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# Illinois Runs Its Deaf School From the Human Services Department. The Budget Has No Line for It.

Heather Grizzle · November 16, 2026

*The Illinois School for the Deaf has no line in the state budget and no published enrollment. Of 851 districts, 37 publish a deaf program.*

**Cov Ntsiab Lus**

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A father in Marion, deep in southern Illinois, opens a letter from his son's school district. Illinois law requires it. Because his son is deaf, the district must notify him "in writing, of the existence" of the Illinois School for the Deaf and "the services they provide." The school is in Jacksonville, about three hours north. The letter gives an address and a short description. It does not say who runs the school, how much it costs the state, or how many children attend. It cannot, because almost nobody in Illinois publishes those things.

He is a composite. The letter is real: section 14-8.02 of the Illinois School Code. It is also one of the few reasons any Illinois school district mentions its state school for the deaf at all. Of 851 districts the National Deaf Education Data Index read in November 2026, 16 name the school, and most of those do it by reproducing the notice the law requires.

Illinois built one of the oldest deaf schools in the country and then placed it somewhere most people would not think to look: inside the Department of Human Services, not the education department, with no line of its own in the state budget. Version 2.0 of the Index followed the money, the children and the publication across both departments and the layer of cooperatives in between. What it found is a system in which every piece is documented somewhere and nothing ties the pieces together.

LUV LUV

- The Illinois School for the Deaf in Jacksonville, authorized in 1839, is run by the Department of Human Services. Its operating cost has no line in the state budget. The only line naming it in fiscal 2025 is $200,000 for vocational programs.
- Illinois runs three state schools for deaf, blind and deafblind children across two departments. No instrument counts the children across the split.
- Three instruments give the deaf school's size and none agree: 137.35 students on the State Board's time-weighted fall count, 198 served in the Department's fiscal 2024 report, and nothing on the school's own pages.
- Most deaf education is delivered by special education cooperatives. 52 of 72 publish deaf or hard of hearing capacity. Of 851 districts, 37 do.
- The federal count found 2,682 Illinois children with hearing impairment in fall 2024. The State Board publishes no count of deaf students by district or even by category.
- The state's $8.6 billion school funding formula does not contain the words hearing, deaf or audiology. The deaf school's last audit by name was released in 2010.

**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 Illinois, version 2.0 of the state file read 938 units on 5 and 6 November 2026 and carries 942 rows: 849 school districts, the City of Chicago, the Department of Juvenile Justice school district, 72 special education cooperatives and joint agreements including the Philip J. Rock Center, nine charter schools that are their own districts, a handful of laboratory and cooperative high schools, and the Department of Human Services as the operator of the state schools. Four rows are units that no longer operate. Statutes were read on the General Assembly's site, and the budget act, budget book and enrollment report 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 classroom, 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. MENTION means hearing appears only in a general way. NONE FOUND means the pages were read and nothing specific was published. Forty districts could not be read on either day.

The codes measure publication, not service. In Illinois, a district coded NONE FOUND may be fully served by its cooperative. The Index never estimates a missing figure, and where two published figures disagree it records both. Before release, the bodies the file names receive notice and ten business days to correct it. For Illinois that is 85 recipients, from the State Board and the Department of Human Services to every cooperative.

## The sixth school in the country

The Illinois School for the Deaf "was authorized by the state legislature in 1839," the sixth of more than thirty such schools opened in the United States between 1817 and the Civil War. Its first four students arrived in January 1846. It sits on a 50-acre campus in Jacksonville and describes itself as "a statewide resource from birth to age 21," serving students from preschool through 12th grade, an infant and toddler program for the surrounding area, a transition living program, and an option to take mainstream classes in Jacksonville's public schools. A student who "elects to postpone

receiving a diploma" can stay on in a transitional program. There is a career and technical education track, a student work experience program and a page that invites visitors to learn ASL.

By statute, 20 ILCS 2405/10, it belongs to the Department of Human Services, Division of Rehabilitation Services. The governor appoints its superintendent with Senate consent. The state's education directory lists it under a Human Services record, beside the Illinois School for the Visually Impaired and a rehabilitation center in Chicago. That placement is old, and it is not unusual for its era: a nineteenth-century school for deaf children was as often thought of as a charity or an asylum as a school. What is unusual is that Illinois never moved it, and that the arrangement now shapes what the public can see.

Students who live more than 25 miles from Jacksonville can board. Those inside 25 miles attend as day students. Admission runs through the home district's IEP meeting, where the school is "listed as a placement option." The state charges no tuition. The home district pays for transportation on home-going breaks and for personal assistants.

The school's pages are warm and thin. They name an outreach director and an admissions and records director. They do not name the superintendent. The Department's 2024 annual report fills in a few gaps: 22 staff vacancies filled for the 2024-25 year, ages three to twenty-two, and a statement that "The school offers accredited educational services," with the accrediting body left unnamed. Its sister school for blind students, by contrast, says it is "fully accredited by Cognia." Every page on the deaf school's site lists the same contact, a Department of Human Services mailbox.

## A school without a budget line

Here is the finding that sets Illinois apart. The Illinois School for the Deaf's operating cost is not a named appropriation. The fiscal 2025 appropriation act, Public Act 103-0589, carries the school in one line only: $200,000 from the Vocational Rehabilitation Fund for vocational programming. The budget book shows that the same line spent $110,400 in fiscal 2024. The school's teachers, dormitories and campus are paid from the Department of Human Services' department-wide personal services and operating lines, alongside everything else the department does.

The Index looked for the cost three ways. The budget book's appropriations by division prints the school at $200.0 thousand. Its headcount by division has no line for the school. The Comptroller's expenditure query groups spending by appropriation, fund and object, not by division, so there is no level at which a school would appear. The Division of Rehabilitation Services links no annual report that breaks it out, and the Department's own 2024 report, which counts students, prints no cost. Version 1.0 recorded the gap as "line item amounts not captured." Version 2.0 closes it as something more definite: there is no line.

**ILLINOIS'S STATE SCHOOLS IN THE FY2025 BUDGET**

**$200K**
the only line naming the Illinois School for the Deaf, for vocational programs

**$0**
separately appropriated for its teachers, dorms and campus

**$5.0M**
for the Philip J. Rock deafblind school, under the education department

**2**
departments running three state schools

Source: Public Act 103-0589; Governor's Office of Management and Budget line items

A legislator who wants to know what Illinois spends to run its deaf school cannot find it in the budget she votes on. Neither can a parent, a journalist or the school's own alumni association. The comparison that matters is inside the same budget act. The deafblind school, which the education department funds, has a $5 million line anyone can read. The deaf school, which is larger by every count, has none. The difference is not about the children. It is about which department holds the school, and what that department's budget format happens to show.

## Where the education money goes instead

If the deaf school's cost is hidden inside a welfare department, the obvious next question is what Illinois's education budget does for deaf children. The answer is that it funds them the way it funds everyone, through a formula that does not name them.

Evidence-Based Funding, the formula at section 18-8.15 of the School Code, carried $8,629,239,000 in fiscal 2025 across four funds. The Index read the section as the General Assembly serves it, all 95,536 characters, and found no occurrence of the words hearing, deaf or audiology. Special education enters the formula as staffing ratios, a number of special education teachers per number of students, with no weight for the kind of disability. A district with three deaf students and a district with none are funded by the same arithmetic.

Beside the formula sit the categorical lines: $467,366,100 for transporting students with disabilities, and $202,732,400 for private tuition, the channel that pays for placements at approved nonpublic schools and out-of-state schools for the deaf. Neither line publishes a deaf or hard of hearing share, and neither can be computed from anything public. The old personnel reimbursement in section 14-13.01 is written "Through fiscal year 2017" and has since folded into the formula. Section 14-8.01 commits half of the state's federal special education share to room and board before anything else is paid.

The federal money is large and also unlabeled. Illinois received $603,909,221 in federal special education grants for the 2024-25 school year, $19,409,261 in preschool grants and $18,695,363 for early intervention, $642,013,845 in all. The one federal line in the state budget that names the sector is $800,000 for deafblind services. Nowhere in the state's education budget, state or federal, does a line read "deaf."

### WHAT ILLINOIS'S FY2025 EDUCATION BUDGET SAYS ABOUT DEAF STUDENTS

**$8.63B**
Evidence-Based Funding, with no mention of hearing, deaf or audiology

**$202.7M**
private tuition line, with no published deaf share

**$642.0M**
federal special education and early intervention grants to Illinois

**$800K**
the one federal line that names the sector, for deafblind services

Source: Public Act 103-0589; 105 ILCS 5/18-8.15; U.S. Department of Education state tables

## Three schools, two departments

Illinois does not have one state school for sensory disabilities. It has three, split between two departments.

The Department of Human Services runs the Illinois School for the Deaf and the Illinois School for the Visually Impaired, which becomes the Illinois School for the Blind on 1 January 2027 under Public Act 104-716. The blind school, established in 1849, counted 58.85 students on the State Board's fall report.

The State Board of Education funds the third: the Philip J. Rock Center and School in Glen Ellyn, the state's deafblind school, at $5,000,000 in fiscal 2025, spent in full, with $800,000 in federal deafblind money for its Project Reach. The Capital Development Board has been rebuilding it, with a new facility under construction from July 2024 and phases scheduled for fall 2025 and spring 2026. Even the capital figure comes in two versions: the budget office's line items print the reappropriation at $5,581,502, the act's own text at $5,605,326. The Index records both.

Since January 2025, under Public Act 103-1045, the Rock school also takes deaf students without vision loss who need a functional academic curriculum. That change quietly made the education department's deafblind school a second door for some deaf children, beside the Human Services school in Jacksonville. Its own website states its operator two ways: "operated by The Illinois State Board of Education" on one page, and Lombard School District 44 as "administrative agent" since 1979 on another. Lombard posts its own annual financial report and single audit for fiscal 2025. The Index read both. Neither names the Rock Center, and the federal awards schedule carries the district's own special education grants and no deafblind award. Wherever the Center's audited books are, they are not in the district's posted ones. The State Board's enrollment report prints the Center at "under 10" on every column.

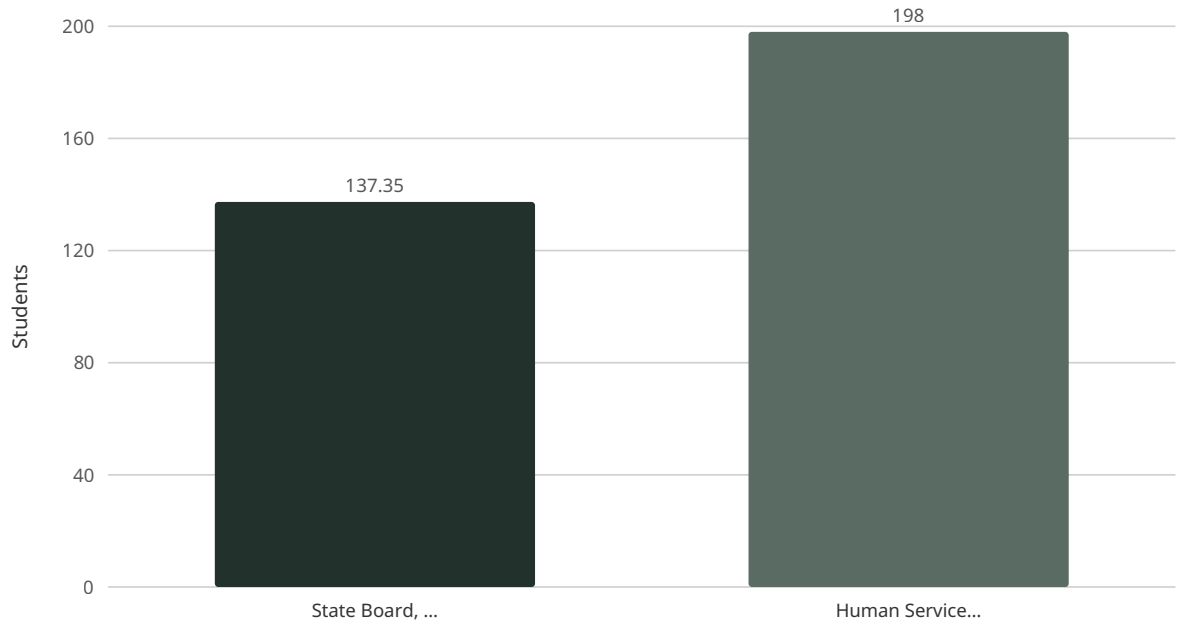
The State Board also maintains the Illinois Service Resource Center, a behavior support center for deaf and hard of hearing students with emotional or behavioral disorders, hosted by a suburban cooperative. Its website presented a certificate the browser rejected on both days the Index tried it, and again on a third.

No instrument counts children across all of this. The deaf school's students are counted by the State Board as a serving school. The deafblind school's budget sits with the State Board. The deaf school's budget sits with Human Services. Early intervention also sits with Human Services, through 25 Child and Family Connections offices. Newborn screening sits with Public Health. Interpreter licensing sits with a separate commission. Each piece is documented somewhere. Nothing ties them together.

## How big is the school?

Version 1.0 of the Index could not find the school's enrollment. Version 2.0 found three instruments, and they disagree because they count different things.

The State Board's Fall Enrollment Report for fiscal 2025 prints the Illinois School for the Deaf as a serving school at 137.35 students in pre-K through 12, 124.35 in K-12 and 109.35 with an IEP. The decimals are real; the report weights students by time. The Department of Human Services' Rehabilitation Services Annual Report for 2024 prints 198 students served in fiscal 2024: 63 in birth to three, 81 residential and 54 day, as "average attendance based on reported monthly totals." The school's own pages print no enrollment at all.




Illinois School for the Deaf: three counts, three instruments

Saib Cov Ntaub Ntawv

| Hom (Category) | Students |
|---|---|
| State Board, time-weighted, PreK-12, fall 2024 | 137.35 |
| Human Services, FY2024 average served | 198 |

Neither number is wrong. The State Board counts school-age students on a fall date, weighted by time. The Department averages a whole fiscal year and includes its babies and toddlers. But a reader who wants to know whether the school is growing or shrinking, or what share of Illinois's deaf children it serves, has no single figure to start from. The federal count offers a rough frame: 176 school-age Illinois students with hearing impairment were in a separate school in fall 2024 and 81 in a residential facility, statewide. Those are not the school's numbers, and the Index does not treat them as such.

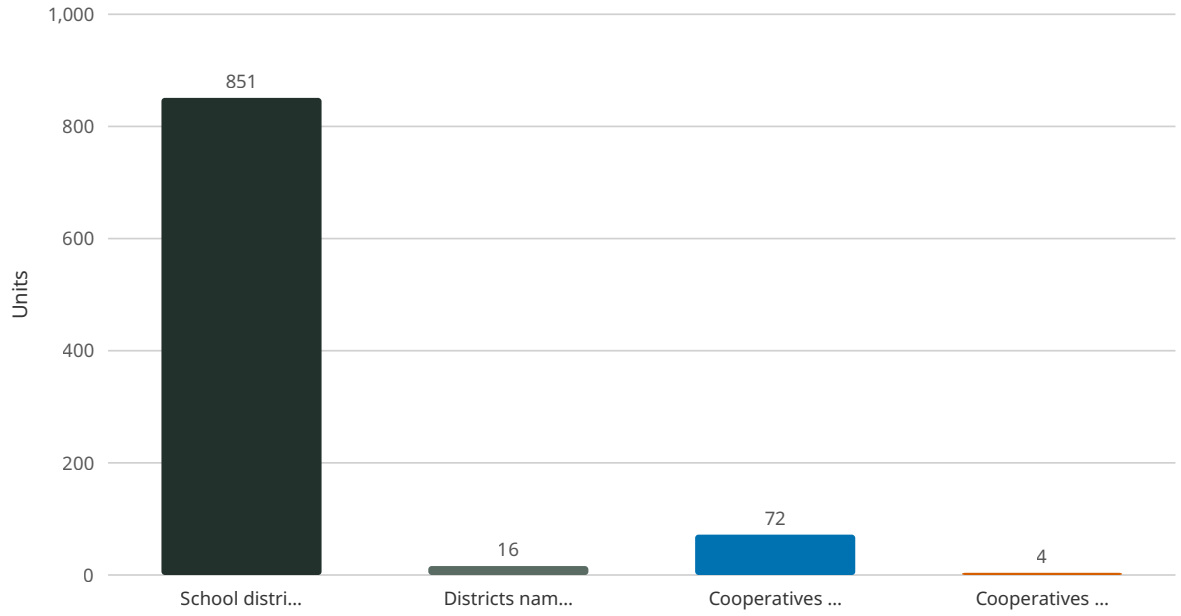
One more comparison is worth making. The same State Board report prints six cooperative deaf and hard of hearing programs with their own counts, and they sum

to 154. The state's cooperatives, taken together on that one report, enroll more deaf students in their programs than the state school does.

The school publishes no staffing roster, no communication policy and no cost. The Human Services report is the only instrument that describes instruction, noting that elementary students "participated American Sign Language Literacy using Cued American English" during reading. The school's home page says it "embrace[s] diverse communication."

## The notice that does most of the naming

The school claims the whole state. Most of the state does not mention it. The Index searched the captured text of every district and cooperative. Sixteen of 851 districts name the Illinois School for the Deaf: Palatine, Park Ridge, Lyons Township, Bensenville, Maercker, Hinsdale Township, Marion, VIT, Beach Park, Township High School District 113, Huntley, Woodstock, Rochester, Springfield, Havana and Danville. Four of 72 cooperatives do: Four Rivers, NSSEO, Henry-Stark and Woodford. Most of those mentions are the 14-8.02 notice text. Two are basketball schedules. No charter names it.




Who names the Illinois School for the Deaf

Saib Cov Ntaub Ntawv

| Hom (Category) | Cov chav |
|---|---|
| School districts read | 851 |
| Districts naming the school | 16 |
| Cooperatives read | 72 |
| Cooperatives naming the school | 4 |

The other statewide instruments fare worse. The school for blind students is named by 10 districts, always in the same notice paragraph as the deaf school. The Philip J. Rock Center is named by one district, Lombard, which is its administrative agent. The Illinois Service Resource Center is named by three districts and four cooperatives.

The law is doing work here. Without section 14-8.02, which entered the code through Public Act 93-0282, the count would be close to zero. With it, families receive a letter, and the State Board recommends that districts hand them the Department's fact

sheets at the IEP meeting. What the letter cannot do is explain a school whose own operator does not publish its size or its cost.

## Where the capacity actually sits

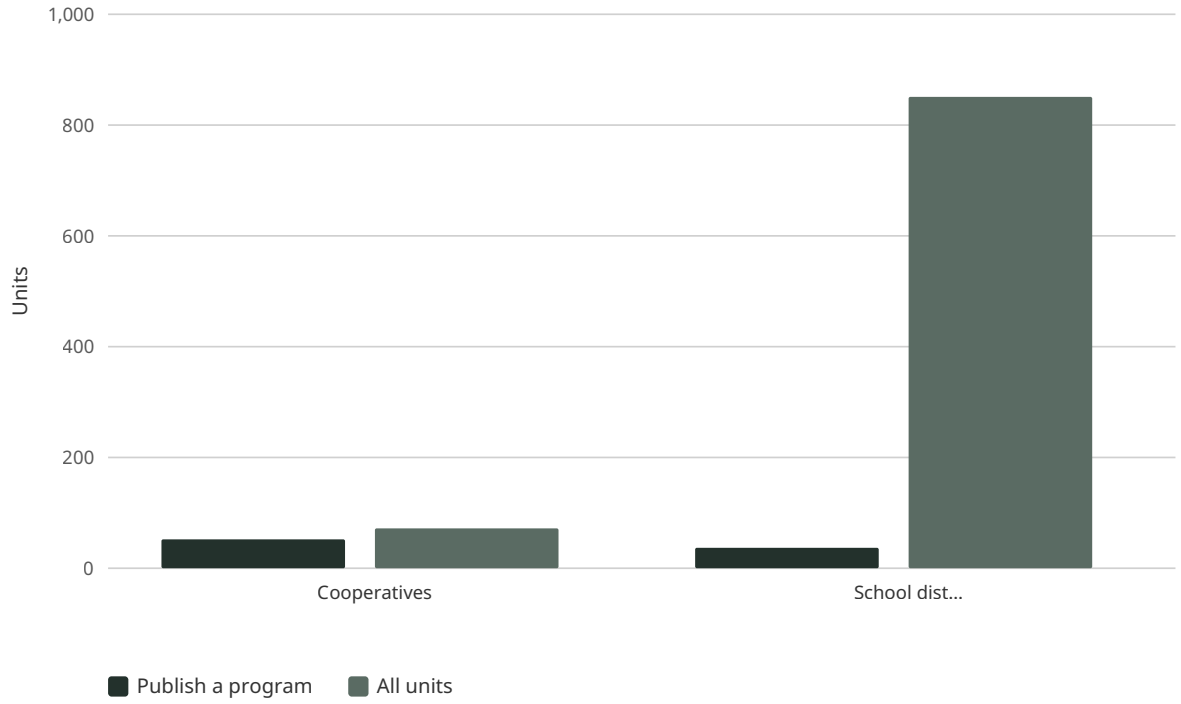
Most deaf education in Illinois is not delivered by the state school or by districts. It is delivered by the 72 special education cooperatives and joint agreements that district boards form under 105 ILCS 5/10-22.31. Each has a state-approved director and a row in the State Board's directory, and districts pool their students and their money through them.

Fifty-two of the 72 publish deaf or hard of hearing capacity on their own pages, 38 of them with a described program: SASED, NSSEO, LADSE, Eisenhower, ECHO, BHASED, the Northwestern Illinois Association, Williamson County, Niles Township and others. The State Board's own enrollment report rows seven cooperative deaf and hard of hearing programs as serving schools with counts: Eisenhower 34, SASED 45, ECHO 27, NSSEO's Riley School 20, LADSE 16.5, BHASED 11.5. That is the first state instrument the Index has held that counts students in a cooperative program.

The cooperative pages are where Illinois's deaf education workforce becomes visible. NSSEO, in the northwest suburbs, lists "highly qualified teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing, interpreters, audiologists, ALD technician" and a Deaf and Hard of Hearing Diagnostic Team. Niles Township describes "four dually certified teachers (DHH and LBS I) along with ASL interpreters and sign language paraprofessionals." CASE, in east-central Illinois, lists 17 hearing itinerant teachers on its staff page. West Central names four teachers certified in hearing impairment and an audiologist. SWCCCASE houses its program "in age appropriate Public School classrooms for students ranging in age from 3 to 21 years." LADSE is the only cooperative that states the interpreter standard it applies: "All interpreters hold either an EIPA of 3.5 or above or an interpreter license for the state of Illinois as well as an ISBE endorsement."

Of the 851 districts, 37 publish capacity of their own. Chicago runs a deaf and hard of hearing program with teachers of the deaf and site-based clusters, though the map of where those clusters are is two page images with no text a screen reader can read. Rockford's program promises that "Every classroom has an ISBE licensed Teacher of the Deaf who is fluent in sign language," with one teacher to five students. Palatine assigns sign language interpreters "to children with a significant hearing loss."

Springfield has a deaf and hard of hearing team. Joliet's hearing itinerant teacher "can act as a student's sole case manager." Twenty of the 37 rest on a single staff title, a hearing itinerant or a DHH teacher on a directory, and carry the weak flag. Two hundred thirty-five districts mention hearing, usually in a screening schedule. Five hundred thirty-nine say nothing. Forty could not be read.




Illinois units publishing a deaf or hard of hearing program

Saib Cov Ntaub Ntawv

| Hom | Publish a program | All units |
|---|---|---|
| Cooperatives | 52 | 72 |
| School districts | 37 | 851 |

The pattern is clear and, under Illinois's design, it is not a failure. The cooperative is where the teachers of the deaf work. Eighty-one districts name a cooperative or an association as the way they deliver services. But a parent searching her own district's website would not know that, and the 37 districts that publish a program enroll

549,023 of the state's 1.84 million students, 29.9 percent, Chicago's 326,117 among them. The other seven in ten students attend districts that publish nothing a parent would recognize as deaf education.

## What a closer read changed

Illinois is a useful lesson in how much depends on how carefully anyone looks. Version 1.0 of the Index, released in August 2026, found 15 districts publishing a program. Version 2.0 found 37. Districts did not suddenly start publishing. Version 2.0 read every unit in a full browser, crawled up to seventeen pages per site and captured every page that matched, where version 1.0 had relied mostly on simpler text retrieval. Rockford's deaf and hard of hearing page and Joliet's hearing itinerant page are both pages the earlier read never reached.

In all, 227 rows changed. Most moved from NONE FOUND to MENTION, on screening schedules and eligibility lists the deeper crawl reached. Twenty-one moved to PROGRAM. A handful moved the other way, where hosts that answered in August had gone dark by November.

The closer read also surfaced problems in the state's own directory, which is the address book every parent, vendor and researcher starts from. Komarek School District 94's listed website now redirects to a lottery page. Belle Valley 119's address serves an unrelated spam page. Henry-Senachwine's address is mistyped and the mistyped domain is parked. Ohio 17 and Ohio 505 have their telephone numbers swapped. One hundred eighteen units have no website in the directory at all, and nineteen cooperatives are listed only at the website of the district that holds their money. None of this is about deaf education specifically. All of it determines whether a parent who goes looking can find anything.

## Total communication in public, spoken language in private

Illinois's public pathway is, by the operators' own descriptions, total communication. Chicago's program states it in full: "Classroom instruction is presented through total communication as determined by the student's IEP. Total communication uses all means of communication, such as formal sign language, sign language provided through licensed interpreters, natural gestures, fingerspelling, speechreading, listening and speech." The Northwestern Illinois Association builds its program "on a

Total Communication philosophy." Williamson County "maintains a total communication philosophy." SASED runs total communication and auditory oral classrooms side by side.

The listening and spoken language pathway is private. Child's Voice in Wood Dale has been "teaching children who are deaf or hard of hearing to listen and speak since 1996." It reports 140 families in its early intervention program in 2024 and 244 graduates since it opened. The Carle Auditory Oral School in Urbana enrolls deaf and hearing children together and aligns its content with the Illinois Early Learning Standards. Both are members of OPTION, the association of listening and spoken language schools. The Alexander Graham Bell Montessori School in Wheeling teaches through cued speech, with "Cue College" and "Learning Cued Speech" in its navigation. Four out-of-state schools are on the approved list too: the Central Institute for the Deaf and the Moog Center in St. Louis, the American School for the Deaf in Connecticut and the National Deaf Academy in Florida. The State Board's report prints each at under 10 Illinois students.

The approved list has its own oddity. The Center on Deafness in Northbrook stands on it as an approved nonpublic operating agency. Its own site describes services "dedicated to serving all adult individuals with disabilities," with day services, a residential program and sign language classes, and no school program on any page read. The Index sent it notice so it can correct that reading if the reading is wrong.

A district that places a child at one of the approved schools pays actual tuition or $4,500, whichever is less, under 14-7.02, and the State Board reimburses the rest from the private tuition line. That channel reaches the private schools. It does not reach the state school, which is paid for, invisibly, by Human Services. No state document in the record ranks or chooses between the pathways. The choice is made one child at a time, at a home district's IEP meeting, with the 14-8.02 letter on the table.

## The count that does not exist

Illinois publishes almost nothing about how many deaf children it has. The State Board's reports page lists fall enrollment, class size, educator supply and support personnel reports, and no IDEA child count. The Fall Enrollment Report prints an IEP count by school and district and no disability category. So every district row in the

Index's file reads NOT PUBLISHED, and the measure the Index uses to compare publication against population cannot be computed.

The federal file is the only count. It found 2,452 school-age Illinois children with hearing impairment in fall 2024 and 230 in early childhood, 2,682 in all, and 39 with deaf-blindness. Hearing impairment is 0.86 percent of Illinois's federal special education count and about 1.45 for every 1,000 students enrolled. Version 1.0 held the 2019-20 federal file, which counted 2,845 school-age children.



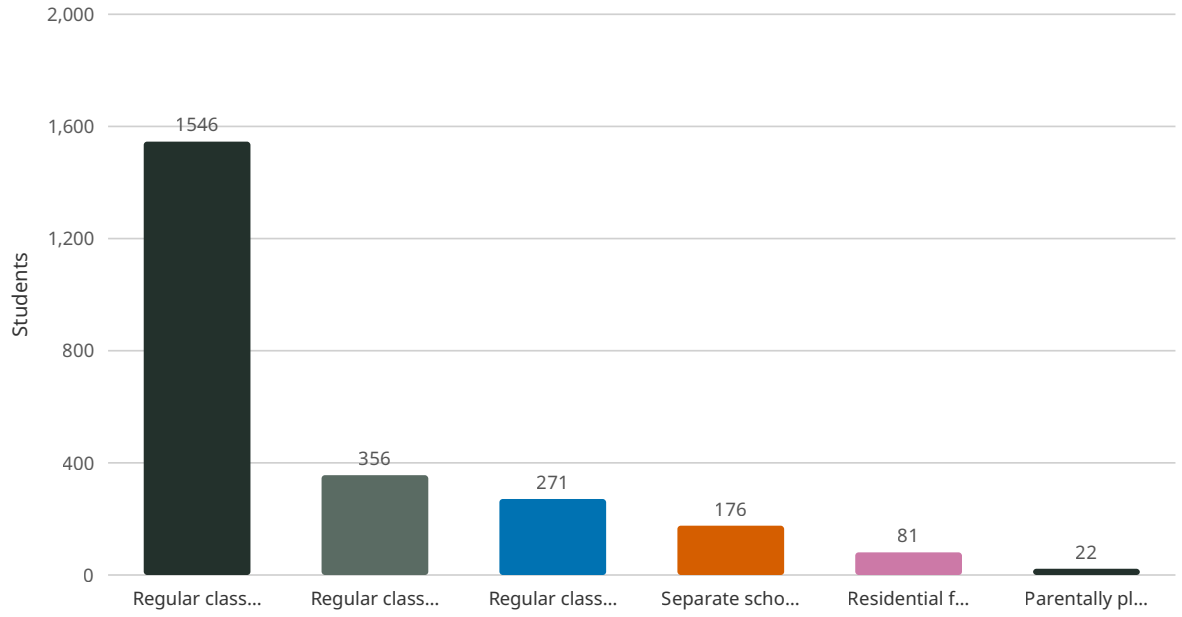

Illinois children with hearing impairment, federal count

Saib Cov Ntaub Ntawv

| Hom (Category) | Menyuam Yaus |
|---|---|
| Fall 2019 (school age) | 2845 |
| Fall 2024 (school age) | 2452 |

The federal file also shows where those children learn, which the state does not publish by category. Of the 2,452 school-age students, 1,546, or 63.1 percent, spend

80 percent or more of the day in a regular classroom. Three hundred fifty-six spend 40 to 79 percent there, and 271 less than 40 percent. One hundred seventy-six, 7.2 percent, attend a separate school and 81, 3.3 percent, a residential facility. Twenty-two were placed by their parents in private schools.




Where Illinois's school-age students with hearing impairment are taught, fall 2024

Saib Cov Ntaub Ntawv

| Hom (Category) | Students |
|---|---|
| Regular class 80% or more of the day | 1546 |
| Regular class 40 to 79% | 356 |
| Regular class less than 40% | 271 |
| Separate school | 176 |
| Residential facility | 81 |
| Parentally placed in private school | 22 |

The State Board collects the category by district every year to file that federal report. It publishes the result only in the federal aggregate. If it released the same count by district, Illinois's publication picture could be measured for the first time, and a parent could see whether her district serves two deaf students or twenty.

## A baby in Illinois

Illinois has required hospitals to screen every newborn's hearing in both ears since screening began on 31 December 2002. The Department of Public Health says "about 98% of babies born in Illinois hospitals get a hearing screen shortly after birth," and publishes the 1-3-6 goals: screening by one month, identification by three, intervention by six. It publishes no Illinois figures for any of the three. The program is described as a collaboration among Public Health, the Human Services early intervention program and the University of Illinois at Chicago's Division of Specialized Care for Children, which means a baby who fails a screen passes through three agencies before anyone counts her.

Early intervention runs through the Department of Human Services' Bureau of Early Intervention, funded "in small part" by the federal grant and in bulk by state general revenue and Medicaid, with "a participation fee" for families who can pay. Its statute lists "sign language and cued language services" among the services a family can receive. No count by hearing status and no list of providers who specialize in deaf babies appears on the pages read. The deaf school's own Parent Infant Program served 63 children in fiscal 2024. How many deaf and hard of hearing babies the statewide system serves is not published.

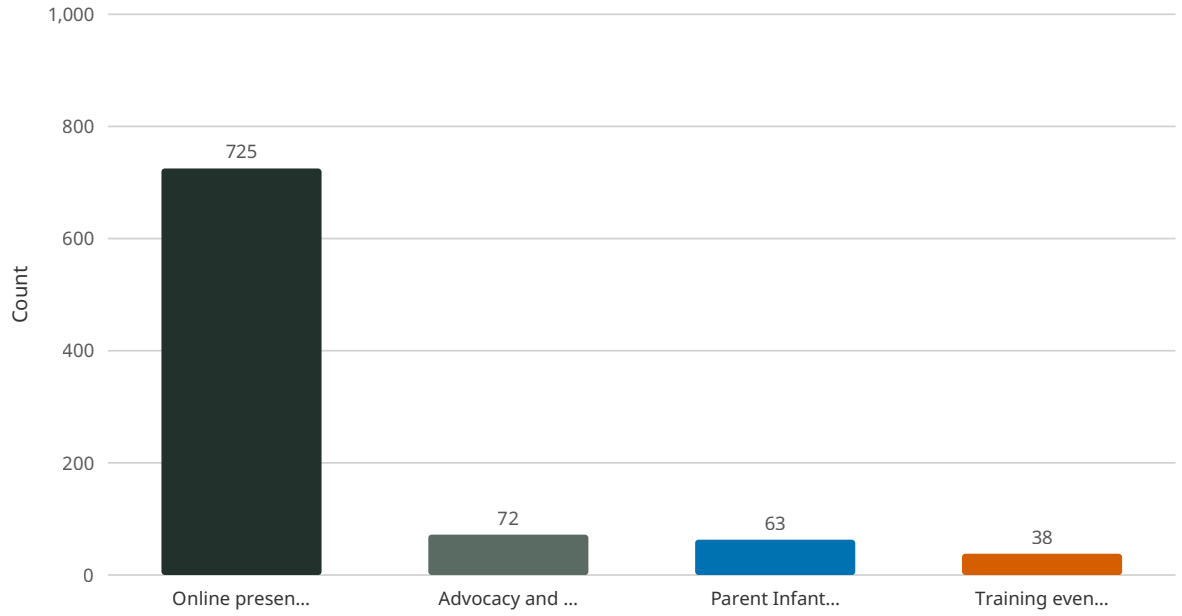
Between the screening and the services sits Illinois Hands & Voices, which runs Guide By Your Side and Illinois Sound Beginnings, "a collaboration between IL Hands & Voices and IL EHDI," pairing new families with parent guides and deaf and hard of hearing adult guides. Its line to families is simple: "What works for your child is what makes the choice right." For a hearing family meeting a deaf adult for the first time, that program may do more than any page the state publishes.

The deafblind count is wide, as everywhere. The Illinois DeafBlind Project counted 221 children on 1 December 2024 and 246 served, from infants through young adults. The federal category counts 39. The gap is not an error in either. The federal file counts each child under one primary disability, and many deafblind children are

reported under another category, often multiple disabilities. But it means the state's own federal report undercounts deafblind children by a factor of about six.

## The outreach office and its numbers

The Illinois School for the Deaf runs an Outreach and Advocacy office whose mission is "to passionately support families, programs, and services for children who are deaf or hard of hearing, throughout Illinois." It offers "individual consultations and advocacy support statewide for children who are deaf/hard of hearing (birth to 21)" and keeps a mailing list of "1800+ parents, professionals, and community members." It publishes seven services, from training and technical assistance to regional parent conferences, cochlear implant support and special education advocacy. The Department of Human Services' report counts its fiscal 2024 work: 38 training events, 725 people at online presentations and conferences, and 72 advocacy and consultation sessions.




Illinois School for the Deaf outreach, fiscal 2024

Saib Cov Ntaub Ntawv

| Hom (Category) | Suav |
|---|---|
| Online presentation and conference participants | 725 |
| Advocacy and consultation sessions | 72 |
| Parent Infant Program children | 63 |
| Training events | 38 |

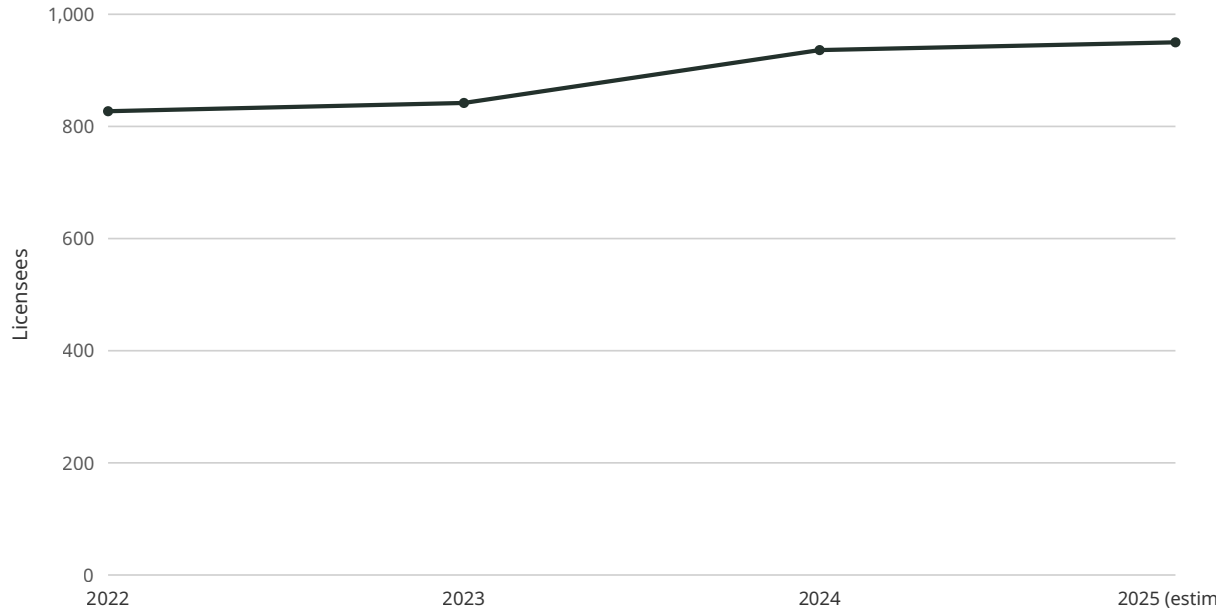
The Index's interpretation, marked as such: the office is real and active, but at that scale it is a consulting service, not a staff that reaches every deaf child. Seventy-two consultation sessions in a year, against 2,682 children on the federal count, is roughly one session for every 37 children. The daily work belongs to the cooperatives and districts, and to the education department's Illinois Service Resource Center, which offers "free training, onsite assistance and resources" to parents and educators through a tiered support model. Illinois has two statewide support offices for deaf

students in two departments, and no public document that says how they divide the work.

## Interpreters, teachers and the pipeline

Illinois does have one clear standard, and it is worth noting because so many states lack one. Section 25.550 of the State Board's rules approves an educational interpreter who scores EIPA 3.5 or above, holds national registry certification, or holds a BEI Basic certificate or higher, with a one-time interim approval at EIPA 3.0. Approval lasts five years and renews with 50 clock hours. The Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission, which licenses interpreters generally, says plainly that its licensees without a State Board approval "are not appropriately credentialed to interpret in public school settings."

The Commission's budget book counts 827 licensees in fiscal 2022, 842 in 2023, 936 in 2024 and an estimated 950 in 2025. It attributes the fiscal 2023 drop in interpreter tests taken to the closure of two interpreter training programs. Its 2025 statistical report counts 113 applications for a new license, 109 issued. The Commission itself is small: eleven commissioners, a staff of seven and a fiscal 2025 appropriation of $908,700.




Licensed interpreters in Illinois (fiscal years)

Saib Cov Ntaub Ntawv

| X | Cov Tau Tso Cai |
|---|---|
| 2022 | 827 |
| 2023 | 842 |
| 2024 | 936 |
| 2025 (estimated) | 950 |

The training pipeline is thinner than the licensee count suggests. On the Commission's own list, interpreter programs run at the College of DuPage, Illinois Central College, Moraine Valley and Southwestern Illinois College. Columbia College Chicago is no longer accepting students and closes its program in December 2027. Harper, John A. Logan and Waubonsee have suspended theirs. MacMurray College, which also trained teachers of the deaf in Jacksonville itself, closed in 2020. Quincy and Richland have closed too. The general licensing law, the Interpreter for the Deaf

Licensure Act of 2007, carries a scheduled repeal date of 1 January 2028 on every section.

Teachers of the deaf hold a specific endorsement on the state license, Teacher of Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, with a separate deaf-blind specialist credential and a short-term emergency approval that requires coursework in audiology, language and literacy and evidence of sign language proficiency. Illinois State University offers an undergraduate sequence and a fully online master's degree for licensed teachers. What no one counts is how many teachers of the deaf Illinois employs. The federal personnel file for 2023-24 prints 237 school interpreters, 225 of them fully certified, and 41.23 audiologists, but has no teacher-of-the-deaf category. The State Board's support personnel report counts 30,676 endorsed staff with no interpreter, audiologist or teacher-of-the-deaf column. Its latest educator supply and demand report lists no deaf or hard of hearing shortage area. The only public record of Illinois's deaf education workforce is the scatter of staff names on cooperative websites.

## An audit that stopped in 2010

The Auditor General's page for the Illinois School for the Deaf lists one review: a limited scope compliance examination for the period ending 30 June 2009, released 29 June 2010. Nothing since.

The school sits inside the Department of Human Services, and the Auditor General has examined that department. Its compliance examination for the two years ended 30 June 2023, released in May 2025, carried 32 findings and an adverse opinion. It does not name the school. Neither does the department's financial audit for the year ended 30 June 2024, released in February 2026. The examination covering fiscal 2025 had not been released on the dates the Index read. No audit of any district's or cooperative's deaf program exists in the public record either.

The Index's interpretation, marked as such. A state school that sits inside a large welfare department, with no budget line of its own, has gone sixteen years without an audit that names it. That is not evidence of any problem at the school. It is evidence that no one outside the school has publicly looked, and the structure makes that easy. An auditor working through a department with 32 findings has no line item to pull on.

## A market that came and went

Illinois briefly had a tax credit scholarship. Invest in Kids allowed credits only for tax years beginning before 1 January 2024 and repealed itself on 1 January 2025. No successor appears in the fiscal 2025 budget. Illinois is the first state in the series whose school choice program dissolved, and in its years of operation no report of participation by disability category was ever located.

The Chicago Hearing Society, outside government, offers interpreting, audiology, a Deaf Mentor Program and school support. One district, Woodstock, names it on a resources page.

## Questions Illinois is positioned to answer

1. What does the Department of Human Services spend each year to operate the Illinois School for the Deaf? Will it appear as its own line in the fiscal 2027 budget?
2. How many students attend the school on a single, published count, and how many are residential?
3. How many students with hearing impairment does each district and cooperative serve? The State Board collects the category for federal reporting and could publish it.
4. Who operates the Philip J. Rock Center and School, the State Board or Lombard District 44, and where are its audited statements?
5. Which cooperatives serve which districts for deaf and hard of hearing students?
6. How many teachers of the deaf and approved educational interpreters work in Illinois schools today?
7. What will replace the Interpreter for the Deaf Licensure Act when it repeals in 2028?
8. What does the 14-8.02 notice actually tell families, and does anyone check that districts send it?
9. When will the Auditor General next examine the Illinois School for the Deaf by name?

Go back to the father in Marion. The law guarantees him a letter about a school three hours away. It does not guarantee him a number. His district may well send his son to a Williamson County cooperative program with a total communication classroom, and the cooperative's website will tell him more than his district's ever will. But if he wants to compare that program with the state school his letter describes, he will find that Illinois cannot tell him how many children attend the school, what it costs, who last checked its books, or which department to ask. The state wrote him a notice. It has not written itself one.

The full Illinois file covers all 942 rows, each 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.

**TIPS**

Know something about a sign language AI system that the public should know? Send it to tips@novaracg.com. Every tip is read by me and kept confidential. If you work in the UK, writing to us is not by itself a protected disclosure under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, so before you share employer information, check your options with Protect (protect-advice.org.uk), the free whistleblowing advice line.

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Grizzle, H. M. (2026, November 16). Illinois Runs Its Deaf School From the Human Services Department. The Budget Has No Line for It.. Novara Consulting Group. https://www.novaracg.com/hmn/2026/11/16/illinois-runs-its-deaf-school-from-the-human-services-department-the-budget-has-no-line-for-it/