

MEMORANDUM

TO: Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee (JLEOC)
FROM: Jeffrey Warren, Ph.D., Executive Director, NC Collaboratory
RE: Preliminary Report for TRANSITION SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS FOR THE DEAF AND BLIND 3J.6.(h)
DATE: May 1, 2025

Background

The [NC Collaboratory](#) is a funding agency that was established by the NC General Assembly in 2016 to advance academic research that generates practical information for use by State and local governments and the communities they serve. Recent legislation ([S.L. 2024-57](#), SECTION 2A.8.(a-e)) established a K12 research portfolio as the Office of Learning Research (OLR) at the NC Collaboratory to provide information and support needed by elementary and secondary public schools, university leaders, and elected officials to make evidence-based decisions; collaborate with constituent institutions of The University of North Carolina and other stakeholders to implement innovative policies and programs to accelerate learning for all students; work with external research resources and partners to evaluate local, State, and federal programs to establish metrics and assess return on investment; and support the operations of OLR.

Legislative Request

[S.L. 2024-57](#), SECTION 3J.6.(h), which passed into law December 11, 2024 directed the NC Collaboratory, in consultation with each of the Schools, the Department of Public Instruction, and the Department of Administration, to study each School's administrative structure, operations, and policies, including the cost and positions needed for the support of the Schools and how to optimize operation of that School to maximize the educational outcomes for the School's students and ensure the School's success and independence. The Collaboratory shall report its findings, recommendations for each School, and any recommended legislation to the Fiscal Research Division and the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee (JLEOC) no later than May 1, 2025.

Preliminary Report Timeline and Next Steps

Given the abbreviated timeline (December 11, 2024 - May 1, 2025) for completing this update to JLEOC, OLR worked with a team of graduate students from the Sanford Master of Public Policy Program at Duke University to develop this *preliminary* report for "TRANSITION SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS FOR THE DEAF AND BLIND" appended to this memo. The graduate student team conducted a foundational landscape analysis to support the NC Collaboratory's efforts to engage highly qualified researchers to identify research-based best practices for educating Deaf and Blind students in the state's three specialty schools.

Subsequently, OLR at the NC Collaboratory will use the information from the preliminary report to design and fund a 18-month study (July 1, 2025 – December 31, 2026) that will provide recommended best practices for administrative structure, operations, and policies, including the cost and positions needed for the support of the Schools and how to optimize operation of that

School to maximize the educational outcomes for the Schools' students and ensure the Schools' success and independence. This study will include direct engagement with leaders and staff the Department of Public Instruction, Department of the Administration, Governor Morehead School for the Blind and Governor Morehead Preschool, Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf, and North Carolina School for the Deaf. A report, non-technical policy brief, and presentation of research findings will be submitted to JLEOC by December 31, 2026.

Preliminary Report Process and Recommendations

The research unfolded in three phases. The first phase included *a review of specialty school history, governance, and educational programs*. Here, the report provides an overview of these schools based on information from articles, websites, and papers published about them in academic journals. Then the report shifts into an *examination of the legal and policy context around Deaf and Blind education, including state constitutional guarantees, federal disability law, and recent governance changes* through conversations with legal experts in education policy and special education advocacy. This section of the report also highlights disability rights law and its influence on education for special education nationwide. This important framework grounded the remainder of the project in protections of the Deaf and Blind in education settings and the nuance around parental choice and advocacy of children at early points of intervention.

Finally, the report provides a synthesis of interviews with school leaders, educators, alumni, and advocates to gather *insights in professional expertise and lived experience*. A theme of “Nothing about us without us” emerged through conversations with individuals who are Deaf, Blind, or an educator of both groups. These interviews highlighted considerations about key terminology and political implications of recent legislation to move the three schools away from traditional oversight mechanisms and into a more autonomous governance structure. The three schools have established respective boards of trustees and advisory councils. These individuals have extensive expertise in the education of Deaf and Blind students and are key individuals who should be at the forefront of any research or legislation moving forward.

Key findings and recommendations from the preliminary report include:

- These specialty schools are vital for students whose needs are not met in general education, yet they face declining enrollment, bureaucratic constraints, and political uncertainty.
- General education settings often lack staff trained in Deaf or Blind education, leading to delayed referrals, inadequate support, and inconsistent access to appropriate services.
- Deaf, Blind, and DeafBlind communities are too often treated as a single group despite distinct linguistic, cultural, and educational needs.
- Governance reforms aimed at increasing school independence require ongoing evaluation to ensure school autonomy, accountability, and responsiveness to community needs.
- Critical systemic gaps have narrowed in response to the 2023 changes in school governance, however, early language deprivation for Deaf children and lack of awareness among families about available services persist.

These findings also point to critical directions for future research. We recommend that the upcoming efforts not only center the needs of Deaf and Blind students but also reflect deeper commitments to inclusion, enforcement, and tailored inquiry. Specifically, future research should aim to:

- Led by experts with lived experience within the Deaf and Blind communities.
- Treat Deaf and Blind education as distinct areas requiring tailored inquiry.
- Strengthen enforcement of existing laws such as the Deaf Bill of Rights.
- Develop assessment tools that reflect students' primary communication modes.
- Engage with national experts and conduct comparative reviews of state programs.

This preliminary report offers a roadmap for the NC Collaboratory to engage appropriate research partners and design a process that honors community voice, legal obligations, and the complexity of specialized education in North Carolina. By investing in research that centers on lived experience and expert insight, the State can ensure all students receive the education they deserve.

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Preliminary Report S.L. 2024-57, Section 3J.6.(h): Deaf and Blind Education In North Carolina

Client: North Carolina Collaboratory | April 28, 2025

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¹ This student paper was prepared in partial completion of the requirements for a course in the Master of Public Policy Program at Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy. The research, analysis, and recommendations in this paper are solely the work of the student team that authored the document and do not represent the official or unofficial views of the instructors in the course, the Sanford School of Public Policy, or Duke University. Without the specific permission of its authors, this paper may not be used or cited for any purpose other than to inform the client organization about the subject matter.

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POLICY QUESTION

This policy report is part of a larger effort by the NC Collaboratory to identify research-based best practices for educating Deaf and Blind students. Our project is the first stage of this research and serves as a foundational landscape analysis for the rest of the legislative inquiry. Specifically, our project answers the following policy question:

What North Carolina-based organizations or independent researchers should the NC Collaboratory partner with to identify research-based best practices and policies to maximize the educational outcomes for North Carolina Deaf and Blind students?

North Carolina has a rich history of educating K-12 Deaf and Blind children in residential schools, leading many to trade schools, secondary education, and successful livelihoods. Students living at these facilities enjoy immersive educational experiences and a vibrant community. Recent changes to public education and the governance of these schools, enacted by the NC General Assembly (NCGA), reflect an ongoing effort to improve outcomes for all students. As part of this effort, the NCGA tasked NC Collaboratory with investigating two main questions:

1. *What are research-based best practices and policies to maximize the educational outcomes for students in residential schools for the Deaf and Blind?*
2. *What are research-based best practices and policies to ensure the school's success and independence?*

Our team has made it a priority to acknowledge that NC Collaboratory's ongoing efforts will require close collaboration with researchers, advocacy groups, and community members. We realized that as policy students without a special education background and as outsiders to the Deaf and Blind community, we risked developing policy recommendations with the potential to harm rather than help. Thus, we centered our work around the foundational rule "*Nothing about us without us.*" Acknowledging our positionality, we strongly believe that centering the insights of individuals with lived experience and specialized policy expertise will be crucial to the success of North Carolina's continued efforts to ensure all students receive the education they deserve.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS - METHODOLOGY

We calibrated our policy question to provide a foundational understanding of the current landscape to inform NC Collaboratory representatives as they work in partnership with appropriate research partners from within the Deaf and Blind community. This effort required collaboration with field experts and incorporating insights from

individuals within the affected community. To articulate the full complexity of the challenges faced by these students, we completed a literature review of the work of researchers across the educational, medical, and legislative sectors. Several major institutions and individuals within North Carolina are already conducting work adjacent to this field. However, there is no extensive research on best practices for Deaf and Blind education in North Carolina.

Following these differing phases, we decided not to quote any interviewees directly to protect their anonymity. Instead, we synthesized the key takeaways from all interviews to provide a robust discussion of diverse viewpoints. We performed a landscape analysis in three phases:

Phase 1: We conducted a literature review of the state’s three specialty schools: the Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf, the North Carolina School for the Deaf, and the Governor Morehead School for the Blind. We investigated school history, mission, governance, structure, and current programs. Our research aimed to bridge information gaps between the NC Collaboratory and these entities, fostering more effective, research-informed partnerships. We also reviewed current medical technologies influencing educational practices for Deaf and Blind students.

Phase 2: Phase two focused on legal and policy analysis. We conducted informational interviews with stakeholders from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI), Duke Children’s Law Clinic, and the North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities, and reviewed applicable federal and state laws. We conducted a review of state and federal regulations governing Deaf and Blind education in North Carolina, establishing a foundational understanding of special education laws.

Phase 3: To ground our analysis in lived experience, we gathered input from key stakeholders—teachers, faculty, and alums from all three specialty schools. Their perspectives proved integral to understanding both the challenges and the potential within these institutions. Phase 3 findings include a synthesis of interviews with school leaders, educators, alumni, and advocates.

PHASE 1 FINDINGS

REALITIES OF SPECIALITY SCHOOLS

North Carolina has a rich history of educating K-12 Deaf and Blind children in residential schools, leading them to trade schools, successful livelihoods, and postsecondary education. Students living at these facilities have immersive educational experiences and a vibrant community in which to live during the school year.

The three schools in North Carolina for Deaf and Blind students are:

- Eastern NC School for the Deaf (ENCSD)

- NC School for the Deaf (NCSD)
- Governor Morehead School for the Blind (GMS)

The Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf (ENCSD) in Wilson, NC, is a state-run residential campus for K-12 students who are living with differing levels of hearing loss. Since 1964, it has served students from the 54 eastern counties of North Carolina. The five buildings on campus are divided into elementary, middle, and high schools to cater to students' specific educational and developmental needs. ENCSD offers programs specifically for students whose primary area of need is related to their hearing loss.²

ENCSD's mission is to "Provide an accessible, inclusive, and safe environment that supports and inspires every student to engage in cultivating and fulfilling their own academic and personal ambitions to achieve excellence."³ ENCSD offers courses in Career and Technical Education (CTE), computer, ASL, art, and more.⁴ Their current board and advisory council have overlapping members, and there are multi-level checks and balances in place to ensure the rights of students are protected.⁵

The North Carolina School for the Deaf (NCSD) is a state-run residential and day school serving K-12 Deaf students that serves 46 counties in central and western North Carolina. Established in 1894, NCSD provides a multicultural and multilingual educational environment designed to empower students as lifelong learners and contributing citizens.⁶

NCSD delivers specialized academic programs to ensure individualized opportunities for student growth. Enrichment programs, such as arts, athletics, and vocational training, contribute to holistic development. Partnerships with institutions like NC State University enhance educational experiences by exposing students to fields such as biotechnology and real-world applications. Residential facilities foster a safe and nurturing community, enabling students to engage with peers and staff actively. NCSD benefits from a dedicated leadership team focused on improving educational outcomes and fostering community partnerships.⁷

The Governor Morehead School (GMS) was founded in 1845 as the eighth school for the Blind in the United States.⁸ GMS serves the special needs of visually impaired students from across North Carolina in a hybrid residential and day school

² "Programs," Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf.

³ "Programs," Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf.

⁴ "Programs," Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf.

⁵ ESDB. "ESDB Advisory Council". Education Services for the Deaf and Blind: Advisory Council. 2024.

⁶ North Carolina School for the Deaf, "Home," North Carolina School for the Deaf.

⁷ North Carolina School for the Deaf, "Staff Directory," North Carolina School for the Deaf.

⁸ Kristen M. Greene, "Professional Development in Inclusive Early Childhood Settings: Can We Create Communities of Practice through Lesson Study?," ResearchGate, January 2005.

setting.⁹ Since 1993, GMS's outreach program has allowed local education agencies to seek specialized services from GMS at the child's local school.¹⁰ In addition, GMS provides 1–2-week training on campus for students. Their mission statement is as follows: The GMS will offer specialized educational opportunities, community outreach, and an immersive environment for North Carolina students with visual impairments and additional disabilities. Through unique and expert instruction, we will create a dynamic and inclusive environment for students to reach their highest potential in developing knowledge, skills, confidence, and values that will support them as independent, life-long learners to contribute to our global society."¹¹

COMPARATIVE LITERATURE REVIEW

Deaf-Blind Education Service Guidelines provide a comprehensive overview of teaching practices designed to meet the specific needs of Deaf and Blind students.¹³ At the core of these practices is the use of individualized education plans (IEPs), which are crafted to address the unique learning needs of each student.¹²¹³¹⁴ Collaboration among educators, specialists, and families is essential to create a holistic support system that encourages student development.

Research highlights the importance of communication methods and assistive technology when educating Blind students.¹⁵ These tools are vital in helping students develop and utilize communication skills. Tactile methods such as hand-over-hand communication allow Blind students to interact with their environment and engage with others in a meaningful way.¹⁶¹⁷ Braille devices and speech-to-text applications provide additional avenues for students to access information and express themselves.¹⁸

In a broader context, many factors influence the inclusion of Deaf and Blind students. Several key factors include the availability of accessible educational environments, both physically and socially, the accessibility of assistive devices, and the level of acceptance from peers and educators. The preparedness of educators also plays a crucial role in determining the success of inclusive education for students. These findings

⁹ "About GMS," Governor Morehead School.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Avinash Vitthalrao Aneraye et al., "Inclusive Education for Students with Multiple Disability, Deaf-Blindness, and Visual Impairment (MDVI)," *Iconic Research And Engineering Journals* 7, no. 4 (October 2023): 373–78.

¹³ Center for Literacy and Disability Studies, "Deaf-Blind Model Classroom," University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

¹⁴ ECU Teacher Support Program, "Teacher Support Program for Learners with DeafBlindness," East Carolina University.

¹⁵ Hersh, Marion A., and Michael A. Johnson, eds. *Assistive technology for the hearing-impaired, deaf and deafblind*. London: Springer London, 2003.

¹⁶ Huebner, Kathleen Mary, ed. *Hand in hand: Essentials of communication and orientation and mobility for your students who are deaf-blind*. Vol. 1. American Foundation for the blind, 1995.

¹⁷ North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, "Education Services for the Deaf and Blind."

¹⁸ Hoskin, Elizabeth R., Morag K. Coyne, Michael J. White, Stephan CD Dobri, T. Claire Davies, and Shane D. Pinder. "Effectiveness of technology for braille literacy education for children: A systematic review." *Disability and Rehabilitation: Assistive Technology* 19, no. 1 (2024): 120–130.

underscore the need for comprehensive support systems and professional development for educators to ensure these students are integrated into mainstream education.¹⁹

Case studies also offer insights into educating Deaf and Blind students.²⁰ Despite their academic strengths, these students face barriers, including the frequently unmet need for specialized teaching strategies and additional resources. Case studies also highlight the success these students have achieved through targeted support and inclusive practices.^{21,22}

While strides have been made in providing education to Deaf and Blind students, several problems persist. In North Carolina, public school teachers often struggle to access adequate training and resources.²³ Specifically, general education teachers face difficulties in supporting Deaf and Blind students, as they may lack the specialized skills and tools needed to create an inclusive environment. This gap in professional development means that teachers are less equipped to address the complex needs of these students within mainstream classrooms. Furthermore, at the policy and legal levels, there is insufficient support tailored to the challenges of Deaf and Blind students, which leaves them at a disadvantage when it comes to receiving the appropriate educational services and accommodations.

Deaf students especially face a substantial risk of isolation without means for language acquisition and communication. Unable to communicate their needs, the onus lies on the system to identify and provide sufficient resources. Leaving this responsibility to individual parents is not a solution. Many parents are new to the Deaf experience and thus discover their child's needs and rights only after they are suffering the consequences of leaving them unmet. Early intervention from trained professionals is essential to meeting Deaf children's educational, psychological, and developmental needs.

Across the U.S., these challenges are exacerbated by inconsistencies in policies related to Deaf and Blind education.^{24,25} As a result, there are disparities in the quality and accessibility of services available to students. The lack of uniform policies leads to a fragmented system where some students may receive the support they need, while others face barriers in their education. Teacher training is also a major issue, as the necessary resources and expertise are frequently unavailable to support the diverse needs of Deaf and Blind students.²⁶ The funding landscape for Deaf and Blind education is another critical issue. In North Carolina, the NCDPI supports Deaf and Blind education programs

¹⁹ Morgan, Susanne, Elizabeth Bixler, and Jamie McNamara. Self-determination for children and young adults who are deaf-blind. NTAC, 2002.

²⁰ Ralph Merry. "A case study in deaf-blindness." *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 25, no. 2 (1930): 133.

²¹ Amy R. McKenzie. "Emergent literacy supports for students who are deaf-blind or have visual and multiple impairments: A multiple-case study." *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness* 103, no. 5 (2009): 291-302.

²² Center for Literacy and Disability Studies, "Deaf-Blind Student Case Studies," University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

²³ Sligar, Steven R., Shirley A. Madison, and Min Kim. Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment Report: North Carolina Division of Services for the Blind. East Carolina University, 2010.

²⁴ National Center on Deaf-Blindness, *The Dynamic Elements of Specialized Education Services for Students Who Are Deaf-Blind*.

²⁵ Khetsiwe Phumelele Masuku, Gift Khumalo, and Nomfundo Moroe, "Barriers and Facilitators to Inclusive Education for Learners Who Are Deafblind: A Scoping Review," *Education Sciences* 14, no. 10 (2024): 1072

²⁶ U.S. Department of Education, "OSERS: Special Institution – National Technical Institute for the Deaf."

through a combination of federal and state funding.²⁷ At the national level, a variety of funding programs are designed to assist Deaf and Blind students.

In 2023, the NCDPI released a presentation on the Educational Performance of Children with Disabilities and the Implementation of Policies to Improve Outcomes for Students with Disabilities.²⁸ Researchers found that the percentage of students proficient with their grade level, or the Grade Level Performance (GLP), for NC children with disabilities fell 7% after the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and has yet to return to pre-pandemic levels.²⁹ The presentation highlights three main priorities to improve the educational performance of students with disabilities: teacher recruitment and retention, data-based programmatic priorities, and an expansion of technical assistance and professional learning opportunities.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

In 2015, the Board of Education created Advisory Boards at each specialty school to monitor the schools and report quarterly to the State Board of Education. Then, the NCGA increased oversight and accountability for ESDB in the following years through HB11.³⁰ It established a board of trustees at each school, of which four of the five board members are appointed by the NCGA; ³¹ the Governor appoints the fifth member. Governor Roy Cooper vetoed an earlier version of the bill due to his concern that the new appointment structure would politicize the governance of the schools. However, HB11 passed and went into effect without his signature in 2021.

The board of trustees self-governs and is required to report to ESDB annually with student outcomes and future funding requests. The board members are appointed by the NCGA. Each board of trustees operates its school as a quasi- independent mini-agency within the NCDPI. Public Education has been at the heart of political discourse in North Carolina since Terry Sanford's efforts toward uplift through education, through integration following *Brown v. Board* and the civil rights movement,

²⁷ Profile of North Carolina K-12 hearing-impaired students and their parents/caregivers. The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1991.

²⁸ "Report to the North Carolina General Assembly: Educational Performance of Children with Disabilities and Implementation of Policies to Improve Outcomes for Students with Disabilities" (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.),

²⁹ DailyMoth. Recap of article about Deaf education in North Carolina. 2024.

³⁰ The Dynamics of Governance: An Analysis of the Governor Morehead School. JD thesis, Northwestern California University School of Law, 2024.

³¹ State Board of Education, Department of Public Instruction, Report to the North Carolina General Assembly, December 15, 2023.

through the current decade.³² Much of the current public education discourse is often simplified in the media as one side advocating for increased investment in public schools and the other side for privatization through vouchers. Political resistance, exemplified by Governor Cooper's veto of earlier versions of HB 11 resulted in delays in essential services reaching Deaf and Blind students. The political landscape must be well understood and carefully navigated to prevent Blind and Deaf education from further turning into a political tool.

PHASE 2 FINDINGS

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

When working in public education, the legal and statutory environment, both in North Carolina and at the Federal level, directs decisions at every stage of decision-making. The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) governs public education at the federal level for students with disabilities. It ensures a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for children with disabilities and provides extra funding to compensate for the additional expenses associated with special education. It also protects students and their parents from discrimination. All federal funding for public schools is currently conditioned on compliance with IDEA.³³ IDEA grants funds and provides civil rights protections. Additionally, Section 504 Rehabilitation Act of 1973 provides additional Federal protections and guarantees to children with disabilities and their parents, prohibiting discrimination based on disability in programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Education.

³² North Carolina General Statutes, § 115C-150.14. 2023.

³³ Alan Anthony Chase, Educational Policy Formation: The Closing and Unclosing of The Governor Morehead School for the Blind. PhD diss., North Carolina State University, 2017.

History and Governance Timeline

1845–1977

Establishment and Integration

1845: North Carolina founds residential schools for Deaf and Blind students, starting with GMS, eventually adding three schools for the Deaf
1977: All residential schools are racially integrated and operate under state

1990s–2000

Modernization and Restructuring

1998: The state initiatives to enhance educational quality and safety at specialty schools.
2001: State closes the smallest school for the Deaf and establishes OES within DHHS to centrally manage the two remaining Deaf schools and the Governor Morehead School. The legislation also mandated their participation in North Carolina's public school accountability system.

2009–2012

Threats of Closure

2009: NCGA rejects subcommittee suggestion to close GMS and move students to two remaining Deaf school campuses.
2009–2010 DHHS's OES evaluates cost-efficiency of three residential schools for consolidation or enhancement.

2010: NCGA reforms governance via the state budget, dissolving the OES and shifting oversight of three residential schools from DHHS to DPI. The 2010 law combined the roles of director and principal into one and created a new superintendent position for all schools, filled by a search committee.

2011: The 2011 state budget mandated the closure of a residential school by mid-2012, claiming these institutions no longer met student needs. DPI held forums and formed a committee to identify the school, ultimately recommending the GMS be closed in name only. They proposed merging its administration with the ENCSD, allowing Blind students to stay on the Raleigh campus, thus achieving cost savings without relocating students.

2012: In mid-2012, school closures averted when state officials leased part of the GMS campus to a public leadership academy, enhancing resource use and generating revenue. By late 2012, the NCGA lifted the closure mandate but introduced new accountability measures for GMS and the two Deaf schools, ensuring they operated under increased oversight.

2020–Present

Governance Changes

2015: State board of Education creates Advisory councils at each of the three schools
2021: SB 593 to change residential school governance passes with near unanimous support in both chambers.
2022: Governor Roy Cooper vetoes SB 593, citing concerns over the board appointment process
2023: North Carolina revised governance of its residential schools in 2023 with the enactment of House Bill 11, similar to the governor-vetoed legislation from 2022, establishing independent Boards of Trustees for each institution.

An important guiding principle of the IDEA is educating children with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE). This principle is based in response to the long history of institutionalizing children with disabilities or mental health disorders in the U.S. This history is especially relevant when considering North Carolina's specialty schools. LRE means that students with disabilities must receive an appropriate education that meets their needs in the LRE, usually with a preference for placement among their peers.

Advancements in assistive technologies such as cochlear implants potentially impact the LRE designation, but the choice of whether to embrace assistive technology like cochlear implants is a highly personal and private family decision with profound cultural implications. Additionally, students with cochlear implants require extensive therapy to learn how to process and interpret the new sensory input. LRE must be approached with nuance. Attending a public school immersed in a geographical community could be the least restrictive for children able to communicate freely with peers in a general education setting. But a public school can also be the maximal restrictive environment, isolating Deaf students permanently by denying them the opportunity to gain language fluency and thus interrupting appropriate development in other areas, sometimes to such an extent that students may never recover the opportunity once lost. This tragic scenario leads to institutionalization later in life when Deaf adults lack the language fluency necessary to develop and function in society. A specialty school may be the LRE if it is the only environment where the child can freely communicate with peers and teachers.

North Carolina's State Constitution guarantees the right to a sound basic education. Additionally, state laws provide protections through statutes that are similar to the IDEA. The meaning of sound basic education and the obligations that the phrase places on the state to provide funding are the issue at the heart of the decades-long unresolved NC Supreme Court case *Leandro v. The State of North Carolina*, commonly referred to as *Leandro*. In *Leandro*, the North Carolina Supreme Court affirmed in multiple decisions the rights of all students to a sound basic education and the responsibility of the state to provide said education. The case set off a battle between all three branches of state government over how best to define sound basic education and who has the authority to enforce its provisions. Any evaluation of public education deficiencies in North Carolina lacking a thorough understanding of *Leandro* and its implications misses a crucial component of the debate and risks misdiagnosis and mistreatment of its issues.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

While the NCGA is currently looking to increase both independence and oversight over the three schools, there are simultaneous concerns about implications surrounding the dismantling of the Department of Education (DOE) as a federal entity. One interviewee stated recently that:

We are looking at 7.4 million students with disabilities who could potentially be impacted by changes in funding through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. [Nationally,] we have 26 million students from low-income backgrounds in all areas in urban, rural, and suburban communities that [depend] on federal Title I funding to improve their achievement in schools. We know that there are six states where more than 20% of their budgets come from federal sources, and those states are going to be impacted if those federal dollars are changed up in any way. There are 9.8 million students in rural schools who depend on federal support for bridge funding in communities with more limited local tax bases.³⁴

As this stakeholder forewarns, without federal backing, things like tuition, adaptive technologies, certain increases in funding for special education, and assistance to many of the rural families in North Carolina who have children at the three specialty schools are at risk. While this is a political landscape that is evolving daily, experts warn that without federal oversight, these children are at significant risk of being harmed by the reduction of the DOE. As federal policies from DOE are being suggested to be given “back to the states,” these children must be set up to succeed long-term in alignment with previous federal protections (IDEA) for special education students, regardless of federal policy changes.

However, differences in categorization surrounding special education of the Deaf and Blind communities make it difficult to analyze the educational outcomes of these schools. The lack of data on the realities of Deaf and Blind students in North Carolina makes the conversations around “low incidence” disabilities difficult for lawmakers to fully understand. Due to the separation of data around the real number of impacted children with low-incidence disabilities, there has been division amongst parents, administrators, students, and advocates for the broader Deaf and Blind community. To move forward, conversations about these schools must be grounded in reliable data—and additional research is needed to inform both policy and practice.

Political tension surrounding the transition of oversight over the three specialty schools from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) to NCDPI has led to several legislative attempts for a “fix-it” bill to reform the current “chaotic” transitions. One interviewee said “This may not be the popular way to put it, but it is a parental choice bill,” referring to previous legislation that has restricted admissions to these schools and, in turn, has reduced the number of students these schools can fully educate.³⁵ They suggested that these schools expand their admissions protocols to care for students with more than one special education need to best adhere to the IDEA regulations.

³⁴ 2025. Explainer: What Dismantling the Department of Education Really Means [Podcast]. Duke Sanford School of Public Policy.

³⁵ Ren Larson, “Why the State’s Deaf Schools Declined—and Could Rise Again,” The Assembly NC, April 15, 2024.

PHASE 3 FINDINGS

COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Interviews with members of the Deaf and Blind communities were the most fruitful phase of our research. We spoke with leaders from each of North Carolina's three specialty schools. Their deep understanding, shaped by years of education, service, and lived experience, offers unmatched insight into the needs of Deaf and Blind children in the state. The boards of trustees are, in many ways, North Carolina's most concentrated source of subject matter expertise. These conversations reinforced our conclusion that policies affecting Deaf and Blind education must be informed by the expertise and perspectives of these communities.

Our investigation surfaced critical systemic challenges that demand a nuanced, community-informed approach. One of the most pressing insights is the profound heterogeneity within the Deaf, Blind, and DeafBlind populations. These are not monolithic groups, but diverse communities with distinct linguistic, cultural, and educational needs. Current frameworks that attempt to combine them often fail to reflect these differences, leading to gaps in service and support. Each group requires specialized understanding, ranging from language acquisition strategies to instructional methodologies.

Among Deaf students, early language intervention emerged as a particularly urgent concern. Language deprivation can severely affect cognitive, emotional, and social development, with consequences that extend well beyond academics. Some children in North Carolina spend years exhausting public school resources before they are referred to one of the state's schools for the Deaf. By the time these students arrive, they may be a decade or more behind in language fluency. Educators then face the dual challenge of teaching foundational communication skills while also addressing maladaptive coping behaviors and developmental delays tied to early language deprivation.

Legal protections such as the 2013 Deaf Child's Bill of Rights were described as promising in theory but lacking in practical enforcement. The burden to invoke these rights often falls to parents, many of whom are unaware of their existence or lack the training and experience needed to navigate complex special education policies. Parents often depend on school officials to guide them, yet many families are unaware that North Carolina has three specialty schools serving Deaf and Blind students.

Public schools across the state were described as lacking comprehensive communication plans, consistent interpretation services, and accessible pathways to specialized education. In addition, state-mandated assessment tools, such as end-of-grade tests, were reported to disadvantage students who primarily use American Sign Language.

Interviewees also identified technological gaps and opportunities. While innovation in areas like video conferencing holds the potential to reach students in geographically isolated areas, significant implementation challenges remain. Development in cochlear implant technology was discussed as one possible tool, but never

as a standalone solution. Interviewees emphasized that students with cochlear implants still require extensive support to interpret and use sensory input and that the decision to pursue implantation is a deeply personal one, requiring careful consideration rather than policy pressure. In addition to technological gaps, there are several informational gaps between the new schools and the proper funding channels. While these schools transition to being fully autonomous, further redundancies must be streamlined to ensure that these schools can properly allocate funding to things such as payroll, administrative fees, vendor contracts, general housekeeping, and future budgets.

Finally, a recurring theme throughout our interviews was the importance of centering Deaf and Blind individuals not merely as subjects of research or policy, but as full participants in shaping the future of special education in the state. So resounding was the message that it bears repeating that the unifying principle echoing across conversations was: “*Nothing about us without us.*”

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Takeaway 1: Changing Oversight Mechanisms

While governance reforms seek to improve oversight of residential schools, evaluating the entire continuum of educational settings remains essential to meeting the diverse needs of students. Moving forward, it is critical to evaluate whether the governance structure enacted through HB 11 is improving outcomes, to clarify roles and responsibilities across state agencies, and to identify what supports are needed to ensure consistent leadership and services at North Carolina residential schools. Many statutes and policies have great potential but seemingly fail at implementation.

Takeaway 2: Lack of Clarity about Student and Parent Rights

The recurring theme at failure points throughout the system can be characterized as the lack of clarity about student and parent rights. Systemic success overwhelmingly relies on parents knowing what their children need and choosing among available alternatives to public education through an effective application of an IEP. For instance, the recently approved Deaf Bill of Rights is intended to close this gap for Deaf students, but without enforcement, it is functionally meaningless. Compliance mechanisms such as state complaints and Office of Civil Rights investigations theoretically provide further accountability, but again, overwhelmingly rely on parents knowing their child’s needs and rights. Professionals in this space spend a lifetime learning the intricacies of Blind and Deaf education and development. Most parents are already facing significant strain keeping up with the needs of everyday life before even approaching educational needs. Parents rarely expect to have a Deaf or Blind child. They are often learning on the job. The state must provide an intervention that does not primarily require individual parents to intervene at the bottleneck between home life and state-provided services and support. The state must meet parents where they are and provide sufficient resources to facilitate material parent choice. Without such intervention, parents might be to simply survive in isolation without the support and services their children are constitutionally entitled to

receive, potentially resulting in irreversible harm despite best intentions. It is not enough to have resources available that promote student and parents' rights if parents have no way of knowing about or accessing those resources on behalf of their children. "Parent choice" lacks substance or meaning without a better mechanism for providing parents with information and options.

Takeaway 3: Debates Around Least Restrictive Environments

General education settings continue to serve as the primary placement option, rooted in the federal requirement for a continuum of services under IDEA and the principle of the LRE. These settings are intended to promote inclusion by allowing students to remain in their home communities, interact with developing peers, and access a broader range of academic and social experiences. Stakeholders emphasized that when general education is properly resourced, it can offer a wide array of supports such as hearing-impaired services, speech and occupational therapies, classroom aides, resource rooms, and self-contained classrooms. However, general education settings are rarely properly resourced, and this often causes profound harm. While legal protections such as IEPs, 504 plans, and independent evaluations are designed to ensure appropriate accommodations, they frequently fall short. In practice, these safeguards depend on two fragile conditions: that parents understand both their child's needs and the services available, and that public schools have the resources and specialized expertise to meet those needs—conditions that are too often unmet.

Title I services exist to extend additional support in high-poverty districts, and public schools are increasingly engaging in disability history education and promoting inclusive values. However, funding for one student to receive specialized services based on the idea that one student only needs a small portion of a specialist's time falls short. It is not possible to hire a small portion of a specialist. Funding structures must reflect that schools with few Deaf or Blind students cannot benefit from economies of scale. Even one single student requires full services. Unfilled positions will remain unfilled if schools must hire specialists at such low rates or for so few hours that no qualified specialist can afford to take the position. Technologies like video conferencing have the potential to allow public schools to share experts or for staff to receive specialized training from schools.

Families are meant to benefit from choice, including ASL instruction or cochlear implant pathways, and there is growing enthusiasm for cross-agency collaboration and improving family awareness of available services. General education has the potential to serve a broader segment of Deaf and Blind students while aligning educational equity goals with proper investment and creative problem-solving.

These schools offer comprehensive, specialized services for students whose needs cannot be met in general education settings and who are fortunate enough that their parents know the schools exist and have the bandwidth and resources to advocate for their child's inclusion in residential school programming. These schools are staffed by professionals trained in Deaf and Blind education and offer both academic instruction and the Expanded Core Curriculum. Their peer-based environments foster strong identity, social

belonging, and cultural continuity, particularly within the Deaf community. Residential schools have historically served as primary education providers for this population and continue to play a key role in supporting students with multiple disabilities, behavioral needs, or delayed evaluations. They offer not only on-campus services but also outreach programs that can assist rural districts through assessments and teacher support. However, having only recently gained the ability to advertise, their existence and services offered remain underutilized.

Takeaway 4: Systemic Challenges for Deaf and Blind Education

Governance reforms have positioned specialty schools to function more like local education agencies, with boards of trustees providing more localized decision-making. This autonomy, paired with their long-standing expertise, shows promise to allow them to serve as regional hubs and collaborate more effectively with public districts. Their track record in preparing students for higher education and employment, and their value in creating lifelong community networks, reinforces their indispensable relevance in a comprehensive statewide strategy for Deaf and Blind education.

Despite the foundational role in promoting inclusion, general education settings across North Carolina face challenges in adequately serving Deaf and Blind students. A widespread shortage of qualified special educators, particularly those trained in sensory impairments, limits schools' capacity to deliver individualized support. Many districts, especially in rural areas, lack staff proficient in sign language or familiar with expanded core curricula essential for independent living, mobility, and communication. As a result, students are often isolated, misidentified, or underserved, particularly when they are the only children with sensory disabilities in the district.

Most importantly, Deaf students without early ASL training will likely miss important language fluency developmental milestones. Inconsistent early identification, delayed re-evaluations, and slow IEP processes exacerbate disparities in access and outcomes. Even when formal plans are in place, implementation may fall short due to high staff turnover, limited resources, and inadequate instructional settings. Schools may unintentionally violate students' legal rights under IDEA or Section 504 without consistent oversight. Families navigating these systems frequently encounter unclear pathways, weak inter-agency coordination, and insufficient early-stage referrals, leading to missed opportunities for intervention and support.

Specialty schools also face structural and systemic limitations that hinder their ability to serve as a reliable alternative. Many campuses operate in outdated facilities and have experienced decades of underfunding and enrollment decline. The 2010 shift in administrative oversight fragmented service delivery and diminished outreach capacity, particularly in rural regions. The move towards increased independence beginning in 2023 has improved the schools' ability to reach more students and access the state. Policies like restrictive admissions criteria have further narrowed access, leaving some students without viable placement options. Parents may face procedural hurdles, such as IEP-based referrals and appeal processes, which delay or prevent timely enrollment. For

those placed in specialty settings, the distance from home can strain family relationships and reduce opportunities for daily community participation. Furthermore, although these schools provide safe and culturally affirming environments, they risk reinforcing segregation if not integrated with broader community and post-school pathways. In some cases, post-specialty options like sheltered workshops offer limited opportunities and subminimum wages, raising long-term equity and inclusion concerns.

LIMITATIONS

Our stakeholder interviews reinforced the necessity of meaningful inclusion of Deaf and Blind individuals in shaping future policy. Our interviews happened later than optimal in our project timeline, due to logistical constraints. With hindsight, interviewing stakeholders in the first phase of our project would have focused our research, providing crucial context for the rest of our work from the outset. Thus, our paramount recommendation is this guiding principle for any future research or recommendations from start to finish: *“Nothing about us without us.”*

Through our interviews and ethnographic methodology, we were able to inform this landscape analysis through corrections of terminology and general gaps in understanding. However, we were not able to complete a thorough literature review to inform the research-based best practices for Deaf and Blind specialized education in North Carolina. More research needs to be completed to show the full impact these schools have on educational outcomes and livelihoods in post-primary education (K-12). Further research on educational innovations is needed to properly inform this topic. As we are not medical professionals, we cannot fully address or recommend specific medical technologies and their impact on these specialty schools. Further research must include these experts to inform the medical and anatomical modalities that impact these children. Research into other U.S. Deaf and Blind education projects will inform other policies and best practices around the country.

It is vital that this project utilizes national associations, key stakeholders, and advocacy groups to best inform stakeholder needs. These groups are well-equipped to consult on a project of this scope and would be great resources for both data-driven narratives alongside legal frameworks to adhere to. See the Appendix for a table of contacts. It is vital to include board members and alums of these schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Nothing about us without us.** Stakeholders from within the Deaf and Blind communities drive research and policy development at every stage of the project. Research teams should include experts from each of the specialty schools, as well as expert Deaf and Blind community members without specialty school affiliation.
2. **Decouple research on Deaf and Blind schools.** Current approaches that attempt to combine these populations fail to recognize their unique characteristics

and requirements. Each community demands specialized understanding, from language acquisition strategies to educational methodologies. ENCSD and NCSD have distinct challenges and therefore different needs from GMS.

3. Identify and implement strategies for **meaningful enforcement of existing laws such as the Deaf Bill of Rights and the ADA.**
4. **Identify and implement standardized testing instruments that accurately measure progress for Deaf and Blind students in their primary learning language and mode.** This will provide accurate quantitative data to identify the strengths and weaknesses of both specialty and general education programming.
5. **Conduct a comparative review of other states' Deaf and Blind education programs** (see Appendix C).
6. **Incorporate the following questions into the framing of their project:**
 - How can policies balance and account for differing conceptions of IDEA's least restrictive environments?
 - How can the NCGA ensure equitable access to resources for Deaf and Blind children across both urban and rural settings?
 - How can the NCGA increase early access programs for children with low-incidence disabilities?
 - How can the NCGA increase awareness of resources offered to Deaf and Blind children starting from diagnosis?
 - How can communication between different resources and experts (hospitals, agencies, schools) improve to fill gaps in care?
 - How can we empower parents of Deaf and Blind children to utilize resources provided by the state?
 - How can children in specialty schools be best prepared for reintegration into the public post-grad?

CONCLUSION

While our informational interviews provided pivotal information for our research question, we stress the importance of engaging with community stakeholders in the Deaf and Blind community in the future. Those with lived experience as students, teachers, and administrators at specialty and general education schools will have the knowledge, experience, and understanding of the nuances of Deaf and Blind student experiences. Input from individuals with lived experience is vital for an informed, responsive, and authentic research project and policy development. Key barriers to securing adequate educational opportunities for Deaf and Blind children include a lack of resources in rural areas as well as general education facilities, evolving conceptions of LRE, administrative inadequacies in resource management and distribution, and more. All Deaf and Blind children in North Carolina deserve access to high-quality and tailored education to set them up for success for the rest of their lives. The NC Collaboratory can play a crucial role in bridging informational divides between the NCGA, general education schools, specialty schools, and families seeking services for their Deaf and Blind children to ensure that every North Carolinian child can learn, grow, and thrive.

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APPENDIX A - KEY TERMS

Descriptive language is constantly evolving in academic and community spaces. Many terms previously in use are controversial and are no longer widely accepted. Clinically appropriate language in medical contexts may be considered offensive or insensitive when applied directly to individuals. Given the personal nature of identity, respecting and adopting the preferred terms individuals use to describe themselves is essential. Current academic best practices emphasize defining terminology at the outset and maintaining consistency throughout a document. To that end, this report adopts definitions for concepts essential to this study:

- **Blind:** The technical definition of blindness is visual acuity no greater than 20/200 in the better eye with correction or a visual field subtending an angle no greater than 20 degrees. However, some individuals and organizations adopt a broader, functional definition: blindness applies when a person must rely primarily on non-visual strategies to perform tasks typically accomplished visually by others.
- **Deaf-Blind:** Refers to individuals with combined vision and hearing loss, a low-incidence disability with wide variation in cause, severity, and co-occurring conditions.
 - **DeafBlind:** (capitalized, no hyphen) reflects cultural identity and pride, commonly used within the community.
 - **Deaf-Blind:** official term in U.S. legal and policy contexts.
 - **deafblind or deaf-blind:** often appears in medical or academic writing.
 - **DB:** is a general abbreviation encompassing all variants.
 - **Blind-deaf** describes culturally Blind individuals who later acquire deafness.
- **Deaf or Hard of Hearing:** An inclusive term for individuals with varying degrees of hearing loss.
 - **Deaf:** (capitalized) indicates identification with Deaf culture and often the use of sign language.
 - **deaf:** (lowercase) refers to hearing loss without cultural affiliation.
 - **Hard of Hearing:** typically describes partial hearing loss, with individuals often using hearing aids or spoken language.
- **Low Incidence:** A rarely occurring impairment or disability.
- **Visual or Hearing Impairment:** These terms imply a deficiency, which some individuals may consider offensive; however, they remain commonly utilized in academic and medical contexts.
- **Audism:** Discrimination against people who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing often stems from the belief that hearing is superior to deafness and that Deafness is a problem to be fixed
- **Identity-first language:** This perspective integrates disability as an inherent and defining component of personal identity. The term DeafBlind (capitalized, without a hyphen) is often used by individuals who view their DeafBlindness as a

cultural identity rather than solely as a medical diagnosis. Such an approach is prevalent among disability rights communities that embrace disability identity with pride.

- **Person-first terminology:** This approach emphasizes the individual rather than the disability. For instance, the phrase people who are Blind places the person first, presenting their disability as a secondary characteristic.
- **Residential School:** A specialized educational institution where students live on campus while receiving tailored instruction and support services.
- **Public School:** A school to which a student is assigned based on their geographic residence, serving students of all ability levels.

ACRONYMS

- **ADA:** Americans with Disabilities Act
- **IDEA:** Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
- **FAPE:** Free and Appropriate Public Education
- **LRE:** Least Restrictive Environment
- **IEP:** Individual Education Plan
- **SBE:** Sound Basic Education
- **OCR:** Office for Civil Rights
- **NCGA:** North Carolina General Assembly
- **NCDPI:** North Carolina Department of Public Instruction
- **NCDHHS:** North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services
- **NCCDHH:** The North Carolina Council for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing
- **DSDHH:** The Division of Services for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing
- **ESDB:** Education Services for the Deaf and Blind
- **ENCSD:** Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf
- **GMS:** Governor Morehead School for the Blind
- **NCSD:** North Carolina School for the Deaf

APPENDIX B - CONTACT LISTS

Table 1.1 - Recommended Core Research Partners

Based on extensive consultations with experts in specialized education for Deaf and Blind students, we identified key personnel with strong community connections, research expertise, and legal insight to support the forthcoming report in collaboration with the NC Collaboratory. We recommend involving the following individuals in the research project moving forward.

Organizational Affiliation	Name:	Title:
NCSD	Dr. Kristin Todd	School Director
NCSD/ NCDHHS	Dr. Candice Tate	Deaf Service Program Director
GMS	Dr. Alan Chase	Chair of the Board of Trustees, Expert in Blind Education
ENCSD	Gary Farmer	Board Member
NCDPI	Dr. Chip Buckwell	Kannapolis City Schools Interim Superintendent
NCDPI	Dr. Carol Ann M. Hudgens	Senior Director of the Exceptional Children office
NCDPI	Allison Schaefer	Agency General Counsel
Retired	Dr. Lory Morrow	Retired School Superintendent
Retired	Barbara Bacon	Former Superintendent for all three specialty schools
NC Council on Developmental Disabilities	Phillip Woodward	Systems Change Manager

Table 1.2 - Advocacy and Stakeholder Network

In addition to recommended partners, we identified a broad network of stakeholders embedded in school communities. These individuals hold leadership or advisory roles within schools and are well-positioned to provide insight into institutional dynamics, lived experiences, and advocacy priorities.

Organizational Affiliation	Name:	Title:	Expertise:
ENCSD	Cheryl Iannucci	Principal	Education
ENCSD	Dr. Michele Handley	School Director	Education
GMS Advisory Council	Ed Summers	Vice Chairman	Education
GMS Board of Trustees & Alumni	Dr. Alan Chase	Board Member	Education & Individual with lived experience
GMS Board of Trustees	Lock Milholland	Board Member	Education & Individual with lived experience
GMS	Michelle Cross	Administrative Secretary to the School Director	Education
GMS	Jacqueline Adams	Educational Developmental Aid	Education
GMS	Daniel Simmons	Principal	Education
NCSD Board of Trustees	Jimmy Autrey	Board Member	Education & Individual with lived experience
NCSD Board of Trustees	Wallace Saunders	Board Member	Education & Individual with lived experience
NCSD Board of Trustees	Dr. Tammy Weiner	Board Member	Education
NCSD	Dr. Kristin Todd	School Director	Education

Table 1.3 - Extended Outreach Directory

This list includes stakeholders who were identified through referrals during our outreach process. Many are professionals, parents, or retired educators with involvement in specialized education, advocacy, and service delivery. Their expertise may enrich the broader understanding of sectoral needs and collaborative opportunities.

Organizational Affiliation	Name:	Expertise/Title
UNCG	Jana Wilhelm	Specialized Education Services
UNCG	Frank Griffin	Specialized Education Services
UNC Med	Penny Hatch	Speech and Hearing Sciences
UNC Med	Karen Erickson	Literacy and Disability Studies, Speech and Hearing Sciences,
UNC Med	UNC Cochlear Implant Research Lab	The effectiveness of cochlear implant uses in new patient populations, hearing preservation, and individualized programming procedures
Gallaudet University	Tawny Holmes Hlibok	International leader in disability policy and education law
Alamance Burlington School System	Christina Armfield	Children Director for Alamance Public Schools, Speech Language Pathologist
North Carolina Association of the Deaf	Mike Lupo	Deaf itinerant teacher of the Deaf at a NC public school
North Carolina Association of the Deaf	Rey Castillo	Parent of NCSD and one mainstreamed in Asheville
DSDHH	David Payne	Communication access, sign language
North Carolina Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing	Linda Amato	Psychologist
State of North Carolina	Robert Nutt	Developmental pediatrician with experience with children with disabilities and a member of the NCCDHH representing the NC Pediatric Society
Legal Aid NC	Crystal Ingram	Discrimination, Expulsion, K-12, Section504/Accommodations, Special Education/Idea
NC Child	Neil Harrington	Civil Rights and Social Action, Education, Health
Disability Rights North Carolina	Debbie Thome	Assistive and learning technologies
Retired	Laurie Rook	Retired teacher at the ENCSD who serves on the NCCDHH
Retired	Jan Withers	Former director of the NCCDHH within the NCDHHS
Retired	Denise Grau Nelson	Retired teacher of the Deaf and lead for D/HH education for Durham public schools and a former representative of local education agencies on the NCCDHH

APPENDIX B - INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following is a sample of questions from our interviews, organized by type:

Interview Questions: For Community Members

1. What are the best ways you have seen (the school they are affiliated with) succeed in educating these children?
2. What is one story from your time in these communities/schools/students that stuck with you?
3. What are the largest barriers you think these children face regarding education?
4. What are the best practices for specialty facilities like these?
5. What are the best things about specialty facilities like these?
6. What are the challenges for specialty facilities like these?
7. If you had a magic wand, what would you change? Why?
8. What organizations are doing the best work for these kids? (ex. National Center for Deaf and Blindness)
9. What conferences do you go to?
10. Where do you go for professional development?
11. Whose voices need to be brought to the table regarding legislation around NCDPI and these schools?

Interview Questions: For Researchers

1. Tell me about your research related to Deaf and Blind children.
2. What is the context (in North Carolina or out? Residential schools? Gen/special ed?) What methods do you use?
3. Generally, what does the research tell us are best practices when educating Deaf and Blind children? Specific to residential settings? In their local school system? Short-term out-of-school “camps”? Differential outcomes for children and families from various demographic categories (race/ethnicity, SES, location, etc.)
4. What outstanding research questions/areas of research need attention?
5. What does the future hold for these students, given technological advances...?
6. Do you have a recommendation for a researcher in NC who might be interested in working with a funder to support ongoing research on best practices and policies for these schools?

: Interview Questions: For Legal Experts

12. What legal issues should be considered when working on public education for Deaf and Blind students at specialty schools? In a general education setting?
13. Do you have a recommendation for a legal expert or organization in North Carolina to consult on a research project in this area?
14. Do you have, either currently or in the past, a conflict with any members of the General Assembly?
15. Can you think of anything about you or your body of work that would provoke a claim of partisan bias from either major political party?

APPENDIX C - U.S. DEAFBLIND PROJECT: FUTURE CASE STUDY

List of U.S.-Based DeafBlind Projects:

1. Louisiana Deafblind Project for Children and Youth
2. Montana Deaf-Blind Project
3. Nebraska Deaf-Blind Project
4. New England Blind-Deaf Project
5. New York Blind-Deaf Project
6. North Dakota Dual Sensory Project
7. Pennsylvania Deaf-Blind Project
8. Tennessee Deaf-Blind Project
9. Wyoming Project for Children and Youth Who Are Deaf-Blind