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Il Delaware mantiene la sua scuola per Deaf all'interno di un unico distretto locale, e nessun documento pubblico dice quanto costa

Heather Grizzle · September 5, 2026

Delaware keeps its only school for deaf children inside one local district. No public document says what that arrangement costs. NDEDI's Delaware file.

What the Delaware state file in the National Deaf Education Data Index found…

Il Delaware doveva essere il caso facile. Diciannove distretti scolastici, ventidue agenzie charter, una scuola per bambini sordi, e uno stato abbastanza piccolo che una famiglia di Selbyville può recarsi in auto all'unica scuola per sordi dello stato e tornare nel giro di un pomeriggio. Quando ho costruito il fascicolo del Delaware per il National Deaf Education Data Index ad agosto, mi aspettavo un profilo breve. Il fascicolo ha invece prodotto l'assetto di governance più insolito tra gli otto stati esaminati finora, un modello di finanziamento che nessun documento pubblicato quantifica, e un reclamo federale per i diritti civili tuttora aperto il cui numero centrale nessuno, nemmeno lo stato, è in grado di verificare.

L'Index è un progetto di riferimento su cinquantuno giurisdizioni che documenta, esclusivamente da fonti primarie, dove vengono istruiti gli studenti sordi e ipoudenti, quali fondi pubblici li seguono e quale apparato istituzionale governa l'offerta formativa. Tutte le quarantuno agenzie educative locali del Delaware sono state sottoposte a verifica, ogni dato sottostante è riconducibile a una fonte pubblica nominata, e dove il fascicolo taceva, il documento lo dichiara invece di colmare il vuoto. Questa disciplina è stata più rilevante in Delaware che in qualunque stato precedente.

Una scuola statale che appartiene a un distretto

The Delaware School for the Deaf in Newark is a public residential school with a statutory basis, state-funded staff positions, and accreditation from the Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf. It is also a school of the Christina School District, one of Delaware's nineteen local districts, and so is Statewide Programs for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deaf-Blind, the umbrella that serves deaf children in the other forty agencies. Where Alabama runs its deaf school through a state agency and Connecticut buys places at a private one, Delaware keeps a public school and places the whole apparatus inside one local district.

Lo statuto in vigore, 14 Del. C. § 1331, si legge come un piano organico del personale piuttosto che come uno statuto istitutivo. Stabilisce i rapporti per insegnanti di sostegno, tutor interpreti, specialisti di alfabetizzazione e consulenti residenziali, li dichiara tutti posizioni di unità statale, e non menziona mai Christina. Non è stata individuata alcuna disposizione del Title 14 che assegni la scuola a un distretto, quindi l'assegnazione sembra fondarsi sulla prassi amministrativa piuttosto che su una legge espressa. Non è un punto accademico. Il 1° gennaio 2023 l'Assemblea Generale ha utilizzato il linguaggio dell'epilogo di bilancio per trasferire l'Office of Statewide Autism Programs fuori da Christina e dentro il Department of Education. Il meccanismo per scorporare un programma statale dal distretto esiste, è stato usato negli ultimi quattro anni, e i programmi per sordi, ipoudenti e sordo-ciechi sono gli unici ancora rimasti lì.

Denaro che fluisce attraverso tre canali e non appare in nessuno

Christina's own budget documents describe the school as one of three programmes for which the district is fiscal agent and state that they "are all partially state funded with the remainder coming from tuition billing." The state's share arrives through the ordinary unit count. In the certified 2025-26 count the school carries 105 students generating 40.38 units, every one of them in the complex special education unit and none in preschool, basic or intensive. The remainder arrives as bills. Delaware law lets a receiving district charge tuition for a nonresident pupil counted in the complex unit, and because every student at the school is a complex-unit student, every one of them is billable to the district or charter where the family lives. Those sending agencies pay from a local tuition tax that each board may levy without a referendum.

The consequence is that no state budget document isolates a dollar figure for the Delaware School for the Deaf. The Governor's FY2026 recommended budget itemises no district and no statewide programme. No per-pupil tuition rate is published, and no document states whether charters are billed on the same basis as districts or whether

families pay anything for the residential programme. Capital is the one clean case: the State Auditor's records show roughly thirty-nine million dollars in state construction appropriations between 2007 and 2010. Operating cost is invisible.

I want to be precise about what that does and does not mean. A legislator, a parent, an advocate or an auditor asking what Delaware spends on deaf education cannot answer the question from published sources. That is not evidence of anything improper. It is evidence that the school's finances are structurally hidden by the design of the funding, which is a more durable problem than any particular funding level would be. One illustration: a court-ordered property reassessment in New Castle County forced Christina to reset its tuition tax rate from $0.8903 to $0.1981 per hundred dollars of assessed value, and that levy is the one from which tuition billing is paid. A county reassessment reaches, three steps removed, the local tax that helps fund the state's only school for deaf children.

Quaranta agenzie, un solo nome

Delaware has no listening and spoken language educational placement. There are no OPTION Schools members, no auditory-oral school, and no auditory-verbal track anywhere in the state; the only such service is clinical, inside the cochlear implant programme at Nemours Children's Health. Christina therefore holds both ends of the pathway. What it does not hold is the day-to-day instruction of mainstreamed deaf children. Its outreach arm describes itself as a provider of "technical assistance, coaching, and professional development," and its service list is addressed to district staff rather than to students, asking districts whether their assessment teams understand hearing loss and whether they have "the time and training" to evaluate their own deaf education staff.

That last question presumes districts have deaf education staff to evaluate. Of forty-one local education agencies, exactly one names the Delaware School for the Deaf, Statewide Programs, or Christina anywhere on its public website, and that one is Christina. Two agencies met the threshold for a coded programme: Christina, the operator, and Appoquinimink, the state's largest district, whose entire published hearing provision is one bullet in a related services list reading "itinerant services for the hard of hearing, partially deaf (HHPD)." Fourteen agencies mention hearing only in passing. Twenty-four publish nothing at all. One, a Dover charter whose every web domain has failed, could not be read by any method. No Delaware agency outside Christina publishes the title of a teacher of the deaf, an educational interpreter or an edu-

cational audiologist. Publication is not the same as service, and the Index says so in every workbook. But a service designed to build district capacity is operating in a state where no district discloses any.

Il numero al centro di un reclamo per i diritti civili che nessuno può verificare

In December 2023 the ACLU of Delaware filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights alleging systemic discrimination against deaf and hard of hearing youth. Its headline claim was quantitative: nationally about nine per cent of deaf and hard of hearing children attend a school for the deaf, and in Delaware the figure is over forty. The director of Statewide Programs said she was "not sure where they got the 40% number." Members of the deaf community objected to the complaint as well, the ACLU filed a narrowed version in June 2024 with an apology, and no public outcome has been located.

Here is what the state's own record can contribute. The Department of Education's last child count broken out by disability category is for 2017-18. It recorded 201 students aged six to twenty-one in the hearing impairment category, of whom 113 spent most of the school day in a regular class and 56 were in a separate school, a share of 27.9 per cent. Nothing comparable has been published since. Current educational environment files disaggregate by age and by race and never by disability category, and the state's otherwise excellent open data portal carries a single binary disability flag. As of 2024-25 there is no published Delaware source from which anyone can determine where the state's deaf and hard of hearing students are educated.

The 27.9 per cent figure and the forty per cent figure are not the same measure, and the file does not pretend they are. The complaint appears to describe all deaf and hard of hearing children, including those under five, where the school's share would be much higher. But the point holds whichever number is closer to right. A state facing a federal complaint about placement rates stopped publishing placement rates by disability category several years before the complaint was filed. I found no evidence the two facts are connected, and the second is almost certainly a reporting simplification. The effect is identical either way: the central factual question in the dispute cannot be resolved from Delaware's published data by the complainant, the respondent, or anyone else.

Cos'altro ha corretto il fascicolo

Two smaller findings are worth carrying forward. Delaware was believed to have passed a LEAD-K style language milestones law between 2017 and 2019. It did not. The nearest instrument is the 2010 Deaf Children's Bill of Rights, which guarantees that no child is denied instruction in a communication mode solely because another is used, but creates no assessment tool and no advisory body. This is the third consecutive state in the series whose believed LEAD-K provision dissolved on inspection. And Delaware's educational interpreter standard is unusually strict, requiring an EIPA score of 4.0 with no provisional tier where many states accept 3.5, yet the state has no general interpreter licensure at all, and a 2022 bill to create one died in committee.

Cosa non è stato possibile stabilire nel fascicolo

Il costo in dollari della scuola in un dato anno. La tariffa della retta addebitata alle agenzie mittenti. Se il personale di Christina insegni a studenti iscritti altrove o si limiti a consigliare i loro insegnanti. Lo strumento, se esiste, che assegna la scuola a Christina. I dati attuali sul collocamento per categoria di disabilità. Il rapporto del 2014 della Deaf Education Task Force, l'ultimo esame statale sull'argomento, che non è stato possibile reperire online. Ciascuno di questi punti è registrato come lacuna anziché colmato, e diversi potrebbero essere chiusi tramite una richiesta di accesso ai documenti.

Il Delaware è l'ottavo stato dell'Index e l'ottavo a dimostrare che non esiste una norma nazionale su come uno stato istruisca i bambini sordi. Ciò che aggiunge è una lezione specifica sulla visibilità. Una scuola può essere pubblica, statutaria, accreditata e stabile nelle iscrizioni, e tuttavia risultare impossibile da rintracciare in un bilancio o in un insieme di dati sul collocamento. L'Index esiste per rendere leggibile questo tipo di assenza, uno stato alla volta.

> **TIPS**
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> 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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