

Can you hear me
now?

Business



Imagine being placed in a country where you don't speak the language. That's what it's like to be deaf, speaking only ASL (American Sign Language), and be placed in a high school filled with kids who don't understand you. Hearing students are rarely given the opportunity to learn ASL, or even offered an explanation of deaf culture.

Deaf students nationwide are mainstreamed into regular schools without well-trained interpreters or ASL classes available. Schools should be providing interpreters to help deaf students communicate, special education classes to help them learn what they missed, and sign language classes for the hearing. Without these steps, deaf and hard of hearing students cannot thrive. Some people think that it is wrong to "force" a deaf child into a regular school, but others believe it benefits their education to learn how to work with hearing people. Who is right? Maybe both.

Special schools for people with disabilities often lack funding for classes like art and gym, and consequently, schools for the deaf generally have lower academic standards. But deaf children who are mainstreamed into regular schools so they can "get a better education" often have social difficulties. They can end up as outcasts as a result of miscommunications if their needs are not met. For deaf students enrolled in hearing schools, interpreters are vital. They help students socialize with peers and allow them to communicate with teachers.

Communication issues can bring a student's grades down dramatically. Think about it: what if you were sitting in the classroom, trying your best, but the teacher spoke only gibberish? You would either completely lose your social

life by trying to study 24 hours a day, or just plain fail. This could easily happen to deaf students who are mainstreamed without support. Special classes can help students find a happy medium. Many hearing or non-disabled students have seen other students taken to a different room for part of the day. These classes are important.

In these rooms, students can relax and study the information they might have missed. The time spent in special classes versus regular classes differs for each student, making it difficult for unprepared schools to keep up. Students who are hard of hearing may miss a lot less than students who are completely deaf. Sometimes having friends in mainstream classes can help shorten the amount of time a student spends in a special classroom, because they can use each other's notes. Schools with mainstreamed deaf students should be required to offer sign language courses, because everyone deserves the right to communicate.

Friendship is important for everyone. What's it like to be without that support? If a student is sick one day and cannot come to school, she doesn't have the ability to ask her peers for the classwork if she cannot communicate with them. Deaf children deserve better treatment and are too often not given the chance to shine. Based on my experience, I know that things need to change. All schools with deaf students should be required to have well-trained interpreters and special, separate classes, and to offer American Sign Language courses. Even a bit of information on deaf culture during orientation could make a huge difference in the lives of deaf students.