



STATE OF MICHIGAN  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
LANSING




JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM  
GOVERNOR

MICHAEL P. FLANAGAN  
SUPERINTENDENT OF  
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

October 27, 2008

MEMORANDUM

**TO:** State Board of Education  
**FROM:** Mike Flanagan   
**SUBJECT:** Approval of Language Policy for the Michigan School for the Deaf

In 2006 the existing Total Communication Policy of the Michigan School for the Deaf (MSD), as adopted by the State Board of Education in 1986 was challenged. A large stakeholder referent group was convened to examine the issues presented and make recommendations to address them. This group, the Language Planning Referent Group (LPRG), met four times throughout 2006-07 and made several recommendations to the leadership of MSD.

Many of the LPRG recommendations were integrated into the MSD Strategic Plan during the 2007-08 school year. One of the recommendations was to rescind the policy of Total Communication and adopt a bilingual policy (Attachment A), stressing the need for the highest levels of achievement in both American Sign Language (ASL) and English for students and staff. This is based on current research demonstrating that language usage and development for students who are deaf and hard of hearing are critical to academic achievement. For students who use ASL as their first or primary language, a bilingual policy assures attention to both ASL and English competencies. This in turn supports high levels of academic achievement, as well as post-secondary competence in both deaf and hearing environments.

It is recommended that the State Board of Education approve the Language Policy for the Michigan School for the Deaf as attached to the Superintendent's memorandum dated October 27, 2008.

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## Michigan School for the Deaf Language Policy

It is the policy of the Michigan School for the Deaf to provide a bilingual education for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students who attend the school. A bilingual education respects both American Sign Language and English, and demands excellence in the achievement of proficiency in both languages. A bilingual education assures access to literacy and academic achievement. A bilingual education respects the primary or native language of students while providing access to academic, social and civic competencies.

### Philosophy and Principles of the Language Policy at the Michigan School for the Deaf

American Sign Language (ASL)/English Bilingual Education at the Michigan School for the Deaf recognizes and values both the native language (ASL) of the Deaf community and the majority language (English). Because ASL is a visual/spatial language, ASL provides Deaf and Hard of Hearing students with clear, complete and consistent access to linguistic information. Fluency in ASL allows students access to developing skill in English literacy (reading, writing, and if appropriate, speaking), improving reading proficiency and increasing academic success.

In keeping with a bilingual philosophy, the Michigan School for the Deaf strives to keep use of the two languages, American Sign Language and English, separate. The MSD goals are:

- To demonstrate respect for both languages
- To provide accessible communication for all members of the MSD community
- To assist all MSD students with the development of proficiency in ASL and English

This language policy impacts on student achievement by ensuring that students have full access to communication and linguistic information, as well as providing students with greater opportunities to increase academic skills, improve literacy and achieve their potential.