

Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission
Attn: John Miller
528 South Fifth St, Suite 209
Springfield, IL 62701

Dear John Miller:

The intent of this letter is to express my concerns of the so-called committee for the ISD superintendent search. I am a Deaf educator that has worked for four different superintendents and I have seen a lot of changes that has happened at our school. While some changes were positive, lately the changes have been negatively focused on the English as a primary mode of communication instead of our deaf students' natural language, which is ASL. As the ASL educator in the PreK-8th grade, I have had many students expressing their frustrations with struggling to understand the communication mode that is preferred by their teachers/parents. This is one of the main issues that our superintendent will have to face.

However, with the selection of your committee, I do not feel confident that their search would focus on finding someone who has the "Deaf Heart" or completely understands Deaf culture and its roots. The reason for that is because the major lifelines of the deaf community has been excluded in the "committee" and that major lifelines are Deaf organizations that support our school such as Illinois Association of the Deaf, Jacksonville Community Center for the Deaf, and the ISD Alumni Association.

I feel that IDHHC is playing with fire with their selection of Sheri Cook, a Deaf person who has not had any strong relationship with ISD until recently simply because she is the regional GURC representative and has oral parents. Karla Geise is a deaf (lower case d because she is not culturally deaf) person from the Alexander Graham Bell Montessori School who supports the English approach and has moderate signing skills. Amy Richards, a hearing person, is currently no longer at ISBE. Joan Forney is a former hearing ISD superintendent who also has moderate signing skills. Based on these selections, I do not see at least two Deaf of Deaf who are native ASL users on the committee and that makes me very nervous. Also, the fact that most of these selected committee members are outsiders and have no real vested interest in our school makes me worried about their ability to select the right leader for our school. I also wondered why someone from the "inside" was not selected, such as an ISD employee, or at least someone who has been involved in the previous superintendent search committee to assist in the current search process.

History showed that Deaf schools were established to teach Deaf students who would not be successful in the hearing program because they did not speak. However, with modern technology, more and more of our Deaf children are better able to "hear" and speak which can be wonderful news for parents who want their children to assimilate them. If ISD continues to focus on English as the primary mode of communication, which the current committee will seem to support, then we really are depriving our students that really NEEDS ISD in the first place. Those who want to focus on the English approach should be in the mainstream program

because it will be considered least restrictive environment for them. For our Deaf students who crave ASL because it is their natural language and their preferred mode of communication, they should be ISD's primary focus because our school existed because of students like them. For our Deaf students, the acronym of LRE should stand for language rich environment in the least restrictive environment and that would be in classrooms where our students have full and one hundred percent access to communication and ASL is the only language that is possible for our Deaf students because it is visual and does not depend on their auditory skills.

With that said, I strongly feel that representatives from IAD, JCCD and ISDAA should be asked to be a part of the ISD Superintendent Search committee to ensure that the Deaf community is involved in the process as well. We might not be able to hear but we do want to be heard. Inclusion, not exclusion, is what matters.

Sincerely,

Fara Harper
ISD ASL Educator

cc: Secretary Dimas, DHS
Kris Smith, DHS-DORS
John Miller, IDHHC
Corey Axelrod, IAD
Deloris Summer, JCCD
Susan Dramin-Weiss, ISDAA