

To the Michigan Senate Education Committee:
Five things I wish to bring to your attention:

1. Education in Michigan is crucial to the social, mental, emotional, and intellectual well-being of everyone.

For the D/DB/HH (Deaf/DeafBlind/Hard of Hearing):

1. Birth to 3 year old: Implement an Early Intervention, see MDE's (Maryland Dept. of Education) model to copy for Michigan. (**see a copy, 6-page handout).
2. How will this profit for Michigan long-term range?
 - a. Identify early, not late in HS
 - b. FACT: HS students at residential schools often larger than K-8th. Why? They are later identified at a much later age after having gone through trial/error of education that failed them. For most, this may be the case.
 - c. FACT: Not identifying at an early age may result in costly mental health issues who lack confidence, assertiveness, communication, and the ready tools to seek higher education for better paying jobs often results in higher percentage of D/DB/HH dependent on State/Federal support. This is an indication of a LRE (Least Restrictive Environment) which does not work. Costly for the state.
 - d. FACT: Michigan's D/DB/HH population is 1.2 million, but ranks 48th in services nationwide. What does this say about Michigan's D/DB/HH community's needs? Correction: 8th in nation for population 1.2 mil.

2. Schools of choice:

How will this benefit D/DB/HH?

School districts statewide receive monies per pupil. Local school districts lose money allocated per pupil when sending to their desired school. Suggestion: State send money to MSD for students wishing to attend MSD. If students from their local district wish to attend MSD, there is money provided for them. The local district does not lose money.

3. Our voice? An 'invisible race'

Where is our voice of reason and planning all of our future?

Examples:

- a. Visually challenged individuals, (Blind): You see a blind person and their needs are automatically identified by asking them what they need/want. There are laws state/nationwide that accommodate their needs per se ADA laws.
- b. Physically challenged individuals, (HC): You see a person walking with a cane or wheelchair bound and/or other devices to help them cope in daily tasks and their needs are identified and met both State/Nationwide per se ADA laws. Parking spots, accommodations in buildings/facilities and the like that adhere to their needs as well.
- c. D/HH: You don't see us. We are an invisible race for the most part, overlooked, both State/nationwide. We have been fighting for years and years to be heard. Finally through Deaf Coffee Chats, our needs are starting to be met. Our voices matter. But,

all along, who makes the decision for our needs? Is it D/HH people? No. It's always the medical industry seeking to 'fix' what is broken as well as speak on our behalf of our needs. It is often the non-D/HH individuals who speak for us with what they think we need without asking us directly,"What do you need?"

5. Implement ASL in all K-12 schools, statewide with Native signers as teachers:
 1. Foster an improved relationship amongst one another with more awareness and understanding of cultural and foster positive relations all over. It's building bridges halfway in being able to sign as well as quashing misunderstandings and loneliness among peers all over within the community. Examples: Lapeer West HS sent students over to MCC Lapeer Extension Ctr.

Additional talking points:

Hire more D/HH staff at MSD. Open up more nationwide/statewide involvements. For nationwide, Gallaudet and NTID. Solve problems with a superintendent with a fresh outlook and ready to lead MSD Monies put into supt position and education at MSD, to develop/implement 0-3 Early Intervention Program. To balance the ratio of D/DB/HH/H workers.

Fact: D/HH and hearing staffers at Gallaudet University and Clerc Center, of Washington D.C., has 895 employees. 462 are D/HH. A total of 220 employees are faculty members or teachers. Source: http://www.gallaudet.edu/about_gallaudet/fast_facts.html.

What's the ratio of D/DB/HH/H workers at MSD?

Conclusion:

Thank you for taking time to hear us discuss pertinent issues within the D/DB/HH communities. A generous thanks to Carmen Johnson, our Deaf Advocate for linking bridges between communities. To establish Deaf Coffee Chat hours in communication the current affairs within our counties. Lastly, sincere thanks to Senator Pavlov, of my county, Lapeer/St. Clair Shore counties for meeting with us and inviting us to meet with the Senate Education Committee.

Let's keep the communication lines open by being proactive and hearing what we need in our community. After all, how many of you have children? How many of you have unspoken dreams for your child(ren's) futures? How many of you wish for the best education possible that will take them as far as they wish to go? To dare to dream where no man has gone before? How many of you will support a D/DB/HH's child(s) dream? Will you stop and listen to us? Help us pave the way of a bleak future into a bright and shining future for our future D/DB/HH children? The time is NOW ~ Thank you!

Sincerely,
Michelle Osterhout
DEAF C.A.N., advocate
MCC ASL Adjunct