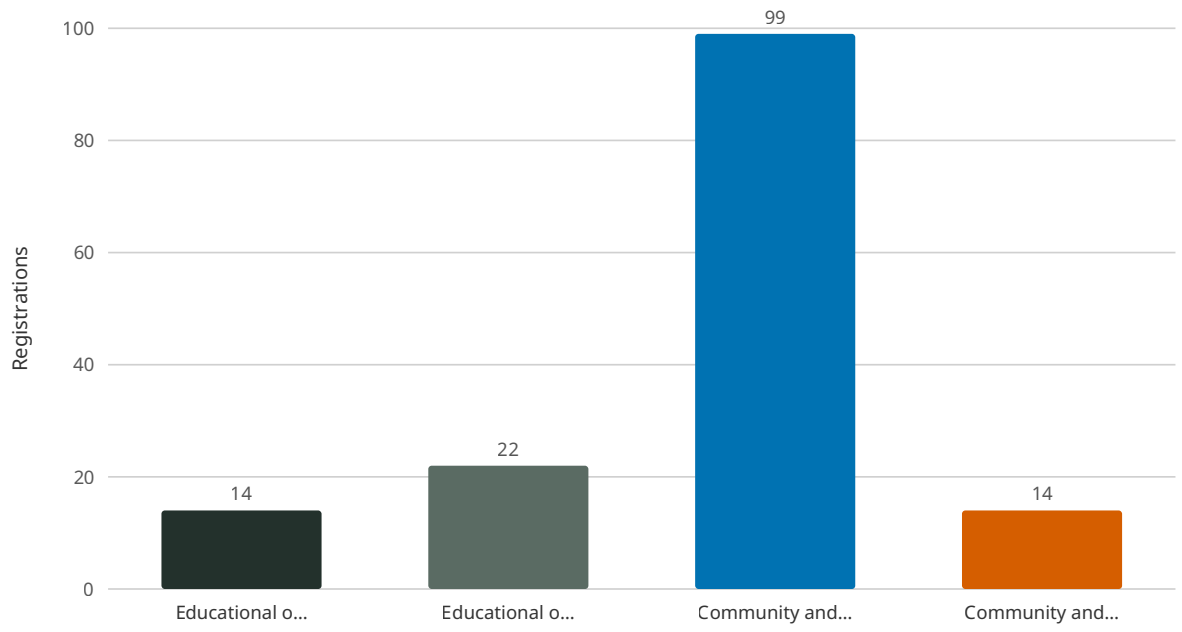
30 June
Department offers to present "new resources" in late summer

The commission's legislative subcommittee has since broken a 2025 bill into four ideas for 2027, one of them "Deaf School Study vs. Deaf School Request." A draft bill's cost model asserts 30.8 million dollars a year to mainstream a 500-pupil cohort against 20.5 million for a school, and a companion email is titled "Save Nevada $14.8M Annually." Those figures are the drafter's. The Index records them as claims, not findings.

A registry, not a workforce

The commission oversees the one statewide count of a deaf education workforce Nevada publishes, and it is a count of registrations, not working interpreters. As of 1 July

2026 the registry showed 595 registrations, 183 of them in state. By the Index's arithmetic, 149 carry an educational scope, 105 of them in state, and provisional educational registrations, 36, outnumber full educational-only ones, 14.



Nevada interpreter registrations with an educational scope, 1 July 2026

View data

Category	Registrations
Educational only, full	14
Educational only, provisional	22
Community and educational, full	99
Community and educational, provisional	14

The same report shows two mentors with seven mentees, three of them in K-12, eleven interpreters in an EIPA practice group, and a consultation request from Nye County about "how to support an interpreter working for the district." For a rural dis-

trict with one deaf student and one interpreter, that request is the whole system in a sentence.

A baby in Nevada

Newborn hearing screening is mandated: no discharge "until the child has undergone or been referred for hearing screening." The most recent state annual report is for 2020. It counts 33,259 births, 96.7 percent screened and 40 babies identified as deaf or hard of hearing, 29 of whom enrolled in early intervention, with the note that "a diagnosis of any degree of hearing loss is a qualifying diagnosis for EI." Nothing has been posted since. The federal survey for 2022 births records 53 diagnosed and 293 babies, 58.4 percent of those who did not pass, with no documented diagnosis at all. The 53 is a floor.

The deafblind count shows the familiar gap. The state count lists 7. The national count lists 120, and the Nevada Dual Sensory Impairment Project at the University of Nevada, Reno counted 127 children served in the year.

Questions Nevada is positioned to answer

1. Is any Nevada child placed in another state's school for the deaf today, under what authority, and who pays?
2. Will the State Board repeal or rewrite NAC 388.460 to 388.488, which cite statutes that no longer exist?
3. Who serves deaf students in the fifteen agencies that publish nothing, including the charter authority?
4. Will a legislator sponsor the commission's Nevada School for the Deaf bill in 2027?
5. Will the Department of Education publish a deaf and hard of hearing page, and name a state project for hearing as it does for vision?
6. Who enforces the 4.0 interpreter standard inside school districts?

Go back to the girl in Ely. In 1956 Nevada would have paid to send her to a deaf school in another state, picking the cheapest one that was appropriate. Since 2016 that promise has been a husk of statute and a regulation that points to sections that are gone.

The Legislature has twice refused to ask whether she needs a school. The state's own count, posted every October, shows how few deaf children live outside Clark and Washoe, which is the best argument both for and against building one. What it cannot show is who teaches them. Nevada has the numbers. It has not yet decided what it owes the children they describe.

The full Nevada file covers all 20 agencies and the charter sweep, 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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