Framework for Instruction in

American Sign Language

in Virginia's Public Schools

Virginia Department of Education
Division of Instruction

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Framework for Instruction in American Sign Language

This document provides a framework for school divisions to use in the development and provision of American Sign Language courses for credit at the secondary level. The framework is based on the current vision for foreign language education in the United States, as presented in the work of the National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (1996) and the Foreign Language Association of Virginia (1997). As stated by the National Standards Project,

> *"To study another language and culture gives one the powerful key to successful communication: knowing how, when and why and to say what to whom. . . . The approach to second language instruction found in today's schools is designed to facilitate genuine interaction with others, whether they are on another continent, across town, or within the neighborhood" (p.11).*

American Sign Language is a language other than English currently taught in secondary schools and post-secondary institutions in Virginia and throughout the nation. A recent survey of elementary and secondary public and private schools by the Center for Applied Linguistics (1997) revealed that "Sign Language" is taught in 2% of the schools responding to the survey. This places it behind Japanese, Italian, and Russian and before Chinese, Greek, and Hebrew in languages taught by the schools. A Joint National Committee for Languages' survey of states (1997) revealed that 26 of 37 states responding "consider" American Sign Language to be "a foreign language." Sherman Wilcox (1997) maintains that nearly 100 colleges and universities recognize American Sign Language for foreign language instruction.

American Sign Language is a visual-gestural language with a grammar and syntax that is unique (Klima and Bellugi, 1979; Baker and Battison, 1980; Baker and Cokley, 1980). It is not based on American English. Rather, it is indigenous to the Deaf culture in the United States and Canada. American Sign Language has the necessary components of a language: structure, syntax, used by a community, relatively arbitrary and dynamic (Chomsky, 1975; Hoeman, 1986).

The second language learning process applies to the learning of American Sign Language in the same fashion that it applies to learning an auditory language. Learning to communicate requires learning about the culture, making connections with other disciplines, drawing comparisons within and outside the language, and using language in communities. Attaining fluency in American Sign Language requires the same amount of instruction that is required to become fluent in any modern or classical language (Baker and Cokely, 1980).

American Sign Language has received increased exposure over the last three decades of the 1900s due to legislation, the media, and research into the language itself. The Deaf commu-

nity in the United States is more visible in our public schools and in our communities. Some two million Americans are deaf or have a severe bilateral hearing loss (Subcommittee on Brain and Behavioral Sciences, 1991).

Although the exact number of persons using American Sign Language is unknown, it is estimated that as many as 500,000 persons use American Sign Language (Padden and Humphries, 1988). Competence in American Sign Language will provide students with cross-cultural experiences, enable interactions with the Deaf community, including deaf students in public schools, and provide career opportunities that require such competency (e.g., education, counseling, interpreting). Inclusion of American Sign Language in the continuum of courses in languages other than English may enable some students to attain knowledge of another language and culture who may not have been otherwise able to do so with offerings from the traditional modern and classical languages.

Framework

The framework for American Sign Language instruction presented in this document is based on the five organizing principles identified by the National Standards in Foreign Language Project and supported by the Foreign Language Association of Virginia. These principles — Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities — are considered "the five C's of foreign language education."

Communication:

Communicating in a language other than English.

Cultures:

Acquiring knowledge and understanding of the cultures that use the language.

Connections:

Providing a connection to additional bodies of knowledge.

Comparisons:

Comparing and contrasting the language to develop greater insight into the first language and culture.

Communities:

Enabling students to participate in multilingual communities.

These organizing principles are not discrete elements, but are interconnected to provide students with a rich curricular experience. The communication principle recognizes three communication modes that place primary emphasis on the context and purpose of communication (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1996).

Interpersonal: direct communication between individuals who are in personal contact (e.g., conversation).

Interpretive: receptive communication of a message, the creator of the message is absent (e.g., understanding movies, television broadcasts or speeches).

Presentational: communication for people (an audience) with whom there is no immediate personal contact (e.g., making speeches).

The culture principle reflects the interrelationships among philosophical perspectives, behavioral practices, and products of a culture. The perspectives are the meanings, attitudes, values, and ideas of the culture. Practices are the patterns of social interactions. Products are considered to be both tangible and intangible and include books, tools, laws, and games (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1996).

Grammar instruction, a traditional component of foreign language instruction, is not lost. Rather, it is taught in context. The structure and syntax (i.e., grammar) of American Sign Language would similarly be taught in the context of the five principles.

This framework assumes that instruction will spiral concepts, structures, and functions. Spiraling reintroduces concepts at increasing levels of complexity, enabling students to improve their skills in a functional context. Further, the framework assumes the use of authentic materials from the Deaf culture, where appropriate to the curriculum.

Learning a language other than English is a valuable learning experience for students. Learning American Sign Language will provide students with the opportunities to communicate with another community, to develop an appreciation of the diversity of our pluralistic society, and to develop a deeper understanding of English.

PRINCIPLE 1: COMMUNICATION

Communicating in American Sign Language

Standard 1.1

Students engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions (interpersonal mode)

Progress Indicators
Year 1

- Students ask and answer questions about family, school events, and celebrations.
- Students share likes and dislikes with each other and the class.
- Students exchange essential information such as making introductions, leave-taking, getting attention, and negotiating the signing environment using appropriate non-manual behaviors (i.e., facial expression, body posture, spatial organization).
- Students follow and give simple directions and instructions.

Progress Indicators
Year 2

- Students ask and respond to questions for clarification.
- Students express opinions and preferences regarding personal and school events and experiences.
- Students develop and propose solutions to issues and problems related to the school or community through group work.

Progress Indicators
Year 3

- Students discuss, in American Sign Language, current or past events that are of significance in the Deaf culture or being studied in another subject.
- Students develop and propose solutions to issues and problems that are of concern to members of their own culture and to members of the Deaf culture.
- Students exchange, support, and discuss their opinions and individual perspectives with peers on a variety of topics.
- Students recognize communication breakdowns and request or provide repair.

Standard 1.2

Students understand and interpret American Sign Language on a variety of topics (interpretive mode)

Progress Indicators
Year 1

- Students comprehend main ideas in appropriate signed narratives such as personal anecdotes or narratives based on familiar themes, in person or via videotape.
- Students identify people and objects in their environment or from other school subjects, based on signed descriptions.
- Students follow signed directions regarding familiar locations.

Progress Indicators
Year 2

- Students understand announcements and messages connected to daily activities at school or in the Deaf culture.
- Students understand the main themes and significant details on topics and products from other classes or from Deaf culture as presented on television, video, or live presentations.
- Students comprehend the principle characters, main ideas, and themes in selected literary presentations (e.g., storytelling, folklore, poetry, and drama).
- Students use knowledge acquired in other settings and from other subject areas to comprehend messages in American Sign Language.

Progress Indicators
Year 3

- Students understand main ideas and significant details of discussions, lectures and presentations on current or past events of Deaf culture or of subjects studied in other classes.
- Students analyze the main plot, characterization, and setting in authentic American Sign Language literature (e.g., storytelling, folklore, poetry, and drama).
- Students demonstrate increasing understanding of the cultural nuances of meaning in signed language as expressed in formal and informal settings.
- Students demonstrate increasing understanding of the cultural nuances of meaning in expressive products of Deaf culture, including selections from various literary genres and visual arts (e.g., storytelling, folklore, poetry, and drama).

Standard 1.3

Students present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers on a variety of topics. (presentational mode)

Progress Indicators
Year 1

- Students prepare stories about activities or events in their environments and share these stories with an audience.
- Students dramatize stories and anecdotes commonly known by members of the Deaf community (e.g., ABC Stories).
- Students tell or retell stories and give messages in American Sign Language.

Progress Indicators
Year 2

- Students present short plays or skits, poetry, and anecdotes to share with school peers or groups via live performance or videotape.
- Students prepare stories about school or personal experiences or events to share with peers and members of the deaf community.
- Students prepare class presentations or reports on personal experiences, other school subjects, or current events.

Progress Indicators
Year 3

- Students debate a topic with classmates.
- Students perform cultural arts events commonly enjoyed by members of the Deaf community (e.g., scenes from plays, poetry, excerpts from short stories).
- Students select and analyze expressive products from the literary genres of American Sign Language (e.g., storytelling, folklore, poetry, and drama).
- Students perform a play or poem connected to a topic from another subject area.
- Students create stories, short plays, or poetry based on themes, ideas, or perspectives of the Deaf community.
- Students prepare and present a research-based analysis of a current event from the perspective of both the Deaf culture and their own culture.

PRINCIPLE 2: CULTURES

Knowledge of the cultural context in which American Sign Language occurs

Standard 2.1

Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between practices and perspectives of Deaf culture.

Progress Indicators
Year 1

- Students demonstrate an understanding of American Sign Language as indigenous to the Deaf culture.
- Students observe, identify, discuss, and use simple patterns of behavior for interacting in various settings
- Students observe, identify, discuss, and use appropriate communication for greeting and leave-taking, attention getting, and use of names (i.e., name signs).
- Students observe and discuss the historical and current role of technology in the Deaf culture.
- Students demonstrate awareness of Deaf heritage and identify major historical events and persons.

Progress Indicators
Year 2

- Student use appropriate communication in daily activities among peers and adults.
- Students discuss and analyze common beliefs and attitudes among members of the Deaf community.
- Students identify the members of the Deaf community and its hierarchy and demonstrate knowledge of communication differences within the Deaf community.
- Students identify and learn about the role of organizations of the Deaf.

Progress Indicators
Year 3

- Students discuss and analyze the diversity of beliefs, attitudes, and mores within the Deaf community.
- Students identify, analyze, and discuss various patterns of behavior and interaction typical of the Deaf culture.
- Students identify, examine, and discuss connections between the perspectives of the Deaf culture and socially approved behavior patterns.

Standard 2.2

Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the Deaf culture.

Progress Indicators
Year 1

- Students recognize the early existence of American Sign Language in the United States and foreign influences on its etymological development.
- Students identify the various historical beliefs about deafness (e.g., education, listening devices).
- Students identify and discuss the contributions made by linguists who have studied American Sign Language.
- Students recognize themes, ideas, or perspectives of the Deaf culture.

Progress Indicators
Year 2

- Students analyze the influence of other signed languages and cultures of the world on American Sign Language.
- Students research and learn about humor, literature, and cultural arts of the Deaf community.
- Students recognize and describe Deaf heritage by identifying the contributions made by people who are deaf in all aspects of life.
- Students analyze and compare opinions regarding American Sign Language as a language.

Progress Indicators
Year 3

- Students identify and analyze social, economic, legislative, and institutional issues that effect and have effected the Deaf community, to include the role of organizations of the Deaf with respect to these issues.
- Students research and analyze Deaf heritage as it relates to humor and the cultural arts.

PRINCIPLE 3: CONNECTIONS

Providing connections to additional bodies of knowledge

Standard 3.1

Students reinforce and further their knowledge of other disciplines through their knowledge of and skills in using American Sign Language.

Progress Indicators
Year 1

- Students demonstrate understanding of concepts learned in other subject areas in American Sign Language (e.g., mathematics: number concepts, time and measurement, story problems; health: physical characteristics).
- Students identify the use of technology to access and exchange information with and within the Deaf community (e.g., captioning/decoding devices, TTYs and text telephones, listening systems, real-time graphic displays).
- Students demonstrate an awareness of print and nonprint resources for deafness, the Deaf, and American Sign Language, and other sign systems (e.g., sign language CD-rom dictionaries, books by deaf authors, books about the Deaf).

Progress Indicators
Year 2

- Students discuss topics from other subject areas in American Sign Language (e.g., geographical terms and concepts, literature, geometry, drama, and dance).
- Students use technology to access and exchange information with and within the Deaf community (e.g., closed captioning, text telephones, relay services).
- Students expand their knowledge of print and nonprint resources on deafness, the Deaf, and American Sign Language to gather information (e.g., web sites for deaf associations, deaf businesses, professional agencies and associations).

Progress Indicators
Year 3

- Students discuss topics from other subject areas, and acquire information about the topic by using American Sign Language (e.g., government, civics, health).
- Students project future technological advances that effect the Deaf, deafness, and American Sign Language (e.g., drive-through windows, viewer phones, rear-view captioning).

- Students use their knowledge and access of print and nonprint resources on deafness, the Deaf, and American Sign Language to research Deaf perspectives on issues (e.g., web sites that offer signed languages outside the United States, videotape series).

Standard 3.2

Students acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through American Sign Language and its cultures.

Progress Indicators
Year 1

- Students gain an understanding of concepts that are unique to the deaf community and their implications for language learning (e.g., hearing of hearing, hearing of deaf, deaf of hearing, deaf of deaf, and hard of hearing).

- Students become aware of the perspective of the Deaf culture by reading or viewing publications or presentations.

Progress Indicators
Year 2

- Students identify issues from different perspectives of members of the Deaf culture (e.g., using topics found in deaf publications such as NAD Broadcaster, the "Deaf President Now" movement, state and federal legislation).

Progress Indicators
Year 3

- Students use their knowledge of diversity within the Deaf culture and their knowledge of American Sign Language to assume different points of view (e.g., class presentations, debates, role plays).

PRINCIPLE 4: COMPARISONS

Comparing and contrasting American Sign Language with a student's own language

Standard 4.1

Students demonstrate understanding of the nature of language through comparisons of American Sign Language and their own language.

Progress Indicators
Year 1

- Students recognize differences and similarities between auditory languages and the visual/conceptual features of American Sign Language, including homophones, manual babbling.
- Students compare the inflections used to communicate questions, negatives, and statements in American Sign Language with the inflectional patterns used in the students' own language.
- Students identify elements of American Sign Language phonology (e.g., handshapes, type of signs, orientation on the body, sign movements), comparing and contrasting with the phonology of their own language.
- Students compare formal and informal forms of language in greetings and leave-taking in American Sign Language and their own language.
- Students identify signs that are "borrowed" in American Sign Language and in their own language and speculate on reasons for "borrowing."

Progress Indicators
Year 2

- Students analyze syntactical and linguistic similarities and differences between American Sign Language and other languages (e.g., relationship between sign/word order and meaning, question format, verb inflections, time and tense indicators).
- Students demonstrate awareness of idioms and other figurative language within American Sign Language and compare them to idioms and other figurative language in their own language.
- Students demonstrate awareness of critical elements of American Sign Language that must be mastered to convey meaning.
- Students analyze relationships between word order and meaning in American Sign Language and their own language.

Progress Indicators
Year 3

- Students demonstrate differences between auditory languages and the visual/conceptual language of American Sign Language, including homophones.
- Students analyze comparisons and differences between literary genres of American Sign Language and their own language (e.g., poetry)
- Students compare and contrast conversation initiator and conversation resuming techniques between American Sign Language and their own language.
- Students demonstrate an awareness that there are phrases that do not translate directly from American Sign Language to their own language.
- Students study the evolution of American Sign Language (e.g., the role of French sign language, English print).

Standard 4.2

Students demonstrate the concept of culture through comparisons of the Deaf culture with their own culture.

Progress Indicators
Year 1

- Students recognize the importance of affiliation and status within the Deaf community during introductions, in comparison with their own language.
- Students demonstrate an awareness of language register in American Sign Language, compared with their own language (e.g., name signs, degrees of formality).
- Students compare simple patterns of interaction in the Deaf culture and in their own culture.

Progress Indicators
Year 2

- Students compare and contrast the Deaf culture with other minority cultures.
- Students compare and contrast heroes and heroines in the Deaf community with heroes and heroines in their own community.
- Students compare and contrast deaf education and its history with education in other communities.
- Students demonstrate awareness that they too have a culture based on their comparisons between the Deaf culture and their own culture.

Progress Indicators
Year 3

- Students compare and contrast representatives of Deaf cultures and other cultures in a variety of literary genres.
- Students compare and contrast Deaf organizations and organizations of other cultures with respect to their political impact.
- Students compare and contrast how culture influences the idioms and nuances of meaning in American Sign Language and in their own language.
- Students analyze relationships between products, practices and perspectives in American Sign Language and the Deaf culture and in their own language and culture.

PRINCIPLE 5: COMMUNITIES

Participation in American Sign Language communities

Standard 5.1

Students use the language both within and beyond the school setting.

Progress Indicators
Year 1

- Students identify deafness-related careers (e.g., Deaf education, interpreting/transliterating)
- Students present information about Deaf awareness and Deaf heritage.
- Students communicate on a personal level with American Sign Language users (e.g., E-mail, Deaf pen-pals, subscription to Deaf-lists)
- Students attend school activities for the Deaf (e.g., Junior NAD/VAD, Deaf clubs)

Progress Indicators
Year 2

- Students expand their knowledge of career opportunities and limitations, with critical review of legislation effecting career choices and accommodations (e.g., the Americans with Disabilities Act)
- Students expand their knowledge of the sociology of deafness by describing diversity within the Deaf culture (e.g., deaf-black, deaf-blind, deaf peddlers)
- Students participate in and plan club activities that benefit the school or community (e.g., displays in the public library, debates, posters)
- Students interact with members of the local Deaf community using American Sign Language (e.g., "Silent suppers," storytelling at libraries, leisure activities)
- Students attend events in the school or broader Deaf community

Progress Indicators
Year 3

- Students analyze and discuss their personal experiences with deafness-related career opportunities and career opportunities for Deaf persons (e.g., by job shadowing an interpreter, interviewing Deaf professionals; studying Deaf artists, attending a Deaf church service).
- Students communicate with or interview members of the Deaf community on topics of personal interest, community, or world concern.
- Students perform, attend, or make a presentation on a cultural or language topic.

Standard 5.2

Students show evidence of becoming life-long learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment.

Progress Indicators
Year 1

- Students use the language for enjoyment (e.g., participate in finger-spelling games)
- Students attend or view media cultural events and social activities (e.g., attend or view a videotaped performance by the National Theater of the Deaf)

Progress Indicators
Year 2

- Students consult various sources in the language and exchange information around topics of personal interest.
- Students attend, view, create and/or perform a topic of interest to members of the Deaf community.

Progress Indicators
Year 3

- Students establish and or maintain interpersonal relations with the Deaf community (e.g., mentor young Deaf children)
- Students participate in, attend, and create social activities with the deaf community (e.g., plan an American Sign Language or Deaf Culture Fair, produce a play, sponsor Deaf humor or poster contests)

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