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Indiana Cut Every Deaf and Blind Services Line by Exactly Five Percent. The Disability Scholarship Was Not Cut.

Heather Grizzle · November 28, 2026

Indiana's 2025 budget cut every deaf and blind services line 5 percent while its $10M disability ESA held flat. Deaf counts stay in a statewide memo.

Waxyaabaha ku jira

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In the spring of 2025, a teacher at the Indiana School for the Deaf in Indianapolis learns that her job is one of 26 being cut. By press accounts at the time, nine teachers go, along with the overnight nurse, the school's outside interpreter contracts and five days of pay through furloughs. The Legislature has cut the school's operating budget

by five percent for each of the next two years. Across town, the Treasurer of State's office is getting ready to hand its education savings account program for students with disabilities to the Department of Education. That program's budget, $10 million a year, was not cut at all.

She is a composite. The arithmetic is not. Version 2.0 of the National Deaf Education Data Index read Indiana's budget data line by line and found that every deaf and blind services line in the state budget fell by 5.00 percent for fiscal 2026 and 2027, exact to the dollar, while the disability scholarship held flat. It is a small number with a clear meaning, and it sits inside a state that has split its deaf education across three departments on three different logics.

SI KOOBAN

- The Indiana School for the Deaf, founded in 1843 by William Willard, a Deaf teacher, had 311 students in 2024-25 and $18.4 million in state funding for the year. It sits outside the Department of Education under its own governor-appointed board.
- The state's 2025 budget cut the school, the blind school, the state's deaf education center and the adult deaf services office by 5.00 percent each year. The $10 million education savings account for students with disabilities was not cut.
- Indiana appropriates $2 million a year for auditory-verbal preschool. No line funds sign language instruction.
- Indiana counted 2,295 deaf or hard of hearing students in December 2024, but only statewide, in a memo to the State Board. No state publication places them in a district.
- Of 461 school corporations, charters, cooperatives and state units read, 28 publish deaf or hard of hearing capacity. None of 136 charters does.

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 Indiana, version 2.0 of the state file read 461 units on 23 and 24 October 2026: 290 school corporations, 136 charter schools, special education cooperatives, education service centers and state-run units. Budget data, child count memoranda, the special education rules and the scholarship reports were read as original documents.

Each unit receives one code. PROGRAM means the unit publishes something specific to deaf and hard of hearing students: a named program, a service, or a named post such as a teacher of the deaf. A PROGRAM row resting on a single staff line or job posting 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. Thirteen units could not be read.

The codes measure publication, not service. In Indiana, many cooperatives that employ teachers of the deaf have no website of their own. 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.

Founded by a Deaf teacher

The Indiana School for the Deaf dates itself to 1843 and to William Willard, "the first Deaf person in American to establish a state school for Deaf people," as its page puts it. It is the first state school in the Index's series founded by a Deaf person. It sits on "a sprawling 80-acre campus in the heart of Indianapolis," calls itself "a tuition-free state public school," and uses "the term Deaf inclusively as a term to include Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind, DeafDisabled and Late-Deafened children." Its admissions page leads with a principle: "Every Deaf Child needs access to Language - Bilingual Education." Its board meetings are "conducted in American Sign Language (ASL) and English."

By statute, IC 20-22-2-1, the school is "a state educational resources center" with "a residential and day school." A seven-member board appointed by the governor runs it,

and the statute requires seats for a parent, a former student and a local special education representative. It sits outside the Department of Education, which only passes its budget request along.

The Department's enrollment workbook counts 311 students for 2024-25 and 303 for 2025-26. The school's own page says "approximately 350 students enrolled on campus," undated. The same page also carries two accreditation statements, one naming Cognia and one naming AdvancED, Cognia's former name. The Index records both.

Three departments, three logics

Indiana's deaf education runs on three separate tracks.

The school is the first. The second is the Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education, created in the education title of the code at IC 20-35-11 but housed in the Department of Health since it opened on 1 July 2013. It "serves all Indiana deaf and hard of hearing children ages birth until they leave school," runs the state's language milestones law, and must carry out its duties "in an unbiased manner ... regardless of the mode of communication used." It is barred from direct therapy "Except for deaf mentor services, audiology services, and interpreter services."

That arrangement has a quiet consequence. The school's founding statute gave it outreach and consultative services "until the center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing education is established and operating." The center has been operating for thirteen years. By the statute's own terms, the school's outreach role has lapsed to a health department office. The blind school's statute keeps its outreach unconditionally.

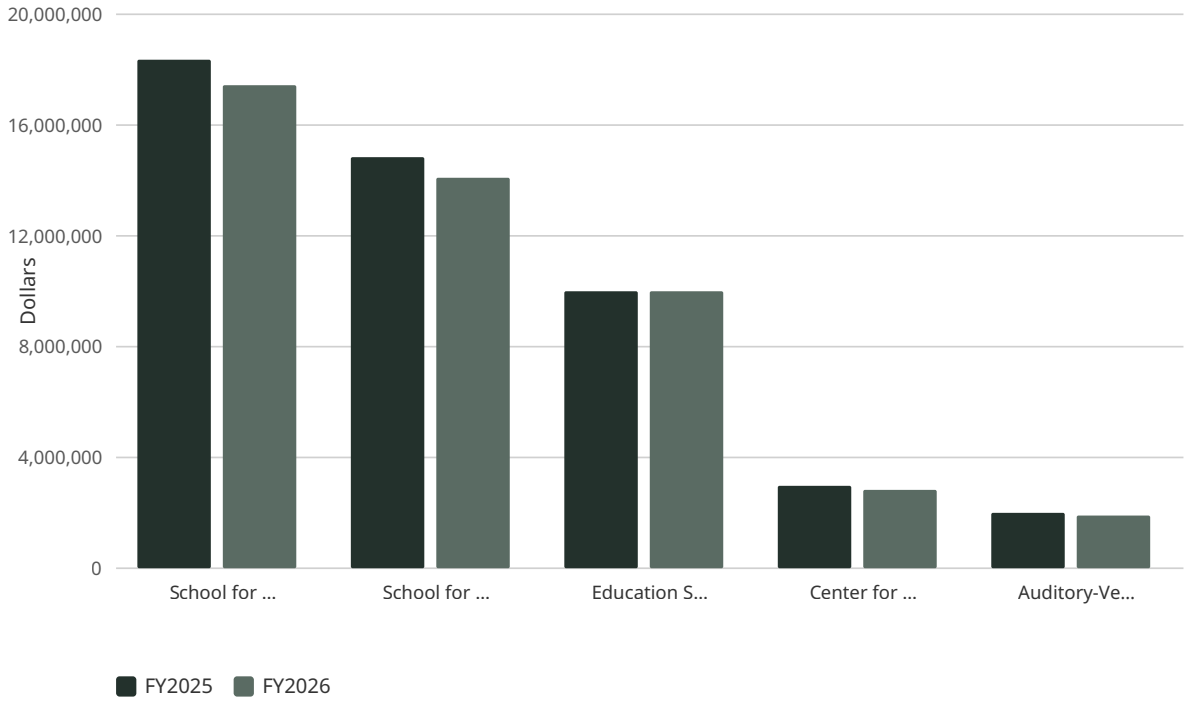
The third track is the market. For the reference year, the Indiana Education Scholarship Account for students with disabilities answered to the Treasurer of State. From 1 July 2026 it moves to the Department of Education.

The five percent

Indiana's budget data makes the priorities legible. For fiscal 2025, the State Budget Agency's as-passed detail appropriates $18,357,483 to the deaf school, $14,841,681 to the blind school, $2,977,538 to the Center, $2,000,000 to the Auditory-Verbal Accelerated Education Program, $271,262 to the Family and Social Services

Administration's deaf and hard of hearing services unit, and $10,000,000 to the education scholarship account.

Then the 2025 budget, HEA 1001-2025, cut every one of the deaf and blind services lines by 5.00 percent for fiscal 2026 and 2027. The deaf school went to $17,439,609. The Center went to $2,828,661. The auditory-verbal program went to $1,900,000. The adult services unit went to $257,699. The scholarship account stayed at $10,000,000.



Indiana deaf and blind services lines, FY2025 vs FY2026

Fiiri xogta

Line	FY2025	FY2026
School for the Deaf	18,357,483	17,439,609
School for the Blind	14,841,681	14,099,597
Education Scholarship Account	10,000,000	10,000,000
Center for DHH Education	2,977,538	2,828,661
Auditory-Verbal program	2,000,000	1,900,000

The Index records both trajectories and infers nothing from them. A reader can draw their own question. In the same budget, the state reduced every public deaf and blind service it funds by name and kept whole the program that pays families to leave public schools. Meanwhile the deaf and blind schools are building a shared campus on College Avenue, with a move planned for Summer 2028.

A method with its own line

Indiana pays for one communication approach directly. The Auditory-Verbal Accelerated Education Program carried $2 million in fiscal 2025, a General Fund line for preschool that teaches deaf children to listen and speak. The Index found no state line that funds sign language instruction.

The Center's statute requires it to support "the full continuum of communication options" without bias. The appropriation behind the continuum does not.

INDIANA'S NAMED LINES FOR YOUNG DEAF CHILDREN, FY2025

$2.0M
Auditory-Verbal Accelerated Education Program

$0
state line for ASL instruction

$2.98M
Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education, all ages

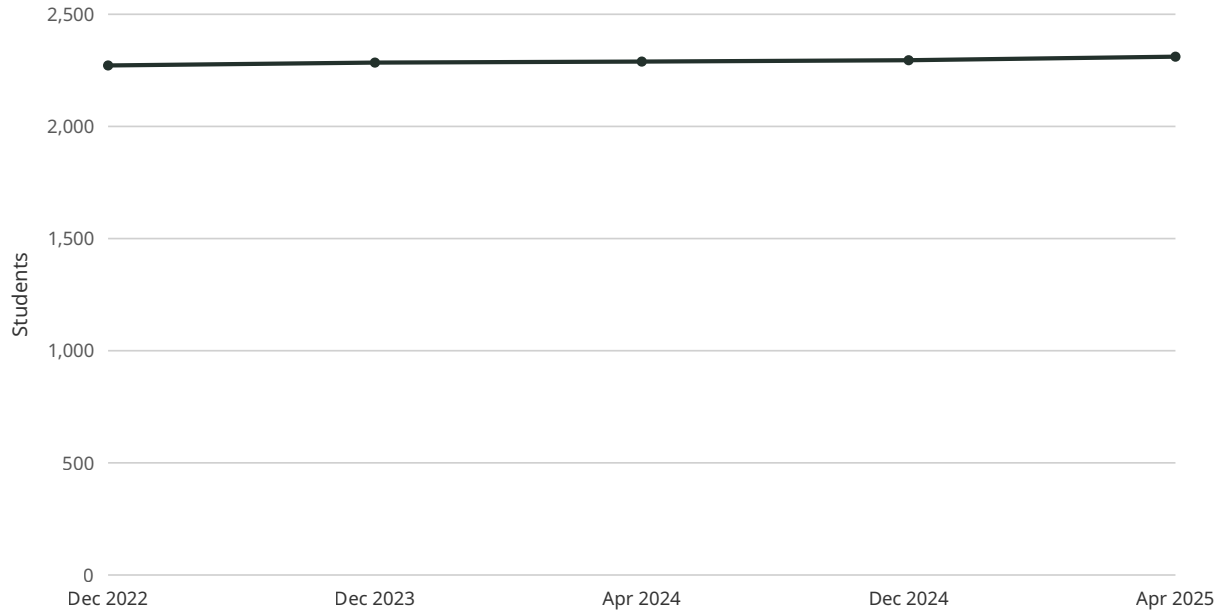
5.00%
cut to every deaf and blind services line, FY2026

Source: State Budget Agency, as-passed detailed budget data, HEA 1001-2023

The count that stays in a memo

Indiana publishes its child count by disability in one place: memoranda to the State Board of Education. The reference-year memo, found on the Board's February 2025 meeting page rather than the Department's data pages, counts 2,295 deaf or hard of hearing students aged 5 through 22 as of 2 December 2024, and 223 aged 3 to 5. It counts 33 deafblind students. The federal file for fall 2024 counts 2,270 school-age students with hearing impairment and 232 in early childhood. The two use different age bands and dates.

The series is flat to rising: 2,272 in December 2022, 2,285 in December 2023, 2,295 in December 2024 and 2,311 in April 2025.



Indiana deaf or hard of hearing students, ages 5 to 22

Fiiri xogta

X	Students
Dec 2022	2,272
Dec 2023	2,285
Apr 2024	2,289
Dec 2024	2,295
Apr 2025	2,311

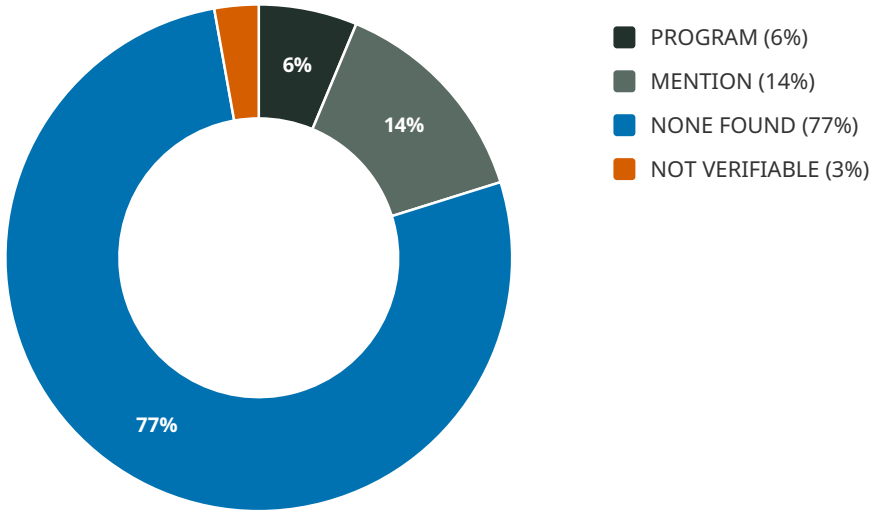
No instrument places those students in a corporation. The memoranda are statewide totals. The Department's special education data workbooks carry no category by district. So the Index's publication measure cannot be computed for Indiana.

Cooperatives without websites

Below the state layer, every Indiana corporation and charter belongs to a special education planning district. Most are cooperatives of several corporations, hosted inside one fiscal agent corporation, and most of those cooperatives have no website of their own. That hosting structure is why the public map of deaf education in Indiana looks so thin.

Of the eleven cooperatives in the directory with their own websites, six publish deaf or hard of hearing capacity, every one on a position or a service line. Old National Trail says "The Interlocal employs teachers of low-incident eligibility categories such as Deaf/Hard of Hearing." Covered Bridge describes "itinerant teaching staff that consult and monitor programs for students with orthopedic impairments, hearing impairments and visual impairments." South Central Area lists a "Deaf/Hard of Hearing Teacher" and an "Interpreter" by title.

Twenty-two of 290 corporations publish their own. Seven describe a program or service. MSD Wayne Township offers deaf and hard of hearing services with sign language interpreters and listening and spoken language instruction. Westfield-Washington describes itinerant service by communication mode. Michigan City has a dedicated department page. Perry Township names a program with two teachers of record and their sites. MSD Warren Township describes a partnership with the state school. Fifteen more name only a teacher, an interpreter or a job posting. None of the 136 charter schools publishes anything.



Indiana's 461 units, by what they publish

Fiiri xogta

Qaybta	Unugyo
PROGRAM	29
MENTION	64
LAMA HELIN	355
MA XAQIIQSANAYN	13

There is another layer no corporation names. Hear Indiana, a nonprofit, sells "Itinerant Teacher of the Deaf (TOD) services through contracts with local education agencies." It is one of the ways small Indiana corporations get a teacher of the deaf. No corporation page the Index read says so.

Who is qualified

Indiana's special education rules, 511 IAC 7-36-2(d), say that people "who provide sign language transliteration and interpreting services must … be certified to interpret

in an educational setting," with no emergency or provisional waiver. The rule names no certifying body and no score. The state's community interpreter certification, run by the Family and Social Services Administration, is a separate instrument, and a 2025 law directed that agency to set interpreter standards "and an enforcement mechanism."

The federal personnel file for 2023-24 counts 141.7 full-time interpreters in Indiana schools and reports all of them qualified. It counts 19.6 audiologists. It also reports that 1,276.48 of Indiana's 4,074.33 special education teachers, 31.3 percent, are not fully certified. There is no teacher of the deaf category in the federal file, and Indiana publishes no count of its own.

The eligibility rule, 511 IAC 7-41-4, defines deaf or hard of hearing functionally and says students "may use: (A) spoken language; (B) sign language; or (C) a combination." There is no decibel threshold.

At birth

Indiana law requires that "every infant shall be given a physiologic hearing screening examination at the earliest feasible time," with a religious exemption only. The Center runs the follow-up and its statute requires quarterly aggregate data to be posted publicly. The deafblind count shows the familiar gap: 33 deafblind students on the state's December count, served alongside a statewide deafblind project that counts children by combined loss rather than by primary label.

A law that measures language, and what it found

In 2019 Indiana passed a law that measures deaf children's language. House Enrolled Act 1484, signed on 5 May 2019, created IDEAL, the Indiana Deaf Education and Assessments of Language program, and gave the state's Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education the job of running it. From 1 July 2020, approved assessment tools and a parent guide to "American Sign Language and English Language Milestones" were available for children with a diagnosed hearing loss "Through age 10," whether they had "an IEP, ISP, 504, or no services."

The structure is worth reading closely. Giving the assessments is permissive: the statute says the state "may administer," and parents can opt out. But submitting results and publishing an annual public report are mandatory. Parents choose which

language or mode is tracked. The result is a law that cannot force every deaf child to be assessed, but does force the state to say what it found among those who were.

What it found in fiscal 2025, on the Index's earlier reading of the report: 769 children with data, 839 language results and 537 literacy results. Half of the language results, 50 percent, fell below the average or expected range. Forty-five percent of the literacy results fell below grade level or expectations.

IDEAL, FISCAL 2025 REPORT

769
children with assessment data

50%
of language results below expected range

45%
of literacy results below grade or expectations

Source: Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education, IDEAL annual report (v1.0 reading)

That is uncommon in this series: a state publishing, by law, evidence that half of the deaf children it assessed are behind in language. It is also the context for the 2025

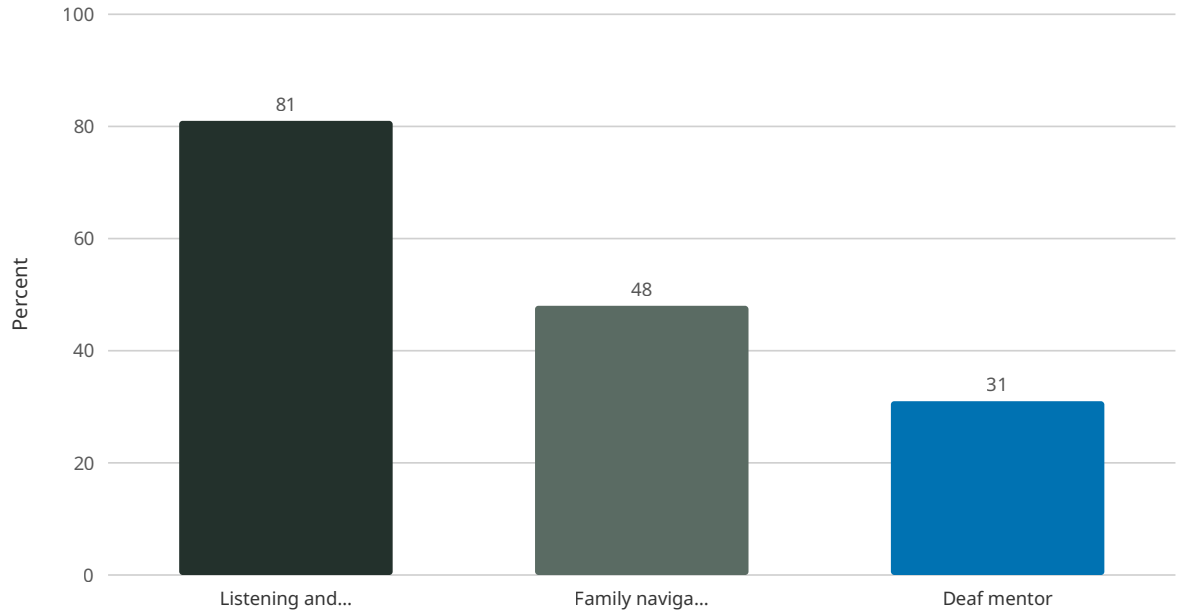


budget's cut to the Center that runs the program. The report is the reason the cut matters, and the cut is a reason to watch whether the next report comes out on time.

The Center's own caseload

The Center describes itself as serving "all Indiana deaf and hard of hearing children ages birth until they leave school," following children "as they grow (with parental permission)." It also runs a deaf-specific early intervention agency inside First Steps, the state's Part C program.

Its report for October to December 2025 counts 224 family service plans carrying its network's services. Of those, 81 percent included listening and spoken language services, 48 percent family navigator services and 31 percent deaf mentor services. In the same quarter it recorded 44 First Steps referrals, 66 general audiology appointments and 37 students seen on site in 13 school districts.



Services on the Center's 224 family plans, Oct-Dec 2025 (percent of plans)

Fiiri xogta

Qaybta	Percent
Listening and spoken language	81
Family navigator	48
Deaf mentor	31

The Center is required by law to be neutral across communication modes, and it publishes both ASL and English milestones. Its own early intervention caseload still runs heavily toward listening and spoken language. The Indiana School for the Deaf, by contrast, publishes a single bilingual ASL and English approach. A family's first years and its school years can be shaped by two state bodies that lean in different directions. The Index records the figures without interpreting them as a judgment on either.

Vouchers that count special education, but not deafness

Indiana runs the widest private school choice system in the Index's series, and its reports come closer than any other state's in the series to showing how children with disabilities use it.

The Choice Scholarship Program enrolled 76,067 students at 373 schools in 2024-25, with total qualified awards of 497,195,861.37 dollars. Its Table 12 does something no other state's report in the series does: it counts the 5,553 Choice students eligible for special education and shows who serves them. For 964, or 17.36 percent, the Choice school is the provider. For 4,589, or 82.64 percent, the public school corporation still provides the special education while the child attends a private school on a voucher. The 2025-26 report shows 80,548 students and 6,329 eligible for special education.

The Education Scholarship Account is aimed at students with disabilities directly, "up to $20k" each, built from "100% of state special education dollars and 90% of state tuition dollars that would have gone to the public school." The state's funding tables place "Deaf or Hard of Hearing" and "Deaf and Blind" in Level I, at 11,592 dollars for 2025-26. Participation grew from 169 students in 2022-23 to 540 in 2023-24.

Neither program reports anything by disability category. Indiana can tell the public how many voucher students have IEPs and who serves them. It cannot tell the public how many are deaf, which private schools they attend, or whether any of them is in a school with a teacher of the deaf.

The private side of spoken language

Indiana has one OPTION Schools member, St. Joseph Hearing + Speech in Indianapolis, which was St. Joseph Institute for the Deaf until a renaming announced in June 2025. Two public school corporations in the frame, Avon and Perry Township, name it as a placement.

Hear Indiana traces its origin to ten Muncie families during the rubella epidemic of the 1960s. It runs a clinic, contracts with local education agencies for "Itinerant Teacher of the Deaf (TOD) services," offers free special education advocacy, and administers the Hearing Aid Assistance Program of Indiana. Indiana Hands & Voices supports families "without a bias around communication modes or methodology." The Indiana Association of the Deaf, based at the school's address, works "to promote

access and to preserve, protect, and advance the civil, human, and American Sign Language (ASL) linguistic rights of Deaf people in Indiana."

Questions Indiana is positioned to answer

1. How many deaf or hard of hearing students does each corporation and charter count? The special education grant pays per counted pupil by category, so the Department holds the numbers.
2. Why were the deaf and blind services lines cut while the education scholarship account was not?
3. How many students with a hearing disability use the education scholarship account, and what happens to their entitlement to a free appropriate public education?
4. Which cooperatives employ teachers of the deaf, and for which corporations?
5. What certification satisfies 511 IAC 7-36-2(d), and who verifies it?
6. Is there any state line for ASL instruction for young deaf children, to match the auditory-verbal program?
7. Which outreach role does the school keep, now that the Center has operated for thirteen years?

Go back to the teacher who lost her job. She worked at a school founded by a Deaf man, governed by a board that by law includes a former student, teaching in a language its admissions page calls every deaf child's need. The state that cut her position by a precise five percent also funds a separate preschool method at $2 million a year and kept its disability scholarship whole. It counts its deaf children in a memo and nowhere else. Indiana has not hidden any of this. It has simply spread it across three departments, a dozen budget lines and a statute whose outreach clause quietly expired, so that no one has to look at it all at once.

The full Indiana file covers all 461 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.

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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