MINNESOTA
COMMISSION OF THE DEAF,
DEAFBLIND & HARD OF HEARING

A Report on Achievements Impacting the Quality of Lives of Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Minnesotans for Fiscal Year 2026

Collective Purposes Report – July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026

September 18, 2026

Contents

Introduction....4

Collective Purposes strategic plan....4

Key survey findings....4

Use of the findings....5

FY2025-2026 Strategic Plan....5

Public policy & legislative strategy....6

2026 Minnesota Legislative Laws....7

Policy issues in progress....8

State government partnerships....9

Work with the Governor's Office....9

Community and civic engagement strategy....9

Engagement with diverse communities....9

Civic education and consultation....9

Communications Strategy....10

Public awareness....10

#CanDoAnything series....10

Public Education Partnership (PEP)....10

Digital communications and outreach....11

Implementing and promoting digital accessibility....11

Enhancing quality of life strategy....12

Education: The Collaborative Plan....12

READ Act workgroup....12

Blue Ribbon Commission....13

Other educational committee work....13

Collaboration and engagement with education partners ***14***

Employment 14

2027 strategic priorities 14

1. Advance public policy and legislative priorities ***14***

2. Strengthen systems advocacy and government partnerships ***14***

3. Expand statewide community engagement ***15***

4. Increase civic participation and leadership ***15***

5. Strengthen public awareness and communications ***15***

6. Advance quality of life through education, employment, health, and public safety ***15***

7. Strengthen Organizational Capacity, Data, and Evaluation ***16***

Closing remarks 16

Appendix A: Collective Purposes 17

1.0 Purposes of the Commission ***17***

APPENDIX B: Detailed list of Commission staff activities and work 19

Systems advocacy ***19***

Community and civic engagement ***19***

Communications ***20***

Education ***20***

Introduction

The Minnesota Commission of the Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing is a governor-appointed commission that works to promote communication access and equal opportunity for Minnesotans who are deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing. The Commission serves approximately 20% of Minnesotans.

Consistent with its statutory responsibilities, the Commission's board has established the overall purposes and goals that guide the Commission's work. The Commission's vision is to improve the well-being of deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing Minnesotans so they can lead productive and fulfilling lives. The Commission also works to ensure that state leaders and decision-makers have the information and support they need when making decisions that affect these communities.

The board has established the following overarching purposes to guide the Commission's work:

1. **Collective Sense of Community**: There is a collective sense of community and solidarity amongst Minnesotans who are deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing.
2. **Government Decisions:** All three branches of state government make, enact, and enforce well-informed decisions impacting this community.
3. **Public Awareness:** The general public is aware of deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing individuals and community, their potential and contributions, and the accommodation that may be needed for them to participate in society; and
4. **Improved Well-Being:** The deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing communities, and the deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing individuals have improved well-being and quality of life with regards to such things as economic status, employment, health, social and emotional well-being, education, communication access and civic responsibility.

The Commission carries out its Collective Purposes through a strategic plan for its work and planned activities. Some activities are also developed or adjusted in response to changes in state policies and priorities.

This report provides examples of the Commission's work and the results achieved in support of the Collective Purposes. The complete Collective Purposes 1.0 document is included in Appendix A. A list of specific activities is included in Appendix B.

Each story and activity in this report is connected to one or more of the Collective Purposes. The stories and activities identify goals, strategies, and measurable results that demonstrate the Commission's work and its impact.

Collective Purposes strategic plan

The Commission's strategic plan is a two-year plan that guides the work of Commission staff. The plan is informed by the board and community's concerns, issues, ideas, and data, as well as community trends, opportunities identified through public engagement, and the duties established in the Commission's statutes.

As part of this work, the Commission conducted a 2025 Public Survey to better understand the experiences, awareness, and access barriers of deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing Minnesotans as well as supporters. The survey provided information about accessibility, communication access, and public understanding of the Commission's role.

Key survey findings

The board's 2025 Public Survey provided information about awareness of the Commission, communication access, quality of life, and barriers experienced by deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing Minnesotans and their supporters.

The Commission received 278 completed responses from Minnesota. Key findings included:

- Awareness of the Commission varied across the state, with greater recognition in the Metro area than in greater Minnesota.
- Respondents identified accessibility in public places, health care and hearing-aid affordability, interpreter availability and quality, awareness of laws and policies, and education as significant barriers.
- On a 1–10 scale, average ratings were 4.63 for awareness, 6.22 for quality of life, and 6.00 for community support.
- Respondents expressed appreciation for the Commission's work while identifying a need for increased statewide outreach and clearer information about available programs and resources.
- Analysis of policy-related responses identified 16 categories of barriers, with communication access and interpreter availability among the recurring concerns.

The survey also highlighted an important outreach challenge: although hundreds of thousands of Minnesotans may experience hearing loss or identify as deaf, deafblind, or hard of hearing, relatively few participated in the survey. The Commission considers this limited participation an important finding and an indication that additional strategies are needed to reach people who have not traditionally engaged with the Commission.

Use of the findings

The Commission used the survey findings, together with community engagement and other available information, to inform its FY2025–26 Strategic Plan and priorities.

In November 2025, the board reviewed the findings and identified opportunities to strengthen statewide outreach, particularly in greater Minnesota and among communities that may be underrepresented in traditional engagement efforts. The findings also reinforced the need for continued attention to communication accessibility, interpreter availability and quality, and affordable hearing-related health care.

The Commission will continue using survey results, community input, participation data, and other evidence to evaluate its work, identify gaps, and guide future priorities.

FY2025-2026 Strategic Plan

1. **Public Policy & Legislative Strategy**
    - Development & Implement 2026 & 2027 Legislative Agenda
    - Monitor Public Policies
2. **Systems Advocacy Strategy**
    - Advise Governor's Office – Public Policy, Public Engagement, Communications and Communication Access
    - Build system change and collaboration with state agencies' leadership, judicial system, legislators, staffers, public officials, and stakeholders
    - Advise and consult with state stakeholders regarding communication access and equal opportunity
3. **Community Engagement Strategy**
    - Advance Commission's Community Engagement Model
    - Integrate Public Participation Model – Build Inclusive, Diverse Focus Groups & Build Engagement & Capacity with Stakeholders
    - Interpreting Forward 2030 Guiding Team Project
    - Develop Age Related Hearing Loss and Aging Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Strategy
    - Develop DeafBlind Capacity Strategy
    - Develop Deaf and Hard of Hearing Capacity Strategy
    - Facilitate Statewide Engagement and Input Strategy
4. **Civic Engagement Strategy**
    - Build Voters capacity and maintain collaboration with SOS
    - Advance Civic Engagement Model
    - Facilitate Civic and Legislative Education

5. **Public Awareness & Communications Strategy**
    - Develop FY26 & FY27 Communication Strategy
    - Develop Public Awareness Campaign
    - Implement Crisis Communication Plan
    - Continue #CanDoAnything Series
    - Build on storytelling strategy
6. **Enhancing Quality of Life Strategy**
    1. **Education**
        - Implement Collaborative Plan 2.0
        - Host 2026 Collaborative Conference
        - Develop Strategy for Language Assessment & LRE
    - **Employment**
        - Collaborate on ongoing barrier-free employment efforts
    - **Health**
        - Promote health equity advocacy
        - Explore Community Health Worker barriers
    - **Human Services**
        - Collaborate with State Services
    - **Public Safety**

Collaborate regarding State Emergency Communications Center

7. **Strengthening our organization**
    - Strengthen evaluation measures
    - Develop data collection strategy
    - Explore SMART opportunity
    - Continuous Improvement with Policy Governance model
    - Integrate professional development/training opportunities in Goals for Performance

Public policy & legislative strategy

Public policy and legislative strategy are central to the Commission's work to advance communication access and equal opportunity for deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing Minnesotans.

During FY2026, changing state budget conditions and federal policy changes created uncertainty for services and programs affecting the community. The Commission monitored these changes and adjusted its legislative strategy as needed to protect services, rights, and quality of life.

The Commission gathered input from community members and strategic partners through a policy priorities survey. This input helped shape the Commission's legislative agenda, which was presented to and approved by the board.

The Commission also monitored federal policy and funding changes, worked with partners to assess potential impacts, and shared information with the community when action was needed.

Public Policy Strategy 1: Protect existing services. The Commission worked with legislative and community stakeholders to understand and monitor the ways state budget cuts might affect important services. When needed, the Commission supported advocates working to protect services and rights.

Public Policy Strategy 2: Monitor for federal impact. The Commission widened its network of federal law experts and worked to understand how upcoming federal changes might impact services provided at the state level. When community actions were needed, the Commission shared information about the issues and details on how Minnesotans could bring their concerns to their federal elected officials.

Public Policy Strategy 3: Invest in policy work beyond legislation. The Commission continued to look for opportunities to influence policy other than legislation and to expand the community's access to the legislative process. We attended and provided public comments at meetings such as the Blue Ribbon Commission on Special Education, provided policy guidance to multiple state agencies, and continued to work with the Legislative Coordinating Commission (LCC) to improve accessibility for community members attending legislative meetings.

The Commission groups the type of work for each bill into **three tiers** to recognize the important work of our partners. Successfully passing any policy or law requires stakeholders to work together.

- **Tier 1**: The laws in this tier came from bills led by the Commission. Our work included gathering community input, finding experts on the issue, educating the public, writing bill language, working with the Revisor's Office and other legislative resources, bringing in testifiers, negotiating with others affected by the bill, and creating explainers for legislators. Bills in this tier are usually part of the approved legislative agenda.

- **Tier 2**: The Commission actively supported bills in this tier. While another organization led the bill, we may have met with legislators, provided advice, brought on testifiers, written letters of support, or attended hearings. These bills may have been a part of the approved legislative agenda.

- **Tier 3**: This group of laws came from the work of others. The Commission spends time discovering and monitoring these bills because of how much they affect our communities. This monitoring lets the Commission make sure the bills include our community and helps us better educate people who will be affected by the new laws.

2026 Minnesota Legislative Laws

The data below shows the final outcomes, 2026 Minnesota Legislative Laws impacting our deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing communities.

Category	Tier	Issue	Issue Explanation	Session law
Advocacy	2	Minnesotans With Disabilities Act	Explains that not trying to work with a person to find reasonable accommodation for their disability may be considered discrimination. If an employer, landlord, or provider of public services does not make a good-faith effort to find a reasonable accommodation that allows a person with a disability to fully participate, a court may find that they have discriminated against that person.	2026 Reg. Session, Chapter 99
Education	1	READ Act Literacy Materials Review Cycle	Requires that alternative curriculum and intervention programs for those who cannot access sound-based approaches be reviewed on the same review cycle as traditional programs.	2026 Reg. Session, Chapter 125, Art 1., Sec. 10
	1	READ Act Oral Language Clarification	Clarifies that "oral language" as defined in the statute includes both expressive and receptive language, not just one or the other.	2026 Reg. Session, Chapter 125, Art 1., Sec. 2

	1	READ Act Training/Curriculum Accessibility Standards	Requires that all professional development and digital curriculum resources comply with the state's accessibility requirements.	2026 Reg. Session, Chapter 125, Art 1., Sec. 9
	2	Minnesota State Academies Bonding Requests	$1.7 million from the bonding fund (money that investors lend to the state) to repair and update buildings on campus as well as other improvements for safety and accessibility needs.	2026 Reg. Session, Chapter 130, Art. 1, Sec. 5
Technology	3	Human Services Modernization Council & Commission	Establishes an advisory council and legislative commission to oversee and guide the modernization of technology systems used for administering human services programs in Minnesota. Creates a fund for those modernization projects, including updates to county information technology systems, fraud prevention technology, and specific improvements to systems managed by the Departments of Children, Youth, and Families, and Human Services.	2026 Reg. Session, Chapter 120
Other	3	River Bend Nature Center Accessibility	$293,000 for new exhibits at the River Bend Nature Center and to increase accessibility to nature for "multilingual, blind, and deaf communities."	2026 Reg. Session, Chapter 104, Sec. 2, Subd. 5

Policy issues in progress

Not all policy issues result in legislation or a legislative hearing. Some require work across multiple sessions or solutions outside the legislative process. The Commission reviews current and previously identified issues before each legislative session, considering community needs, policy changes, recent developments, and available information to determine where continued attention is needed.

For example, the Commission monitored proposed legislation related to genetic information and health insurance. The proposals would have limited insurers from denying coverage or charging higher rates based solely on genetic information, an issue relevant to deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing individuals who have genetic hearing loss. Although the proposals did not pass during this session, the Commission will continue to monitor the issue and engage with policymakers as appropriate.

Policy issues receiving attention during FY2026 included (but not limited to):

- Federal disability rights and protections
- Age-related hearing loss and the related task force
- Community Health Worker portable certification
- Telehealth accessibility
- Support Service Provider availability

A complete list of policy issues and related activities is included in Appendix B.

(Covered the following Collective Purposes policies: 1.2; 1.2.1; 1.2.2; 1.2.3; 1.2.4; 1.2.6; 1.4; 1.4.1 & 1.4.2)

State government partnerships

Building relationships and connecting resources across state government are important parts of the Commission's advocacy and systems-level work. The Commission works with the Governor's Office, legislators, and state agencies to provide information, review policies and programs, and support the development of accessible services and communications.

Through these partnerships, the Commission has contributed to efforts related to service access, information access, communication access, and awareness. Appendix B provides specific examples of ongoing and completed work with state government partners and the connection between this work and the quality of life of deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing Minnesotans.

Work with the Governor's Office

The Commission continued its partnership with the Governor's Office to advance communication access, public engagement, and accessibility. The Commission provided consultation on the State of the State address, press conferences, emergency communications, and other public events, and strengthened relationships with offices responsible for communications, community engagement, equity, accessibility, and appointments.

The Commission also continued implementation of communication-access procedures developed with the Governor's Office and worked with the Department of Public Safety to improve access during emergencies, including Metro Surge and other emergency events.

These efforts strengthened communication access and increased opportunities for deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing Minnesotans to receive and participate in state government communications.

Community and civic engagement strategy

Engagement with diverse communities

Community engagement helps the Commission understand the experiences, needs, and priorities of deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing Minnesotans and incorporate community perspectives into its work.

During FY2026, the Commission contracted with seven community representatives reflecting diverse racial, cultural, geographic, age, gender, and communication backgrounds. Contractors supported community outreach, civic education, focus groups, legislative engagement, and collection of community input.

The Commission also strengthened relationships with community organizations and facilitated engagement with deafblind, hard of hearing, speaking deafblind, LGBTQIA2S+, BIPOC, and other communities. These efforts provided information about Commission resources while helping identify priorities, barriers, and opportunities for future work.

(Covered the following Collective Purposes policies: 1.1; 1.1.1; 1.1.2, 1.1.3; 1.3; 1.3.2; 1.4; & 1.4.1)

Civic education and consultation

The Commission expanded opportunities for Minnesotans to participate in civic life through accessible presentations, online sessions, voter outreach, legislative engagement, and educational events. Activities included public policy and voter education sessions, coordination with legislators, and civic events at the State Capitol and schools serving deaf and hard of hearing students.

These efforts increased access to information about voting, public policy, legislative participation, communication rights, and self-advocacy. They also provided opportunities for community members to share their experiences directly with policymakers.

The Commission will continue expanding statewide engagement, with particular attention to communities that have been underrepresented in traditional outreach and civic activities.

(Covered the following Collective Purposes policies: 1.1; 1.1.1; 1.1.2, 1.1.3; 1.3; 1.3.1; 1.3.2; 1.4; 1.4.1 & 1.4.2)

Communications Strategy

Public awareness

Approximately one in five Minnesotans, or more than 1.1 million people, are deaf, deafblind, or hard of hearing. Hearing loss also becomes more common with age. About one in three adults over age 65 experience hearing loss, and approximately half of adults over age 75 are estimated to have hearing loss. Each year, an estimated 150 to 200 newborns are identified with permanent hearing loss.

Public awareness is an important part of the Commission's work to share information and resources with Minnesotans. The Commission develops and distributes information about hearing loss, communication access, available resources, and communication rights. These efforts are intended to help people understand hearing loss, identify available resources, and make informed decisions about communication access.

#CanDoAnything series

The Commission's #CanDoAnything series features deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing people working in a variety of fields. The interviews describe career experiences, approaches to communication access, self-advocacy, and experiences working in different professions.

The series provides information and examples for vocational professionals, families, students, and others who are interested in employment and career opportunities for people who are deaf, deafblind, or hard of hearing.

Public Education Partnership (PEP)

The Commission contracted with the Minnesota Broadcasters Association (MBA) for a three-month Public Education Partnership (PEP) campaign. The campaign distributed a 30-second public service announcement through participating radio and television stations throughout Minnesota from July 1 – September 30, 2026.

The ads encouraged Minnesotans to participate in the board's public survey and provide input for the development of the Commission's strategic plan. The campaign provided statewide exposure across all 87 Minnesota counties, and reached audiences who may not otherwise have been familiar with the Commission or its resources.

Here are the numbers from the PEP report:

July Radio: 9337 spots run, July TV: 1140 spots run
August Radio: 9757, August TV: 1634
September Radio: 9026, September TV: 1350
Radio totals: 28,120, TV totals: 4124

The Commission invested $62,500 in the campaign. The reported value of the radio advertising was $920,829.89, and the reported value of the television advertising was $400,243, for a combined reported advertising value of $1,321,072.89.

The campaign also generated direct interactions with members of the public. For example, following the statewide public education campaign, a visitor at the Commission's Pride booth reported hearing about the Commission on the radio and requested resources for a hard of hearing friend.

Digital communications and outreach

Between July 2025 and June 2026, the Commission distributed 46 newsletters covering a range of topics, resources, and news. A complete list of newsletters is included in Appendix B.

Digital communication is another important way the Commission shares information and connects with communities. The Commission uses its website, newsletter, social media platforms, and YouTube channel to provide information and updates. The following metrics summarize the Commission's digital activity during the reporting period and, where noted, the status as of September 1, 2026.

Website and newsletter

As of June 30, 2026:

- Website visits: 52,159
- Website page views: 92,470
- Newsletter subscribers: 7,836
- Newsletters distributed: 46
- Average newsletter open rate: 30.3%

The average newsletter open rate of 30.3% was higher than the industry benchmark of 17–28% reported for comparison.

Social media

- Facebook: 4,151 followers
- LinkedIn: 20,314 impressions, 278 reactions, 8 comments, 12 reposts
- Instagram: 706 followers, 53 accounts engaged
- X: 716 followers
- YouTube: 1,245 subscribers, 40,300 views, 1,900 hours of watch time

Together, these communication channels provide multiple ways for the Commission to share information, distribute resources, receive community feedback, and maintain connections with Minnesotans who are deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing.

(Covered the following Collective Purposes policies: 1.1; 1.1.1; 1.1.2, 1.1.3; 1.2; 1.2.3; 1.2.4; 1.2.6; 1.3; 1.3.1; 1.3.2; 1.4; 1.4.1 & 1.4.2)

Implementing and promoting digital accessibility

The Commission incorporates accessibility into its digital communications and follows Minnesota's digital accessibility standards and Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1.

To support different communication and access needs, the Commission provides video content through multiple formats, including captions, transcripts, voiceover, high-contrast deafblind-friendly formats, and ASL interpretation upon request.

The Commission also applies accessibility practices across its website, surveys, social media, and other digital materials. These practices include appropriate color contrast, screen-reader compatibility, descriptive link and image text, and accessible materials such as Braille when appropriate.

These efforts help ensure that Commission information and resources are accessible to Minnesotans with diverse communication and access needs.

(Covered the following Collective Purposes policies: 1.1; 1.1.1; 1.1.2, 1.1.3; 1.2; 1.2.3; 1.2.4; 1.2.6; 1.3; 1.3.1; 1.3.2; 1.4; 1.4.1 & 1.4.2)

Enhancing quality of life strategy

The Commission advances communication access and equal opportunity by addressing systemic barriers in housing, transportation, health care, employment, education, public safety, and other essential services. Through advocacy, partnerships, and technical assistance, the Commission works to improve access and opportunities for deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing Minnesotans.

Education: The Collaborative Plan

The Collaborative Plan brings together state agencies, schools, organizations, families, and community partners to improve education and career outcomes for deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing students.

In partnership with Wilder Research, the Commission held a statewide summit to learn more about the experiences, needs, and service gaps of deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing children and their families, from birth through age 22. Wilder Research also reviewed available data and the previous Collaborative Plan and conducted interviews and focus groups.

This work informed the 2025–2030 Collaborative Plan, which was completed in July 2025 and distributed statewide in September 2025.

Year One Outcomes

The new plan focuses on six areas:

1. Provide resources for families from identification through transition
2. Develop, expand, and address mental health resources and needs across Minnesota
3. Maintain and improve the Collaborative Experience Conference to ensure ongoing community connections
4. Utilize data-informed decision-making
5. Provide postsecondary options for deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind community members in-state
6. Language acquisition for children and their families

Four workgroups meet quarterly to support these priorities:

- **Birth to Age 5:** Focuses on early identification, family resources, language acquisition, early intervention, and mental health support for young children and their families.
- **Kindergarten–4th Grade:** Focuses on educational and developmental needs, language access and acquisition, mental health, family engagement, and coordination of services during the elementary years.
- **5th–8th Grade:** Focuses on the changing academic, social-emotional, language, and mental health needs of students as they move through middle school and prepare for greater independence.
- **Transition Workgroup (Ages 14–22):** Focuses on transition planning, self-advocacy, postsecondary education and training opportunities, employment, independent living, and ensuring access to in-state opportunities for deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind individuals.

READ Act workgroup

The Minnesota READ Act DHH Workgroup examined how the READ Act can better support deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing students. Beginning in September 2024, the workgroup reviewed research and READ Act resources and developed recommendations for screening, curriculum, and professional development.

The workgroup found that some READ Act approaches rely heavily on sound and may not meet the needs of all DHH students. It recommended using multiple sources of information to assess language and literacy, including students' signed and spoken language development and other measures of literacy.

The workgroup also identified evidence-based literacy resources and recommended flexible teaching approaches that use multiple languages, formats, and methods. DeafBlind students are identified as needing additional consideration because combined hearing and vision differences can affect access to language, concepts, and literacy.

The report was completed in December 2024 and submitted to the Minnesota Legislature in January 2025. During FY2026, the workgroup continued developing a Minnesota approach for assessing language and literacy in DHH students. The Commission also continued participating in the Minnesota Department of Education's DHH and DeafBlind workgroup.

The workgroup's recommendations provide guidance for including the needs of deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing students in Minnesota's implementation of the READ Act.

Blue Ribbon Commission

The Commission staff attends the monthly meetings of the Minnesota Blue Ribbon Commission on Special Education to ensure that deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing students are explicitly included in Minnesota's plan to transform special education. They were given the opportunity to provide public comments to remind the commission members that any reforms must not reduce or limit the services and supports D/DB/HH students need to fully participate, learn, and succeed in school. The Blue-Ribbon Commission report is due in the fall of 2026.

Other educational committee work

To ensure the six Collaborative Plan overarching issues were also addressed outside of the Collaborative Plan workgroups, the Collaborative Plan Director is a member of several critical committees, including the Minnesota Newborn Hearing Screening Advisory Committee, MRID Educational Interpreter CoP, Minnesota Employment Center Steering Committee, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education Advisory Committee, and Minnesota Hands and Voices Advisory Committee.

The Commission also provided a presentation about the Commission's work to several Educational Community of Practice workgroups hosted by the Minnesota Department of Education, and Brightworks, such as the statewide Regional Low Incidence Facilitators, EHDI Low Incidence, statewide Deaf and Hard of Hearing Teacher, and Educational Audiologist meetings. Participating in the Community of Practice allows the Collaborative Plan Director to build relationships and networking opportunities with several agencies and schools.

The Commission participates in national work groups. Currently, our Collaborative Plan Director serves in National Association of the Deaf LEAD-K workgroup and is a member of the NAD's DECLARE: Language Rights for all Deaf Children. Nearly 50% of the states in the U.S. have passed LEAD-K bills. Each state shares updates with current and future legislation. Currently, there are discussions for national level strategies, including centralization of Deaf Education, Language Assessment Programs, and discussions for national level strategies including centralization of Deaf Education, Language Assessment Programs and among other topics. Additionally, the Collaborative Plan Director is a member of the Conference of Education and Administration of School for the Deaf, CEASD. CEASD meets every month to discuss the five strategy plans to improve national Deaf Education.

The Commission also advocated and monitored the needs and rights of D/DB/HH students on behalf of Minnesotans with the federal Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS).

Collaboration and engagement with education partners

The Commission continued to support deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing children, students, and families through community events, education workgroups, and family engagement activities.

The Commission supported the Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf (MSAD) by helping students prepare for employment through mock interviews and other transition activities.

Staff also participated in the Upper Midwest Audiology Conference to increase awareness of the Commission and connect with professionals in the field.

The Commission continues to monitor state and federal education changes that may affect services and opportunities for deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing students.

> *"Does my child in daycare have rights to an ASL interpreter? Where can I get information about my rights as a parent?" A Parent*

Employment

The Commission continues to work closely with our partners, the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) and the Minnesota Employment Center (MEC). See Communications and Collaborative Plan sections for employment projects, including the #CanDoAnything campaign.

(Covered the following Ends policies: 1.1; 1.1.1; 1.1.2, 1.1.3; 1.2; 1.2.1; 1.2.2; 1.2.3; 1.2.4; 1.2.6; 1.3; 1.3.1; 1.3.2; 1.4; 1.4.1 & 1.4.2)

2027 strategic priorities

Building on the accomplishments and lessons of FY2026, the Commission will focus its FY2027 work on strengthening communication access, advancing equal opportunity, expanding statewide engagement, and improving systems that affect the lives of Minnesotans who are deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing.

1. Advance public policy and legislative priorities

The Commission will continue to identify, develop, and advance policies that improve communication access, equal opportunity, and quality of life. Key priorities include:

- Develop and implement the Commission's 2026–2027 legislative agenda.
- Monitor state and federal legislation and policies that may affect the community.
- Provide policymakers with timely information and recommendations.
- Support community participation in the legislative and policymaking process.
- Identify opportunities to advance systems-level policy changes beyond legislation.

2. Strengthen systems advocacy and government partnerships

The Commission will strengthen relationships with state government, the judicial branch, and other partners to improve accessibility and ensure that the needs of deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing Minnesotans are incorporated into government programs, policies, and services. Key priorities include:

- Provide policy and technical guidance to state leaders and agencies.
- Strengthen communication access across state government.
- Expand collaboration with the Governor's Office, state agencies, legislators, courts, and other decision-makers.
- Support efforts to improve communication access in emergency, public safety, health, education, employment, and other essential systems.
- Advance opportunities for judicial branch education and collaboration related to communication access and interpreter services.

3. Expand statewide community engagement

The Commission will strengthen its community engagement model and expand opportunities for Minnesotans across the state to inform the Commission's work. Key priorities include:

- Expand inclusive and accessible opportunities for community participation.
- Strengthen focus groups, advisory processes, and other methods for gathering community input.
- Increase engagement in greater Minnesota.
- Develop targeted engagement strategies for communities that may be underserved by traditional outreach methods.
- Continue Interpreting Forward 2030 and develop a path toward long-term systems change.
- Strengthen engagement with deafblind, deaf, hard of hearing, and age-related hearing loss communities.

4. Increase civic participation and leadership

The Commission will expand access to civic education and opportunities for Minnesotans who are deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing to participate fully in civic life. Key priorities include:

- Strengthen collaboration with the Secretary of State Office and other civic partners.
- Expand accessible voter education and outreach.
- Provide opportunities for community members to engage directly with legislators and other policymakers.
- Develop accessible online civic education resources.
- Support community members in developing the knowledge and skills needed to advocate for themselves and their communities.

5. Strengthen public awareness and communications

The Commission will expand its communications capacity while maintaining high standards for accessibility. Key priorities include:

- Develop and implement an FY2027 communications strategy.
- Expand public awareness of the Commission, communication access, and available resources.
- Build on the #CanDoAnything storytelling campaign.
- Use community stories to demonstrate the contributions and experiences of deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing Minnesotans.
- Strengthen crisis and emergency communication strategies.
- Expand accessible communication across digital platforms and other media.

6. Advance quality of life through education, employment, health, and public safety

The Commission will continue addressing systemic barriers that affect education, employment, health, public safety, and other aspects of quality of life.

Education

- Implement the 2025–2030 Collaborative Plan.
- Strengthen language access, assessment, literacy, and educational opportunities.
- Support collaboration among families, educators, state agencies, and community organizations.
- Continue advocacy related to the educational rights and needs of deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing students.

Employment

- Continue collaboration with DEED, the Minnesota Employment Center, and other partners to advance barrier-free employment opportunities.
- Support efforts that increase access to employment, career development, and economic opportunity.

Health

- Advance health equity and communication access in health care.
- Identify and address barriers affecting access to hearing-related services and other health resources.
- Explore barriers and opportunities related to community health workers.

Human Services and Public Safety

- Collaborate with state agencies to improve communication access to human services.
- Support efforts to improve emergency communications and public safety systems.

Interpreting Forward 2030

- Minnesota continues to face a critical shortage of qualified and available interpreters. The Commission launched Interpreting Forward 2030 in 2024 to examine the systemic causes of the shortage and identify potential solutions.
- Following the 2025 launch of the Interpreting Forward 2030 website, the Commission began developing a guiding team to analyze stakeholder recommendations and data and develop a plan for system change. The team will begin its work in FY2027.
- Key questions include interpreter licensing and quality assurance, workforce development, consumer and practitioner education, ethical business practices, and grievance processes.

7. Strengthen Organizational Capacity, Data, and Evaluation

The Commission will strengthen its ability to measure results, use data effectively, and continuously improve its work.
Key priorities include:

- Develop a comprehensive data collection and evaluation strategy.
- Strengthen measures that demonstrate community impact and outcomes.
- Improve documentation of community experiences and stories.
- Evaluate organizational processes and identify opportunities to improve efficiency.
- Strengthen staff capacity through professional development and training.
- Align staffing, roles, responsibilities, and resources with the Commission's strategic priorities.
- Explore funding and resource opportunities that support the Commission's statutory responsibilities and communication access needs.

Closing remarks

During FY2026, the Commission advanced communication access and equal opportunity through legislation, systems advocacy, community and civic engagement, public awareness, education, and partnerships across Minnesota. The Commission will build on these accomplishments and on community feedback, data, and evaluation findings as it implements its FY2027 priorities and continues working toward its Collective Purposes.

Appendix A: Collective Purposes

These collective purposes describe the Commission's "big picture" goals and commitments to the state of Minnesota and our community – Minnesota citizens who are deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing. These policies inform everything we do.

1.0 Purposes of the Commission

The Minnesota Commission of the Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing exists to improve the overall well-being of this community of Minnesotans, enabling them to lead productive, fulfilling lives. ensuring that those responsible for the state's decisions related to these concerns are adequately supported in their decision-making processes. All this is to be achieved through a reasonable investment of the state's resources dedicated to the Commission.

1.1 Collective Sense of Community

There is a collective sense of community and solidarity amongst Minnesotans who are **deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing**.

1.1.1 Community members feel empowered to seek, and speak out for, equal access to Minnesota benefits and services.

1.1.2 Community members have access to the concerns and needs of groups within the larger deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing communities.

1.1.3 Minnesota-based organizations and initiatives that support our community are highly collaborative and their efforts coordinated.

1.2 Government Decisions

All three branches of state government make, enact, and enforce well-informed decisions impacting this community.

1.2.1 State policy makers are well-aware of current and future needs of deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing individuals in Minnesota while developing legislation that impacts the community.

1.2.2 The Commission will lead efforts to pass legislation for the benefit of the deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing individuals.

1.2.3 State agency administrators will be aware of the needs and concerns of the community.

1.2.4 State agency administrators have the technical advice and assistance necessary to solve challenging problems and policy implementations.

1.2.5 The judicial branch has the technical advice and assistance necessary to enforce laws, statues, and precedents.

1.2.6 All three branches of state government are aware of, and advocate for, the inclusion of accommodations and considerations for deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing individuals in all financial planning decisions.

1.3 Public Awareness

The general public is aware of deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing individuals and communities, their potential and contributions, and the accommodations that may be needed for them to participate in society.

1.3.1 The general public will be aware of the potential and contributions of deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing individuals in the community.

1.3.2 The public is aware of the various accommodations and tools available that may be necessary for deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing individuals to have communication access and equal opportunity to participate in society.

1.4 Improved Well-being

The deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing communities and individuals have improved well-being and quality of life with regards to economic status, employment, health, social and emotional well-being, education, communication access and civic responsibility.

1.4.1 Policies and legislation that improve wellbeing and quality of life (with regard to economic status, employment, health, social and emotional well-being, education, communication access and civic responsibility) in the public and private sector have been advanced by the Commission.

1.4.2 State policies and procedures that support barrier-free employment, economic, health, social and emotional, educational, communication and civic opportunities have been advanced by the Commission.

APPENDIX B: Detailed list of Commission staff activities and work

Systems advocacy

- Department of Public Safety – to address and enhance effectiveness of emergency communications and improve communication access at new Capitol security checkpoints.
- Department of Health – to support health equity in partnering with leadership. Supported a community member representative on the HEAL Council in sharing their expertise.
- Minnesota Council on Disability – to support visibility and promotion of disability resources at the Minnesota State Fair.
- Olmstead Implementation Office – to support and consult on the engagement of deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing Minnesotans in the development of a new Olmstead Plan. In addition, reviewed the impact of Minnesota State Performance Plan indicator target of reducing percentages of students with disabilities in separate schools or residential facilities and submitted letter of concern. We provided input regarding the development of a new Olmstead Plan.
- Department of Education – to advocate and advise for educational leadership in deaf education. Also advised on work of the READ Act DDBHH working group and provided public comment to the Blue Ribbon Commission of Special Education.
- MNIT's Technology Accessibility Advisory Committee- participate and contribute perspectives of deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing users.
- Legislative Coordinating Commission – advised on communication and accessibility standards.
- Secretary of State – participate and advise voters' access
- Governor's Office – developed Standard Operating Procedures for securing communication access services.
- Department of Labor and Industry – advised regarding standards impacting career advancement opportunities

Community and civic engagement

- Worked with state partners on the 2026 Martin Luther King Jr. event to provide communication access and accommodations. Eighteen community members attended.
- Partnered with Minnesota Deaf Queers and other organizations at Twin Cities Pride. The Minnesota Deaf Queers booth welcomed more than 500 visitors each day, including many hard of hearing people who learned about the Commission and available resources for the first time.
- Participated in and presented at the Hearing Loss Association of America, State Services Advisory Group, Deaf Equity, and other community meetings and events.
- Supported the Minnesota Hands & Voices annual cookout, connecting with about 300 parents of deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing children.
- Held focus groups with DeafBlind, hard of hearing, Speaking DeafBlind, LGBTQIA2S+, and BIPOC communities. Community members shared their experiences and provided input on the Commission's strategic planning, legislative priorities, and services.
- Partnered with the Minnesota Secretary of State's Office to provide online information sessions and served on its Disability Advisory Committee.
- Facilitated informational sessions on the Public Policy Agenda and participated in the REV UP MN Coalition and other meetings focused on education, emergency communications, disability access, and technology accessibility.
- Hosted the Commission's 40th Anniversary Gala in St. Cloud in November 2025, celebrating 40 years of advocacy for communication access and equal opportunity. More than 300 people attended.

- Provided Capitol tours for deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing individuals and presented to the Speaking DeafBlind community about the Commission and its legislative priorities.
- Hosted the May Awards Program on the Capitol Lawn to recognize community leaders and advocates.
- Hosted Civics Day events online and at Metro Deaf School and the Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf to help deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing students and community members learn about civic engagement and government.

Communications

#CanDoAnything Series

From July 1, 2025, through June 2026, we interviewed JaNahne "Jan" McCready-Johnson, Amanda Smith, Hannah Furney, Robert Harris, Kole Krier, and Heath Focken.

Newsletters

Newsletter topics included executive director and staff updates; board and statewide surveys; team recruitment and organizational planning; local elections and civic engagement; public policy, legislative updates, and accessibility; community events and awards; public and personal safety; educational trainings and affiliations; the 40th anniversary banquet; and job opportunities.

Education

The Collaborative Plan Director attends various conferences and committees to maintain the trends of Deaf Education and federal educational policies, which includes:

The annual National Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) Conference in Jacksonville, Florida. The conference shared new research, practices, and policies that support better outcomes for deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing children and their families.

The 2026 Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf (CEASD) in Bloomington, MN. She gave the opening keynote with the Minnesota Department of Special Education Director, Sonia Smith. The conference focused on national issues and policies affecting deaf education.

Several education policy webinars on current trends in deaf education and changes in the federal political climate. These activities help the Commission stay informed about policies that may affect special education services and supports for deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing students in Minnesota.