

By: RB

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LANGUAGE

American Sign Language is not offered at every high school in Massachusetts.



Why this matters:

American Sign Language is the **third** most used language in America and it is another form of communication that is needed for people with hearing disabilities. Having ASL promotes inclusivity and communication for the deaf and hard of hearing community. Teaching ASL helps break down barriers, fosters understanding, and encourages empathy among students. As the third most used language, learning ASL equips students with valuable skills that can enhance their career opportunities and enrich their personal lives.

Statistic: There is a total of 2,497 schools in Massachusetts and only 33 schools offer an ASL program. That is **0.01%** of schools in Massachusetts.



ROOT CAUSES:

Lack of Teachers:

Many schools struggle to offer ASL classes simply because there are too few qualified instructors who are fluent and licensed to teach the language. Without certified teachers, schools cannot build or sustain ASL programs. This creates a cycle where students don't have the chance to learn ASL, and demand stays low.

Not Seen Equally:

Some schools don't count ASL as fulfilling foreign language requirements, even though it is a fully developed, natural language with its own grammar and cultural background. This discourages schools from offering it and students from choosing it.

Lack of Awareness:

Many educators and decision-makers underestimate the importance of ASL and Deaf culture. This results in less support for ASL in school programs and fewer resources dedicated to it.

INTERVIEW:

From talking with Mrs. Fitz, I have learned that there are few high schools in the surrounding area that also offer ASL. Most districts treat ASL as a world language credit option alongside languages like Spanish and French.

- ★ **Some high schools offer ASL as an elective, mainly due to staffing and not having a certified teacher to teach multiple levels of the language**
- ★ **Some programs focus mainly on vocabulary and basic conversation, while others only incorporate Deaf culture and history**

How does CHS differ?

- ★ **Our curriculum not only teaches students to sign fluently but also introduces them to the history, values, and experiences of the Deaf community. We also aim to provide opportunities for students to interact with native signers and attend community events, which really sets our program apart.**

INTERESTED PARTIES:

**Deaf and Hard of
Hearing Students:**

**Access to
communication
and inclusion**

**Teachers and
Administrators:**

**Curriculum development
and student engagement**

**Deaf
Community:**

**Cultural preservation
and wider
communication**

**Hearing
Students:**

**Broader language
options and
inclusive
communication**

**ASL Teachers
and
Interpreters:**

**Employment
opportunities and
language
promotion**



SOLUTIONS:



Mandate ASL as an elective language course option in all high schools.

Why?

It increases access to ASL without forcing all students to take it, allowing those who are interested to choose it. Moderately effective because it promotes ASL, but doesn't require everyone to take the language.



Establish state-funded ASL teacher training and certification programs to prepare qualified instructors and create pathways for deaf community members to obtain teaching credentials.

Why?

It addresses the teacher shortage issue that prevents schools from offering ASL courses by creating a pipeline of qualified ASL instructors, making it feasible for more schools to add ASL as an elective option. Moderately effective in the long term, as it directly addresses the root cause of limited ASL availability by ensuring adequate teacher supply, though it requires sustained investment.



Create partnerships between Chelmsford High School and local deaf community organizations to provide ASL instruction through community volunteers, mentorship programs, and after-school clubs.

Why?

It provides immediate access to ASL learning opportunities without requiring schools to hire full-time teachers, using community expertise to bridge the gap until formal programs can be established. Highly effective as a short-term bridge solution, providing immediate access while building community connections, though it may lack the consistency and academic rigor of formal courses.



FINAL SOLUTION:

Create partnerships between
Chelmsford High School and local
deaf community organizations.



ACTION PLAN:



Connect with Local Deaf Communities:

- ★ Research and compile a list of local Deaf organizations
 - Examples: Deaf Inc. and The Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- ★ Reach out to these organizations to explore mutual goals and gauge interest in partnership
- ★ Schedule initial meetings with representatives to discuss possible collaboration models



Develop Program Structure and Goals:

- ★ Collaborate with CHS administration, ASL instructor (Mrs. Fitz), and deaf community leaders to co-design the initiative
- ★ Define program types: weekly ASL classes, one-on-one student mentorship, and have more people be involved in the after school ASL club
- ★ Establish roles for volunteers and mentors, including required training or background checks

ACTION PLAN:



Recruit and Train Volunteers/Mentors

- ★ Launch a volunteer recruitment campaign through local organizations, social media, and school newsletters
- ★ Host orientation and training sessions to prepare volunteers for teaching or mentoring in a school environment
- ★ Pair students with deaf mentors and schedule club and class times that align with school hours



Launch and Evaluate the Program:

- ★ Officially launch the ASL programs at CHS at the start of a semester or quarter
- ★ Promote through school announcements, assemblies, and parent newsletters
- ★ Collect feedback from students, volunteers, and staff after each session to refine the program
- ★ Measure outcomes via participation rates, student ASL proficiency, and engagement levels



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