

READ Act Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind Working Group

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Ten Minnesota Commitments to Equity

1. **Prioritize equity.**
2. Start from within.
3. Measure what matters.
4. Go local.
5. Follow the money.
6. Start early.
7. Monitor implementation of standards.
8. Value people.
9. **Improve conditions for learning.**
10. Give students options.

Items 1 and 9 are emphasized.



MN Commission of the Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing

- Overseen by a governor-appointed board
- Develop public policy solutions to barriers faced
  - Education
  - Healthcare
  - Technology
  - Access to public services
  - Employment
- Collect guidance by surveying community members, hosting focus groups, and meeting stakeholder groups.



About the Collaborative Plan

The Collaborative Plan is a network of agencies, schools, and organizations that work together to create positive, systemic changes to achieve better education, language, and career outcomes for students who are deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing. (birth to age 22)



The Commission and the READ Act

- READ Act passed 2023: Deaf/Hard of Hearing (DHH) teachers expressed concern about what that would mean for deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing students. (Collaborative Group)
- Quickly mobilized DHH teachers, the School Administrators, Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf (MSAD) and Metro Deaf School (MDS) via the existing Collaborative Plan network– Shared common concern with Alicia Lane, Commission's Government Relations Director (Collaborative Group)
- Approached bill authors, learned Amendments in works (Commission)
- Joined Legislator-led group and continued to meet 1:1 with bill authors (Commission)
- Bills successfully passed with Commission's support (Legislature)

READ Act new laws

- Update definition to be inclusive of signed languages https://www.revisor.mn.gov/laws/2024/0/Session+Law/Chapter/109/#laws.4.4.0

- Establish DDBHH Working Group with report due to legislators https://www.revisor.mn.gov/laws/2024/0/Session+Law/Chapter/115/#laws.3.6.0

Why is this important?

- The Universal Read Act Policy doesn't fit with how DHH students learn
  - The Minnesota READ Act mandates structured literacy for all public schools. However, sound-based approaches are structurally inaccessible to students who cannot fully access sound. This working group prevents DHH students from being left behind by creating necessary, evidence-based adaptations.
- Designing Non-Auditory Literacy Pathways
  - The team is actively reviewing and modifying curriculum, screeners, and professional development to prioritize visual, tactile, and bi-modal (ASL and English) alternatives to standard auditory phonics.
- Preventing Language Deprivation Statewide
  - By establishing statewide recommendations for screening and intervention, the group also acknowledges the impact of language deprivation and the importance of meaningful language access and exposure in early development. It is important for all education professionals to understand the impact of hearing on language and literacy

Where to find the report

- Google: MN READ Act DHH DB report
- Report PDF Link
- MDE 2025 Legislative Reports

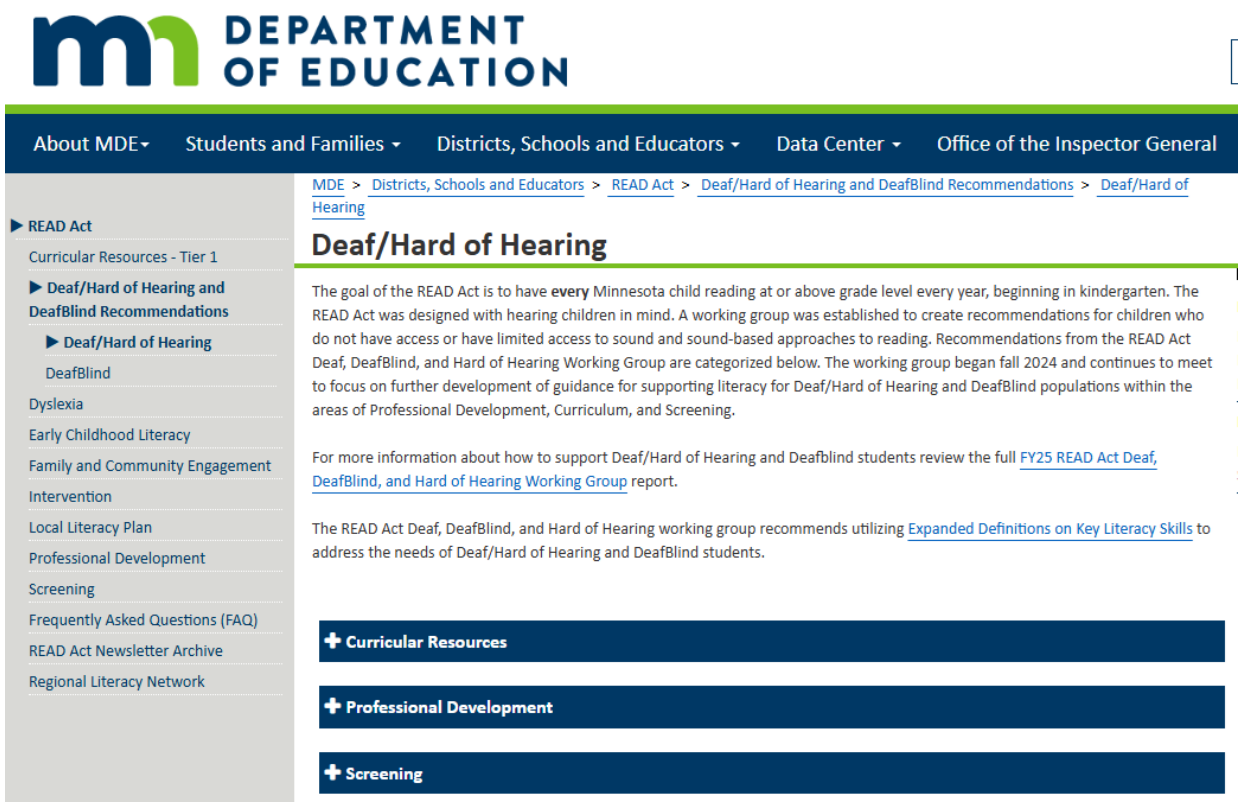


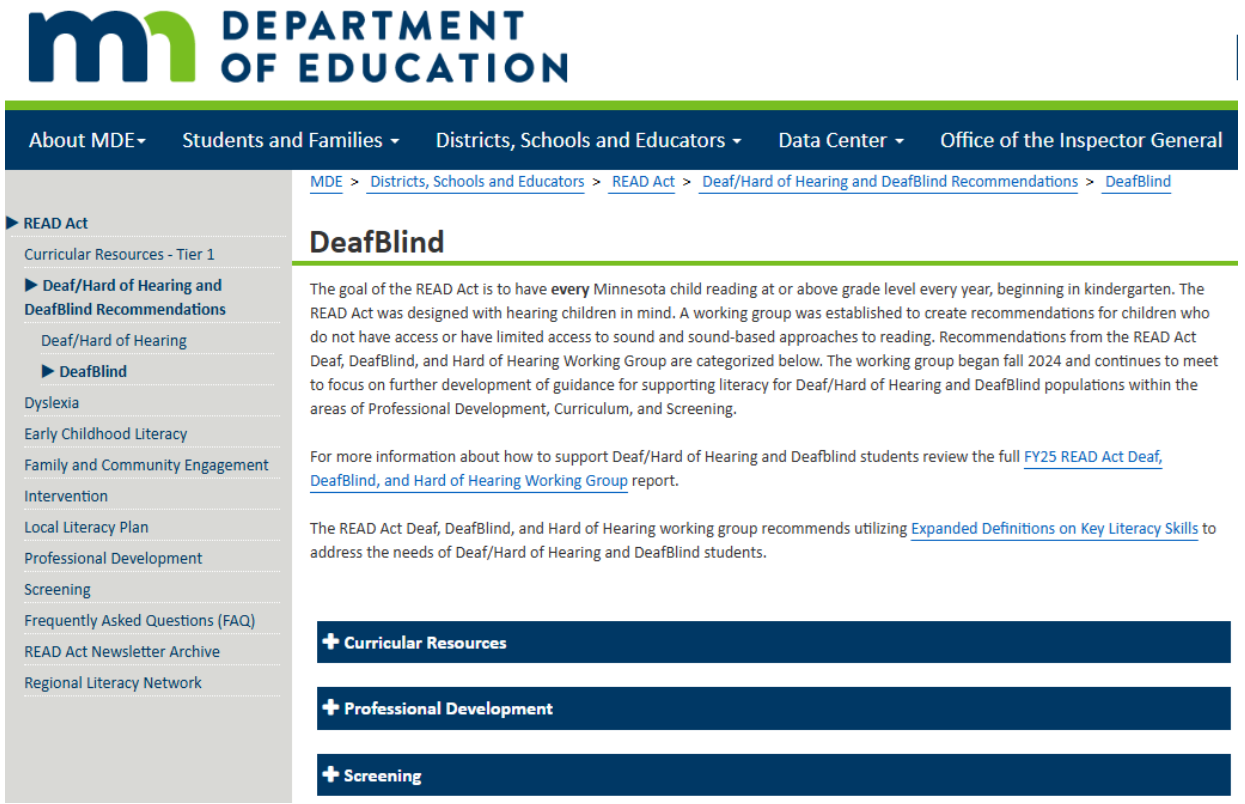
READ Act DHH DB webpage

https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/READ/deaf/



Deaf/Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind tabs





Who was involved

- BrightWorks as a part of the The Minnesota Service Cooperatives (MSC)
- Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI) at the University of Minnesota (UMN)
- Minnesota Commission of the Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing
- Minnesota Department of Education (MDE)
  - READ Act Literacy Unit
  - State Specialist in Blind/Visual Impairment
  - State Specialist in Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- Minnesota Low Incidence Projects (MLIP)
  - Statewide Specialist in DeafBlind
  - Statewide Specialist in Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI)

Who was involved continued

- Minnesota State Academies (MSA)
- Metro Deaf School (MDS)
- Intermediate School Districts
- Regional Low-Incidence Facilitators (RLIFs)
- University of Minnesota (UMN) Deaf and Hard of Hearing Teacher Licensure Preparation Program
  - The Deaf and Hard of Hearing teacher licensure preparation program in Minnesota approved by the Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB)
- Teachers of students who are Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing who are highly knowledgeable about literacy
- Reading Researchers specializing in literacy for Deaf/Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind

Report must address

Report must address the following for students & educators who are unable to access sound-based approaches:

READ Act Approved Screeners

- Review approved screeners
- Recommendations for adapting
- How approved items could be modified
- Alternative resources

READ Act Approved Curriculum

- Review approved screeners
- Recommendations for adapting
- How approved items could be modified
- Alternative resources

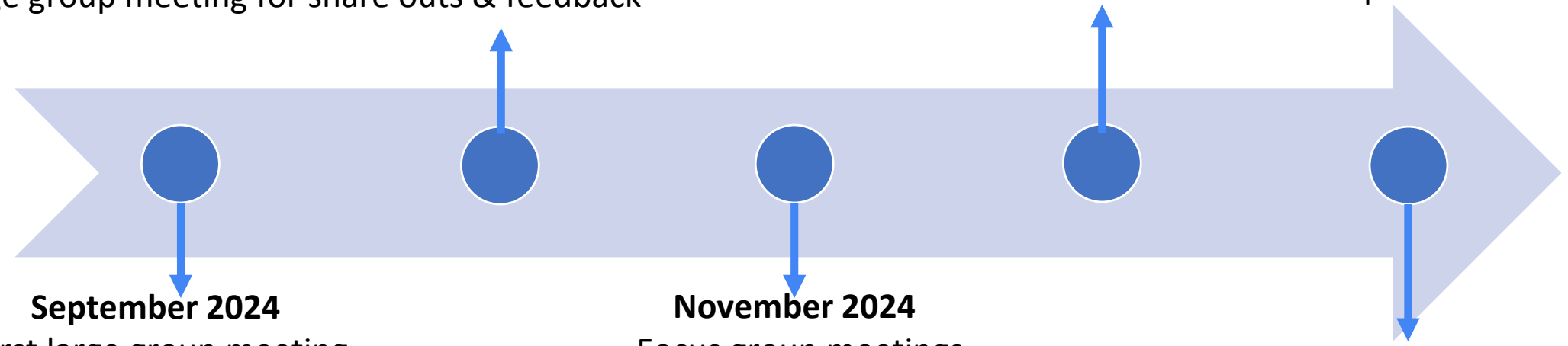
READ Act Approved Training

- Review approved screeners
- Recommendations for adapting
- How approved items could be modified
- Alternative resources

Process to create the report

October 2024
-Focus group meetings
*Adapting
*Modification
-Large group meeting for share outs & feedback

December 2024
-Focus group meetings
-Large group meeting for share outs & feedback
-Finalize draft report



September 2024
-First large group meeting
-Choose focus groups
-Select dates & times
-First focus group meetings

November 2024
-Focus group meetings
*Alternative & additional resources

January 2025
-Report submitted

Key research citations on DHH children learning to read through alternative approaches

- Strong Foundation of Language:
  - A strong foundation of Language is critical for literacy success (Bower et al., 2023; Hecht, 2020)
  - Lack of access has broad long lasting negative impacts (Courtin, 2000; Goodwin et al., 2022; Langdon et al., 2023; Mayberry et al., 2023; Pyers et al., 2010; Pyers & Senghas, 2009; Santos & Cordes, 2022).
  - Language delays lead to reading delays. When you see delays in reading there are likely also language delays. Always assess both.

Key research citations on DHH children learning to read through alternative approaches

- DHH children can successfully learn to read through alternative non-sound-based approaches to reading & without relying on sound. (see Sampson et al., 2026 for a review) (Courtin, 2000; Goodwin et al., 2022; Langdon et al., 2023; Mayberry et al., 2023; Pyers et al., 2010; Pyers & Senghas, 2009; Santos & Cordes, 2022).

- Supporting reading and writing with sign language(s) can benefit all children (including Deaf, Hard of Hearing & hearing children) (Coppola & Walker, 2025; Lillo-Martin & Henner, 2021; Moses et al., 2015)

Expanded definitions

- **We examined READ Act for sound-based words related reading English and include:** phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, oral language, fluency, phonics, choral reading, orally, letter-sound correspondence, sounding out words, make sounds, voicing.

- Researchers in Deaf Ed from the UMN and national partners developed Expanded definitions for literacy. Here -applied to READ Act: PD, Screeners, Curriculum, Rubrics

- Some examples….

Expanded definitions

- **Phonological awareness**: A broad term that refers to the awareness of the sound or sign structure of a spoken or sign language, including the ability to manipulate sounds or signs.

  *****note: while some who access sound may benefit, research demonstrates that phonological awareness, phonemic awareness and/or phonics are not always necessary or required skills for Deaf or Hard of Hearing children learning to read. Many learn to read through alternative approaches.*

- **Oral Language change to Expressive/Receptive Language**: *comprehension* of expressive and receptive sign language(s) or spoken language(s)
- **Decoding**: the ability to breakdown and translate a written word using sound-letter or handshape/sign-letter correspondence including the understanding of the word.
- **Vocabulary development:** The process of acquiring new words that are conceptually accurate at the word and phrase level

Screeners

- Flow Chart to determine if an approved screener is appropriate
  - Group found no valid/reliable reading screeners for DHH children
  - Group recommends a Body of Evidence Approach that gathers samples of both spoken and sign languages and literacy skills for all DHH children
- Future project
  - Developing Body of Evidence as a screening tool for the Read Act that
    - Taps into expertise of DHH researchers and DHH teachers in Minnesota
    - Meets the needs of DHH educational settings and DHH population in Minnesota

    ***Colorado is supportive of our adapting*

Curriculum

- Expanded definitions
- READ Act Curriculum is not accessible or appropriate for DHH learners
- Updates to Curriculum Rubric – Working group completed suggestions for:
  - Accessibility and Inclusivity
  - Differentiation

- No comprehensive literacy curriculum for DHH children
  - There are evidence based resources that target literacy skills for DHH
    - vocabulary, grammar, phonological awareness, decoding and comprehension
- Future projects: Create “resource pages” recommending resources for targeted skills and assessments that
  - Provide flexibility for teachers
  - Tap into resources to share how to differentiate instruction utilizing multilingual and multimodal teaching strategies
  - Recommendations to best utilize these resources

Professional development

- Next Steps: Create a proposal outline for professional development that:
  - Is based on current research evidence specific for DHH learners (Sampson et al., 2026) to maximize differentiated instruction integrating multilingual and multimodal teaching strategies
  - Meets the needs of DHH students with varying language levels and literacy levels and educational settings in MN
  - Taps into the expertise of MN DHH researchers and DHH teachers
  - Includes feedback from educators fo are DHHDB themselves and representing BIPOC communities as well
  - Supports Teachers and Staff
  - Aligns with teacher training-the UMN DHH teacher preparation program

DeafBlind

- IDEA recognizes DeafBlind (DB) as a separate disability from Deaf/Hard of Hearing as well as Blind/Visually Impaired. Thus literacy focus requires separate consideration.
- DB is multiplicative and not additive of DHH plus B/VI because neither sense is able to compensate for the other DHH-sighted and B/VI-hearing.
- Due to etiology, approximately 80-85% of children who are DB also have additional disabilities that add complexity to concept development, communication, learning, and language.
- Therefore, DB requires specialized materials and administration of screening tools, curriculum, and professional development.

Report limitations

- The Compressed Timeline
  - The working group was tasked with retrofitting a massive, complex, sound-based state mandate with a short timeline. True systemic change takes time, and the pressure to produce rapid recommendations risks leaving critical gaps unaddressed.
- The Sound-Based Spectrum Misconception
  - The READ Act assumes a baseline of auditory access. Even for students with residual hearing, partial access to sound does not equal functional access. Traditional sound-based approaches to reading often fail these students because missing subtle acoustic cues can impact reading development.

Report limitations continued

- The "Distance Factor" in Mainstream Classrooms
  - During general education instruction, classroom acoustics work against the DHH student. Background noise and the physical distance between the teacher and the student severely degrade phonemic awareness and phonics activities, making real-time, sound-based learning exhausting and ineffective.
- Systemic Resource & Training Deficits
  - The recommendations from this group cannot instantly fix the statewide shortage of DHH teachers or the lack of specialized literacy training for mainstream general education teachers.

Historical efforts

- Deaf and Hard of Hearing State Specialist reached out to a list of people in similar positions across the nation
  - Several responded, noting our populations are exempt from their state reading laws
  - Three states responded with interest in further discussion
  - Colorado was doing something

- Our report was mentioned in the recent Policy Brief in the Journal for Deaf Studies and Deaf Education: Avoiding unintended consequences: science of reading policies may harm deaf children (Sampson et al., 2026)

Summary of evidence-based recommendations

- “Refrain from making one-size-fits-all policies. Instead, support **teacher-led differentiated instruction** that adapts to the heterogeneous needs and strengths of DHH children (Bondie et al., 2019).
- Develop and enact **differentiated reading instruction** frameworks**, grounded in empirical research** that acknowledges **multiple pathways to literacy** and that includes DHH children(Wolbers et al., 2025).
- Where restrictive reading mandates exist, **create exemptions that allow flexibility in both assessment and instruction for diverse readers** including DHH learners, as differentiated instruction leads to positive literacy outcomes (Puzio et al., 2020).
- Teacher preparation programs (here UMN DHH program) ensure that **all DHH educators have comprehensive training in literacy instruction for DHH children,** including the ability to communicate with and **supports students where one of their languages is ASL.** “ (Sampson et al., 2026 p.5)

Resources

- Minnesota Department of Education. (2025). FY25 READ Act Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Working Group: Report to the Legislature. https://www.lrl.mn.gov/docs/2025/mandated/250798.pdf

- Tory Sampson, Amelia Becker, Erin E Campbell, Jennie Pyers, Wyatte C Hall, Zed Sevcikova Sehyr, Todd Czubek, Kristin DiPerri, Jon Henner, Karen Emmorey, Jennifer Petrich, Christina L Dobbs, Amy Lieberman, Marie Coppola, Clifton Langdon, Elana Pontecorvo, Paris Gappmayr, Anna Lim, Michael Higgins, Donna Jo Napoli, Nathan E Harrison, Rachel Benedict, Leala Holcomb, Franklin Jones Jr., MA, Andrew Bottoms, Emily Glenn-Smith, MA, Diane M Clark, Rachael Gabriel, Laura Jiménez, PhD, Natalie Delgado, Naomi Caselli, Avoiding unintended consequences: science of reading policies may harm deaf children, *The Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 2026;, enag004, https://doi.org/10.1093/jdsade/enag004

Thank You!