The Past, Present, and Future of Deaf Education in America

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Deaf Education in America: The Beginning

Imagine what it was like to be deaf in the 1800s...

Communicating with family and friends was a challenge.

Finding a job was almost impossible.

Receiving an education was not an option.
Although there were 84 deaf school-aged children living in the state of Connecticut in 1812, there were no educational options for these students in the United States until ASD was founded in 1817.

Our history begins when a young minister by the name of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet met 9 year-old Alice Cogswell, daughter of prominent Hartford physician Dr. Mason Fitch Cogswell, in 1814.
Dr. Cogswell holds a meeting in his home with Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet and nine other Hartford leaders to discuss the possibility of opening a school for deaf students.

Once it is agreed that a school for the deaf should be created, funds are raised to send Gallaudet to Europe in search of methods for teaching deaf students (sufficient funds were raised in one day!).

After being turned away from the Braidwood Academy in England, Gallaudet meets Abbe Sicard, the Director of the French Institute for the Deaf, who invites him to study the French methods for teaching the deaf.

Gallaudet studies with French teacher, Laurent Clerc, who agrees to travel back with Gallaudet to Hartford, CT to open the first school for the deaf in America.
1817

The Connecticut Asylum for the Education and Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons (*now the American School for the Deaf*) opens as the first permanent school for the deaf in the United States.

When ASD was founded in 1817, the first school consisted of rooms that were rented at Bennett’s City Hotel in Hartford, CT.

Since 1921, ASD’s campus has been located on North Main Street in West Hartford, CT.
American Sign Language

- American Sign Language began at the American School for the Deaf

- ASL was created from:
  - French Sign Language brought to the United States by ASD’s co-founder, Laurent Clerc
  - Martha’s Vineyard Sign Language - a language established on the island due to the high population of deaf citizens (1 out of every 155 residents were deaf)
  - Home signs developed by ASD’s early students to communicate

Although ASL began in Connecticut, it would become an established world language through the publishing of *A Dictionary of American Sign Language on Linguistics Principles*. 
ASD: The Home to Many Firsts

- First permanent school for the deaf in the United States
- First special education school in the Western Hemisphere
- Recipient of the first allocation of both state and federal funding for special education in the U.S.
- First school in the U.S. to employ deaf teachers
- Enrolled its first African American student in 1825 - a time when integration was not only unaccepted, but also illegal.
- Educated the first deaf-blind student, Julia Brace, beginning in 1825.
- Established the first vocational educational program for deaf students
- ASD’s PACES program is the only program specifically designed for emotionally and behaviorally challenged deaf children in New England
ASD’s Impact on Legislative Efforts

- From the beginning, ASD staff and alumni have been heavily involved in the creation of new legislation, policies and programs to benefit deaf and hard of hearing individuals:
  - **Captioned Films for the Deaf** - a nonprofit co-created by former ASD Executive Director, E.B. Boatner, to caption educational and Hollywood films.
  - **Captioned Films for the Deaf Act (1958)** - Legislation signed by President Dwight D. Eisenhower federally funding the captioning of movies, and eventually television programming.
  - **Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975)** passes requiring schools receiving federal funding to provide equal access to education for children with disabilities.
  - **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (1990)** replaces the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* and ensures that students with disabilities are provided with a Free Appropriate Public Education tailored to their individual needs.
  - **Alice Cogswell Anne Sullivan Macy Act** - Proposed piece of legislation that will serve as an amendment to the IDEA providing special considerations for deaf, hard of hearing, blind, and deaf-blind students.
As ASD celebrates our 200th anniversary, our mission remains to meet the unique needs of each individual student, “empowering them to become educated and self-directed, lifelong learners.”
ASD Implements the American Sign Language/English Bilingual Approach

- Students are provided with a bilingual foundation in both American Sign Language and English
- ASL and English are separated to ensure students receive the best modeling of each
- Approach integrates American Sign Language, speech, auditory training, reading, writing, and the use of assistive listening devices
- Specialized services are designed to meet the unique learning needs of each individual student
In 2013, the doors to ASD’s Gallaudet-Clerc Education Center were opened to students and staff eager to call this new building home.
The GCEC is equipped with state-of-the-art technology to provide students with total access to language, including an advanced digital visual system and amplification system that automatically syncs with a student’s hearing aid or cochlear implant.
Entering Our Third Century with A New Look

- In October 2016, ASD unveiled a new logo, tag line, and position statement.
What does it mean to be able?

It means you can.
You have what it takes.
To think.
Question.
Decide.
Dream.
Achieve.

Not just in a classroom, but in the world.
So we prepare deaf and hard-of-hearing students
not only for diplomas,
but for their whole lives.
By nurturing the whole child:
And by giving every student everything they need
to focus not on obstacles or challenges,
but on opportunities and potential.

Our students and their families find we're more than a school —
we're a true community, made up of passionate professionals.
And using a holistic, ASL/English bilingual approach,
we help students and their families be well-prepared
to participate in everything tomorrow will bring.
Because we want all our students
to look forward to futures in which they're...

ALL ways able.
The American School for the Deaf is a comprehensive learning community that welcomes all deaf and hard of hearing children and their families.

We develop the whole child—intellectually, emotionally, physically, socially. Here, students and their families are surrounded by supportive peers, guided by dedicated educators and specialists, and empowered by the latest technology.

Utilizing the proven American Sign Language/English Bilingual approach, we foster a language-rich environment that maximizes each student’s unique potential.
ASD Continues Legacy of “Firsts”

- ASD champions our resources to open Source Interpreting in response to the closing of Connecticut’s interpreting services program.
- ASD partners with NPR and the Colin McEnroe Show to broadcast the first ever regularly scheduled interpreted radio show through Facebook Live.
- ASD is in the development stages of a state-of-the-art Autism Program for deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing nonverbal autistic children who will benefit from visual language to acquire communication skills.
  - This will be the first specialized autism program at a school for the deaf to serve both deaf and hearing students.
Please enjoy the short video created by CONVO Communications showcasing ASD!
AMERICAN SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF

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