

# FLORIDA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF AND THE BLIND OPERATIONAL POLICY

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## Policy Number

## Subject

OP 7.04

Total Communication Philosophy-Definition

**SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS:** Total Communication is the Philosophy that will be utilized within the Department for the Deaf/Hard of Hearing and the Special Needs Department serving Deaf/Hard of Hearing Students.

- I. The Total Communication Philosophy is based on:
  - A. The need and desire to provide full access to FSDB students and staff through free flowing and comprehensive communication regardless of the level of each student's hearing loss and socioeconomic background.
  - B. Recognition of the importance of each student's self-expression.
  - C. Recognition and respect for the fact that FSDB students' communication needs vary, and our acceptance of the responsibility to adapt to each student's communication needs.
  - D. Recognition that Sign Language, and American Sign Language (ASL) in particular, is the natural language of the majority of deaf persons.
  - E. Recognition of the importance of ASL to cultural identity and as an instructional tool.
  - F. Recognition that English is the primary language of the general population and recognition that the acquisition of English is important in that:
    - (1) it is a mandated component of the educational system of the state of Florida, and
    - (2) it provides the primary avenue for employment options and socioeconomic status within a predominantly English language society.
- II. Total Communication Philosophy Components

FSDB supports the use of a sign language which allows the teacher freedom to move along the continuum between English word order meaning based signing and ASL in whatever manner meets the communication needs of students at all levels. This approach encourages the use of communication strategies that include daily exposure to, and direct

teaching of various linguistic structures and concepts commensurate with each student's language functioning and the educational objectives of the class. This process should always occur while striving to develop the highest possible level of English mastery for eventual participation in the larger English language society. It is also of the utmost importance that all professionals recognize the need to support students who have varying degrees of residual hearing and who use residual hearing as a basic component of their communicative functioning. FSDB must serve students based on their **individual needs** and all services that may be necessary to meet their needs, as agreed upon among professionals, parents, and/or students, should be utilized.

#### Total Communication Components

- A. Use of English in the instructional environment and meaning based signed English as the primary mode of instruction with students.
- B. Use of Contact Language in the instructional environment. This form of signing permits signing in English word order and mouthing and/or speaking. This is not a separate language but the integration of two communication modes, spoken and sign.
- C. Use of American Sign Language (ASL) in the instructional environment, as appropriate.
- D. Use of assistive technology which includes, but it not limited to:
  - 1. Personal hearing aids
  - 2. Group FM auditory trainers
  - 3. Programmable hearing aids
  - 4. Cochlear implants
  - 5. Other assistive technology that enhances a student's ability to access any level of communication.
- E. Communication via the use of writing, speech, speechreading. Listening, Sign Language, writing and reading, as appropriate, to facilitate two-way communication.

#### III. The concept of Total Communication

- A. Promotes Sign Language use in whatever ways are most appropriate for each student and staff member who is deaf/hard of hearing. Within this policy, Sign Language moves along a continuum from English word order meaning based signing to contact signing to a more pure linguistic form of American Sign Language (ASL).

- B. Incorporates appropriate spoken and Sign Language modes of communication in order to ensure effective communication with and among students and adults with a variety of hearing losses and communication skills and preferences.
- C. Recognizes that the goals of Sign Language use are:
  - (1) to provide gestural visual communication that will facilitate free and open communication, and
  - (2) to provide the basis for most students to develop their language base to the maximum, which in turn, allows for the development of the whole person.
- D. Recognizes that the goals of the Spoken Language are:
  - (1) to provide students the opportunity to access auditory, speech, spoken English and speechreading services through speech and auditory development services
  - (2) to encourage daily practice as an integral part of the academic, residential, and recreational program
  - (3) to provide reinforcement activities and opportunities for using skills outside of formal instruction
  - (4) to encourage parents to reinforce skills at home

#### IV. Total Communication Environment

In order to provide the appropriate communication environment and to afford FSDB students opportunities equal to their hearing peers, the day-to-day environment must be structured in a way that allows the student, as well as the deaf/heard of hearing staff, access to communication within the FSDB environment. To accomplish this the following must occur:

- A. Employees who are considered as direct student contact must be fluent or near fluent in contact language.
- B. In order to provide open communication, staff should sign at all times when they are involved in open or public conversation (dining rooms, meetings, hallways, etc.).
- C. Confidential discussions or discussions not for public awareness should occur in offices or areas where privacy can be maintained.
- D. Contact language and American Sign Language (ASL) are primary means of communication for many of our students and staff, and are an integral part of our professional existence. As professionals we must take a positive and active

approach to all signing that supports effective communication and instruction at FSDB.

- E. Open and accessible communication is a professional courtesy, as well as, a professional expectation. Given that each student comes to us with specific and unique needs, services for our deaf and hard of hearing students necessitates an open mind. If FSDB is to be THE program for meeting the educational needs of deaf/hard of hearing students, the professional levels of our staff must be unquestionable. Additionally, each of us must be willing to assure that the students' communication needs, as well as their educational and social/emotional needs, are met at the highest possible levels.
- F. All staff should have an awareness and respect for the level of communication accessibility required by the students and staff with whom they come in contact in order to provide the best possible communication environment, and they should develop the strategies, skills, and knowledge needed to communicate within the context of their job positions.
- G. FSDB recognizes and accepts the impact cultural (i.e. Deaf, Hispanic, African-American) differences may have on communication. Therefore, students are provided services to enable them to communicate (i.e. reading, writing and/or spoken language) effectively using English.
- H. With any policy of this type, the actual quality of the communication environment is dependent on the attitude, as well as the skills, of those individuals affected the policy. It is critical that each FSDB employee appreciates that we are a school set up to meet the needs of the children served by the school. As an organization, FSDB administrative staff will do everything possible to assist all staff in developing their communication skills to the highest possible level, with the goal of this development being to assist in providing high quality services for every FSDB student.

**APPROVED:**

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Elmer Dillingham, Jr. President

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**STATUTORY AUTHORITY:**

**1002.36, 6D-4.003, F.A.C., F.S. 1001.41, 1001.42**

**LAW IMPLEMENTED:**

**1002.36 (4)(d)**

**HISTORY:**

**NEW:** 8/18/94

**REVISED:** 7/31/01

**FLORIDA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF AND THE BLIND  
OPERATIONAL POLICIES & PROCEDURES**

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**POLICY NUMBER**

**SUBJECT**

**OP 1.24**

**FSDB Staff Sign Language Communication Policy**

**SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS:** The Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind (FSDB) recognizes the fundamental need and purpose of clear, consistent and dependable communication as (1) a foundation for the development of language skills, (2) the basis for the development of interpersonal skills, and (3) critical to the sharing of information among all of the members of the FSDB campus community.

For some members of the FSDB community, the primary and most efficient method of communication is sign language. The primary purpose of the FSDB Staff Sign Language Policy is to encourage and support an optimal setting of communication for all students and staff across the FSDB campus. In recognition of and respect for the diversity of the FSDB student and staff population, FSDB staff needs to possess the skills and knowledge needed to work effectively with all students and staff. FSDB recognizes that the level of these skills and the importance of acquiring these skills varies across FSDB staff. Procedures for implementing this policy include a process for determining reasonable accommodations that may be needed for staff with sign language communication skill level standards.

Frequency, length and type of communication required for interaction with students and staff who are deaf and hard of hearing are primary factors used in determining sign language communication skill level standards for selected FSDB staff positions. These standards are based on the Sign Language Proficiency Interview (SLPI) (see Appendix, page 3). Sign language communication skill level standards for FSDB staff positions are provided in OP 1.24A.

FSDB positions standards are included in staff position descriptions. For selected new positions or for potential changes to current job position standards, the immediate Supervisors for the positions, the SLPI Coordinator, and the Human Resources Director meet to discuss standards for these positions and they make their recommendations for standards to the President. The President makes final decisions for standards, and informs the immediate supervisors for positions, the SLPI Coordinator, and the Human Resources Director of his/her decisions.

FSDB selected the SLPI for use because: (1) It provides ratings and descriptions of sign language communication skills for staff taking the SLPI, (2) SLPI Follow-Up Meetings provide staff with the opportunity to review, discuss, and better understand their sign language communication skills, and (3) results may be used to assist in identifying sign language communication skill development areas and options that may be appropriate for each person.

FSDB staff not at their standards at job entry are required to take the SLPI within 60 days of job entry dates unless they sign a statement indicating that they have no sign language communication skills. Staff signing this statement are required to participate in FSDB-supported sign language communication skill development activities and to take the SLPI within two years of hire. Staff are encouraged and expected to achieve their standards within four (4) years, from their job entry dates.

Staff hired into or transferred to positions with skill level standards on or after August 15, 1996, take the SLPI every two years until they achieve their standards. In addition, staff that are promoted within a position with a standard on or after January 1, 2009, take the SLPI every two years until they achieve their standards.

All staff are encouraged to develop their sign language communication skills as time and resources allow. This includes participating in activities such as (1) sign language communication skills development workshops and use of sign language self-instructional materials that address their specific job communication needs, (2) workshops on techniques and strategies for effectively communicating with people who are deaf and hard-of-hearing, and (3) workshops on Deaf culture and community.

**APPROVED:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
L. Daniel Hutto, President

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**STATUTORY AUTHORITY:**

1002.36, 6D-4.003, F.A.C.

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6/4/09, 9/30/09, 12/2/09

## APPENDIX

**SIGN LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY INTERVIEW (SLPI) RATING SCALE<sup>ab</sup>**

<b><u>RATINGS</u></b>	<b><u>DESCRIPTORS<sup>c</sup></u></b>
<b><u>Superior Plus</u></b>	<b><u>Able to have a fully shared and natural conversation, with in-depth elaboration for both social and work topics.</u></b> All aspects of signing are native-like.
<b><u>Superior</u></b>	<b><u>Able to have a fully shared conversation, with in-depth elaboration for both social and work topics.</u></b> Very broad sign language vocabulary, near native-like production and fluency, excellent use of sign language grammatical features, and excellent comprehension for normal signing rate.
<b><u>Advanced Plus</u></b>	<b><u>Exhibits some superior level skills, but not all and not consistently.</u></b>
<b><u>Advanced</u></b>	<b><u>Able to have a generally shared conversation with good, spontaneous elaboration for both social and work topics.</u></b> Broad sign language vocabulary knowledge and clear, accurate production of signs and fingerspelling at a normal/near-normal rate; occasional misproductions do not detract from conversational flow. Good use of many sign language grammatical features and comprehension good for normal signing rate.
<b><u>Intermediate Plus</u></b>	<b><u>Exhibits some advanced level skills, but not all and not consistently.</u></b>
<b><u>Intermediate</u></b>	<b><u>Able to discuss with some confidence routine social and work topics within a conversational format with some elaboration; generally 3-to-5 sentences.</u></b> Good knowledge and control of everyday/basic sign language vocabulary with some sign vocabulary errors. Fairly clear signing at a moderate signing rate with some sign misproductions. Fair use of some sign language grammatical features and fairly good comprehension for a moderate-to-normal signing rate; a few repetitions and rephrasing of questions may be needed.
<b><u>Survival Plus</u></b>	<b><u>Exhibits some intermediate level skills, but not all and not consistently.</u></b>
<b><u>Survival</u></b>	<b><u>Able to discuss basic social and work topics with responses generally 1-to-3 sentences in length.</u></b> Some knowledge of basic sign language vocabulary with many sign vocabulary and/or sign production errors. Slow-to-moderate signing rate. Basic use of a few sign language grammatical features. Fair comprehension for signing produced at a slow-to-moderate rate with some repetition and rephrasing.
<b><u>Novice Plus</u></b>	<b><u>Exhibits some survival level skills, but not all and not consistently.</u></b>
<b><u>Novice</u></b>	<b><u>Able to provide single sign and some short phrase/sentence responses to basic questions signed at a slow-to-moderate rate with frequent repetition and rephrasing.</u></b> Vocabulary primarily related to everyday work and/or social areas such as basic work-related signs, family members, basic objects, colors, numbers, names of weekdays, and time. Production and fluency characterized by many sign production errors and by a slow rate with frequent inappropriate pauses/hesitations.
<b><u>Below Novice/No Functional Skills</u></b>	<b><u>(May be) Able to provide short single sign and “primarily” fingerspelled responses to some basic questions signed at a slow rate with extensive repetition and rephrasing.</u></b>

<sup>a</sup> Adapted from U.S. Foreign Service Institute & ACTFL LPI rating scales by William Newell and Frank Caccamise.

<sup>b</sup> The SLPI was referred to as the Sign Communication Proficiency Interview (SCPI) from 1983 to May 2006.

<sup>c</sup> For all SLPI rating descriptors, **first statement (in bold type) always a statement of sign language communicative functioning**, with all remaining statements (regular type) descriptors of ASL form (vocabulary, production, fluency, grammar, and comprehension).

June 2006 (revised edition).

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OPERATIONAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

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**POLICY NUMBER**

**SUBJECT**

<b>OP 1.24A</b>	<b>FSDB Staff Sign Language Communication Skill Standards</b>
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**POLICY:** It is preferred that staff members have their sign language communication skills level standards at time of job entry. For some positions however, having the skill level standards at job entry is especially important. These positions are designated below by italic type for both the positions and standards.

**JOB AREA / POSITION**

**SKILL LEVEL STANDARD**

**PRESIDENT’S OFFICE:  
(Including Public Information, Parent Information,  
Outreach, Grants)**

<i>President</i>	<i>Advanced</i>
Public and Parent Information Staff Working with Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing	Intermediate
Grants Staff Working with Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing	Survival Plus
All Other Staff	Survival Plus

**BUSINESS SERVICES:  
(Including Student Bank, Safety, Budgets, Purchasing,  
Accounting)**

Board of Trustees Employees/Select Exempt Service Supervisors	Survival Plus
Student Bank Employees	Intermediate
All Other Staff	Encouraged to Develop Sign Language Skills

<b>CAMPUS POLICE AND SECURITY STAFF</b>	Survival Plus
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<b>MAINTENANCE, TRANSPORTATION, FOOD SERVICE, CUSTOMER SERVICE, HOUSEHOLD STAFF, CONSTRUCTION</b>	Survival Plus
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Board of Trustees Employees/Select Exempt Service Supervisors	Survival Plus
Bus Chaperones	Intermediate
Supervisor-Dragon’s Lair	Intermediate
All Other Staff	Encouraged to Develop Sign Language Skill



**JOB AREA / POSITION****SKILL LEVEL STANDARD****HUMAN RESOURCES STAFF**

Survival Plus

**INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS:***Administrator of Instructional Services**Advanced**Supervisors and Directors Reporting to Administrator of Instructional Services**Advanced**Curriculum Teachers, Specialist, Working with Deaf/Hard of Hearing**Advanced*

Other Curriculum Staff Working with Deaf/Hard of Hearing

Intermediate

**DEAF ACADEMIC:***Principal*

Advanced

*Assistant Principals, Supervisors, Teachers, Specialists, working with Deaf and Hard of Hearing.*

Advanced

*Other Academic Staff Working with Deaf/Hard of Hearing*

Intermediate

**PHYSICAL EDUCATION (PE):***Assistant Principal Supervisors, Teachers, working with Deaf/Hard of Hearing**Advanced*

Other PE Staff Working with Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing

Intermediate

**SPECIAL NEEDS ACADEMIC:***Assistant Principal, Supervisors, Teachers, Specialists working with Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing**Advanced*

Other Special Needs Academic Staff Working with Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing

Intermediate

**BLIND ACADEMIC:***Principal-Blind/Special Needs Department,**Intermediate*

**JOB AREA / POSITION****SKILL LEVEL STANDARD****ALLIED HEALTH SERVICES  
(Including Child Study, Mental Health,  
Speech and Audiology, Health Care)***Administrator of Related Services**Advanced**Related Services Supervisor, Director, Teachers,  
Coordinators, Specialists working with  
Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing**Advanced*

Nurses

Intermediate

Other Related Services Staff working with  
Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing

Intermediate

**BOARDING SERVICES:  
(Including Athletics and Recreation)***Administrator of Boarding Services**Advanced**Deaf Boarding Supervisors, Coordinators,  
Director, Assistant Director, Teachers,  
Specialists, Senior Residential Instructors  
working with Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing**Advanced*

Other Boarding Services Staff

Intermediate

**SPECIAL NEEDS BOARDING SERVICES:***Administrator of Boarding Services**Advanced**Special Needs Boarding Supervisors,  
Coordinators, Director, Assistant Director, Teachers,  
Specialists, Senior Residential Instructors  
Working with Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing**Advanced*

Other Special Needs Boarding Services Staff

Intermediate

**INTERPRETER SERVICES STAFF***Advanced Plus-Superior Plus Range***TRAINING AND QUALITY ASSURANCE STAFF**

Survival Plus

**JOB AREA / POSITION**

**SKILL LEVEL STANDARD**

**TECHNOLOGY:**

Director/Coordinators/Supervisors

Intermediate

Specialists

Intermediate

All Other Staff

Encouraged to Develop  
Sign Language Skills

**APPROVED:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
L. Daniel Hutto, President

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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