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An Act Regarding Kindergarten Readiness for Children Who Are Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:

Sec. 1. 20-A MRSA §7204, sub-§6, as amended by PL 2015, c. 448, §11, is further amended to read:

6. Technical assistance. May, on the request of a school administrative unit, provide technical assistance in the formulation of a plan or subsequent report required of all administrative units. Assistance may not be designed to transfer the responsibility for or actual development of the plan or report; ~~and~~

Sec. 2. 20-A MRSA §7204, sub-§7, as enacted by PL 2015, c. 448, §12, is amended to read:

7. Out-of-state placement of a state ward. May, when a child with a disability who is a state ward is placed in an out-of-state residential treatment center by the Department of Health and Human Services, designate the Department of Education as having responsibility for oversight of the child's individualized education program to ensure that the child receives a free, appropriate public education; ~~and~~

Sec. 3. 20-A MRSA §7204, sub-§8 is enacted to read:

8. Report on language and literacy development of children who are deaf and hard of hearing from birth to 5 years of age. Beginning July 31, 2020 and annually thereafter, shall submit a report to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over education and cultural affairs of:

A. The data reported in compliance with the state performance plan required by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act that are specific to language and literacy development of children who are deaf or hard of hearing from birth to 5 years of age, including children who are deaf or hard of hearing and have other disabilities, that demonstrate language and literacy development of children who are deaf or hard of hearing relative to the children's peers who are not deaf or hard of hearing; and

B. Any language developmental milestones or parent resources used or disseminated by the department to parents, educators, early interventionists or therapists for use in tracking or assessing the expressive and receptive language acquisition of children from birth to 5 years of age who are deaf and hard of hearing and their development stages toward literacy in American Sign Language and English.

The commissioner shall post the report on the department's publicly accessible website.

Sec. 4. Departmental task force established. The Commissioner of Education shall establish a departmental task force to recommend language developmental milestones for children, from birth to 5 years of age, based on existing resources and current standards and to develop a parent resource portfolio as described in subsection 5 to monitor and track the expressive and receptive language acquisition of children who are deaf and hard of hearing and their developmental stages toward literacy in American Sign Language and English. The task force must be convened no later than October 1, 2019.

1. The commissioner shall appoint members of the task force in accordance with the following provisions.

A. The task force must include:

- (1) A majority of members who are deaf or hard of hearing;
- (2) Members who are advocates and professionals within the field of education for children who are deaf and hard of hearing and parents of children who are deaf and hard of hearing; and
- (3) A balance between members who personally, professionally or as parents use both American Sign Language and English and members who personally, professionally or as parents use only spoken English.

B. The task force may include:

- (1) A parent of a child who is deaf or hard of hearing and who communicates using only spoken English without visual supplements;
- (2) A parent of a child who is deaf or hard of hearing and who communicates using American Sign Language;
- (3) A parent of a child who is deaf or hard of hearing and who communicates using American Sign Language and spoken English;
- (4) A parent of a child who is deaf or hard of hearing and who has additional special needs;
- (5) A credentialed teacher of students who are deaf and hard of hearing and who use both American Sign Language and English;
- (6) A credentialed teacher of students who are deaf and hard of hearing who use only spoken English;
- (7) A credentialed teacher of students who are deaf and hard of hearing whose expertise is in curriculum development and instruction in American Sign Language;
- (8) A credentialed teacher of students who are deaf and hard of hearing whose expertise is in curriculum development and instruction in English;
- (9) A credentialed teacher of students who are deaf and hard of hearing whose expertise is in American Sign Language and English language assessment;
- (10) A credentialed spoken language therapist whose expertise is in spoken English assessments;
- (11) An expert who researches language outcomes for children who are deaf and hard of hearing;
- (12) An advocate for the teaching and use of both American Sign Language and English;

- (13) An advocate for the teaching and use of spoken English, with or without visual supplements;
- (14) An early intervention specialist who oversees statewide programming for infants and toddlers who are deaf and hard of hearing;
- (15) A pediatrician who is committed to the health and well-being of children who are deaf and hard of hearing;
- (16) A specialist whose expertise is in the resources, curriculum and teaching of children who are blind and who are also deaf or hard of hearing;
- (17) A licensed audiologist who specializes in pediatric and educational audiology;
- (18) A licensed clinical social worker who specializes in working with children who are deaf or hard of hearing;
- (19) A representative from the Child Development Services System, established under the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 20-A, section 7209; and
- (20) A representative from the Maine Newborn Hearing Program established by Title 22, section 8821 within the Department of Health and Human Services who is responsible for referring children who are deaf and hard of hearing to early intervention services.

C. Members are not entitled to compensation.

2. By March 1, 2020, the Department of Education shall provide to the task force the following information:

- A. A list of language developmental milestones based on current standardized norms that are aligned to the department's infant, toddler and preschool guidelines;
- B. Information held by the department relating to language developmental milestones;
- C. The instrument currently used by the Department of Education to assess the development of children with disabilities pursuant to federal law; and
- D. The state standards in English language arts education as provided under the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 20-A, section 6209.

3. By June 1, 2020, the task force shall recommend to the Department of Education language developmental milestones based on current standardized norms and aligned with the state instrument used to meet the requirements of federal law for the assessment of children who are deaf or hard of hearing from birth to 5 years of age for purposes of developing a parent resource portfolio as described in subsection 5 for use by parents to monitor and track their children's expressive and receptive language acquisition and developmental stages toward literacy in American Sign Language and English. In selecting language developmental milestones, the task force shall solicit input from experts in the field of education for the deaf and hard of hearing. The Department of Education shall post the recommendations on its publicly accessible website and shall solicit public comments.

4. By June 30, 2020, the Department of Education shall select the language developmental milestones to include in the parent resource portfolio and inform the task force of which language developmental milestones have been selected.

5. By November 15, 2020, the task force shall, in consultation with any governmental entities that oversee the education of children who are deaf or hard of hearing from birth to 5 years of age, develop a parent resource portfolio. The parent resource portfolio must:

- A. Include the language developmental milestones selected pursuant to subsection 4;
- B. Be appropriate for use, in both content and administration, with children who are deaf and hard of hearing from birth to 5 years of age who use American Sign Language or English, or both;
- C. Present the developmental milestones in terms of typical development of all children;
- D. Be written for clarity and ease of use for parents to monitor and track their children's expressive and receptive language acquisition and developmental stages toward literacy in American Sign Language and English;
- E. Be aligned to the department's existing infant, toddler and preschool guidelines, the existing instrument used to assess the development of children with disabilities pursuant to federal law and state standards in English language arts;
- F. Make clear that parents have the right to select American Sign Language, English, or both, and the modalities for language provision, including but not limited to cued speech, lipreading, listening and tactile communication, for the child's language acquisition and developmental milestones;
- G. Make clear that the parent resource portfolio is not a formal assessment of language and literacy development and that a parent's observation of that parent's child may differ from formal assessment data presented at an individual family service plan meeting or individual education program meeting;
- H. Make clear that a parent may bring the parent resource portfolio to an individual family service plan meeting or individual education program meeting for purposes of sharing that parent's observations about that parent's child's development; and
- I. Include balanced and comprehensive information about languages and communication modes as well as available services and programs.

6. The task force may advise the department on the content and administration of instruments used to assess the development of children with disabilities pursuant to federal law as used to assess the language and literacy development of children who are deaf and hard of hearing to ensure appropriate use of those instruments and may make recommendations regarding future research to improve the measurement of progress in language and literacy of children who are deaf and hard of hearing.

Sec. 5. Department of Education's selection of tools and assessments for educators, early interventionists and therapists. The Department of Education shall select tools and assessments for educators, early interventionists and therapists that can be used to assess the language and literacy development of children who are deaf and hard of hearing and that, in addition to the assessment required by federal law, can be used by the children's individual family service plans or individual education program teams, as applicable, to track the progress of these children and to establish and modify individual family service plans or individual education programs. These tools and assessments must:

1. Be in a format that shows stages of language development;

2. Be currently used by educators to track the development of expressive and receptive language acquisition of children who are deaf and hard of hearing and their developmental stages toward literacy in American Sign Language and English;

3. Be drawn from existing instruments or assessments currently used to assess the development of all children from birth to 5 years of age; and

4. Be appropriate, both in content and administration, for use with children who are deaf and hard of hearing.

The selection of tools and assessments for educators, early interventionists and therapists may also reflect the recommendations of the task force made pursuant to section 4, subsection 6.

Sec. 6. Report. No later than December 15, 2020, the Department of Education shall submit a report of its findings and recommendations, including suggested legislation, for presentation to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over education and cultural affairs. The report must include:

1. The parent resource portfolio developed by the departmental task force under section 4, and a procedure to disseminate the parent resource portfolio to parents and guardians of children who are deaf and hard of hearing;

2. A procedure to disseminate to local educational agencies educator tools and assessments selected by the department according to section 5 for use in the development and modification of individual family service plans and individual education programs and materials and training in their use in assisting children who are deaf and hard of hearing to become linguistically prepared for kindergarten using American Sign Language or English, or both; and

3. A procedure to require, if a child who is deaf or hard of hearing does not demonstrate progress in expressive and receptive language skills, as measured by one of the educator tools or assessments selected by the department according to section 5 or by the instrument used to assess the development of children with disabilities pursuant to federal law, the child's individual family service plan or individual education program team to provide a detailed explanation of why the child is not meeting the language developmental milestones or progressing toward them and to recommend specific strategies, services and programs that should be provided to the child to assist in the child's success toward literacy in American Sign Language or English, or both, including the possibility that a child may be monolingual in American Sign Language or English.

The joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over education and cultural affairs may report out a bill to the First Regular Session of the 130th Legislature to implement the findings and recommendations included in the report.

SUMMARY

This bill requires the Commissioner of Education, beginning July 31, 2020 and annually thereafter, to submit a report to the joint standing committee having jurisdiction over education and cultural affairs of the data specific to language and literacy development of children who are deaf and hard of hearing from birth to 5 years of age, including children who are deaf or hard of hearing and have other disabilities,

that demonstrate the children's language and literacy development relative to their peers who are not deaf or hard of hearing to include any language developmental milestones or parent resources used or disseminated by the department for use in tracking or assessing the expressive and receptive language acquisition of children who are deaf or hard of hearing and to make this report publicly available.

This bill also directs the Commissioner of Education, no later than October 1, 2019, to establish a departmental task force to recommend language developmental milestones from existing resources and current standards and to develop a parent resource portfolio to monitor and track the expressive and receptive language acquisition and developmental stages toward literacy in American Sign Language and English of children who are deaf and hard of hearing and sets criteria for the task force membership. The bill also directs the Department of Education to select tools and assessments for educators that can be used to assess the language and literacy development of children who are deaf and hard of hearing and to report to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over education and cultural affairs, by December 15, 2020, on the parent resource portfolio developed by the task force and a procedure to disseminate the parent resource portfolio to parents, a procedure to disseminate the selected tools and assessments to educators and a procedure for educators to use when a child is not progressing in expressive and receptive language skills. The report must include suggested legislation to implement its findings and recommendations, and the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over education and cultural affairs is authorized to report out legislation to the First Regular Session of the 130th Legislature to implement those findings and recommendations.