LANGUAGE & LEARNING

A virtual training series for Minnesota professionals supporting children with hearing differences and their families.

Session 1: October 10, 2025

12-1pm
Language Acquisition Overview

1:15-2:15pm
AAC Candidacy and Implementation for DHH Individuals

Session 2: November 13, 2025

12-1pm
Considerations for Selecting Language Assessments for Children with Hearing Differences

1:15-2:15pm
Using Language Input to Understand Language Outcomes: An Introduction to the DHH Language Exposure Assessment Tool (D-LEAT)

Session 3: December 16, 2025

12-2:15pm
Bridging the Gap: Educational Strategies for Supporting Language Acquisition in Part C and Part B

Session 4: January 28, 2026

12-1pm
AI Language Strategies for Children with Hearing Differences

LANGUAGE & LEARNING

A virtual training series for Minnesota professionals supporting children with hearing differences and their families.

Intended Audience:

Minnesota educational professionals supporting children with hearing differences and their families.

Fee:

$25 (MN professionals enter the discount code provided in email correspondence.)

Registration:

Registration is for the complete 4 session training series and available on the Brightworks Events Language & Learning Series link.

- Registered participants will receive a confirmation email, including the virtual participation links.
- Each session will be recorded and posted to the BrightWorks Asynchronous Online Courses webpage until the end of June 2026. Please allow 1-2 weeks for recordings to post.

Sessions:

Sessions with two topics/presenters will have a built-in 15 minute break between presentations.

Questions:

Registration questions contact Gail Jankowski, gail.jankowski@brightworksmn.org Session specific questions contact Jess Moen, jess.moen@brightworksmn.org

LANGUAGE & LEARNING

A 4-see training series for professionals supporting children with hearing differences and their families.

Session 1: October 10, 2025 12-1pm
Language Acquisition Overview

Presenter: Dr. Onudeah Nicolarakis, Beacon Center

Dr. Onudeah Nicolarakis holds a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education and a Master's degree in Deaf Education from Gallaudet University, as well as a Doctorate in Education of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing from Columbia University. Her research and professional interests include functional writing development, critical theory, transformative learning and pedagogy, ASL/English literacy, fingerspelling, mixed methodology, and school reform. Dr. Nicolarakis has extensive teaching experience, having worked at the California School for the Deaf-Fremont, Texas School for the Deaf, Lexington School for the Deaf, P.S. 347: The ASL/English Dual Language Lower School, New York School for the Deaf as a curriculum specialist, LaGuardia Community College, and Teachers College, Columbia University.

Session Description: An introduction to language acquisition (definitions, factors, support available).

Learning Objectives:

1. Explain what language acquisition is and differentiate it from language learning.
2. Discuss factors that influence language acquisition in DHH children.
3. Understand the relationship between access to language and language acquisition outcomes in children.
4. Articulate the importance of early intervention services in supporting DHH children.
5. Examine how family dynamics and involvement can impact language acquisition and the importance of supporting families in this process.

LANGUAGE & LEARNING

A 4 session training series for professionals supporting children with hearing differences and their families.

Session 1: October 10, 2025

1:15 - 2:15pm
AAC Candidacy and Implementation for DHH Individuals

Presenter: Quinn Kelly, Language First
Quinn Kelly is a bilingual Speech-Language Pathologist, American Sign Language (ASL), licensed in both New York and New Jersey. She currently practices at *The Way You Say LLC*, a private practice based in northern New Jersey, and also serves as a content expert and AAC consultant for *Language First*. Quinn primarily supports students developing expressive and receptive language skills through Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). She specializes in working with Deaf Plus individuals and has experience with both neurotypical and complex communicators, utilizing various bilingual approaches that integrate ASL and AAC. Quinn has presented about AAC use with d/Deaf individuals at national and international conferences. She holds an ASL-PI certificate from Gallaudet University.

Session Description: This presentation will discuss how Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) can be used to support Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) students' American Sign Language (ASL) acquisition and expression. The presentation will also help provide professionals a guide as to which DHH students are candidates for AAC, and who are not, based on various criteria. The attendees will learn how to distinguish how to target AAC core words with correlating signs that can be targeted in a conceptual way, allowing for their signing to continue to grow.
Professionals will acquire AAC tools, strategies and ideas that will follow language rules. There can be obstacles faced when collaborating and integrating the use of AAC in a variety of environments; therefore, it is invaluable that professionals that use AAC with DHH students create appropriate participation plans for communication partners. This can ensure success in spontaneous and routine communication situations. It is important that while coaching our communication partners we incorporate our plans into everyday life. This, as well as teaching the corresponding ASL signs, and the location on the communication system will allow for an ASL-English bilingual approach.

Learning Objectives:

1. Determine which Deaf and Hard of Hearing students are candidates for AAC
2. Explain how to implement ASL and AAC strategies during communication
3. Create participation plans for communication partners

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Session 2: November 13, 2025

12 - 1pm

Considerations for Selecting Language Assessments for Children with Hearing Differences

Presenter: Dr. James McCann, Beacon Center

James (Jim) McCann, Ed.D., CCC-SLP is a faculty member in the speech-language pathology program in the School of Human Services and Sciences at Gallaudet University. His teaching and research interests are in language and literacy acquisition in deaf, hard-of-hearing, deafblind, and deafdisabled (DHH) children.

Prior to joining Gallaudet he worked as a speech-language pathologist providing services to DHH children and their families in the infant-toddler, early childhood, elementary, high school, and deafblind programs.

Session Description: This session will review language assessment including different purposes, types of assessment tools, and data provided by different tools. The session will discuss challenges and opportunities for language assessment with DHH children.

Learning Objectives

1. Identify the importance of language acquisition data
2. Compare and contrast types of data obtained from assessment tools
3. Examine how language assessment results may inform intervention and public health policy

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Session 2: November 13, 2025 1:15-2:15pm

Using Language Input to Understand Language
Outcomes: An Introduction to the DHH Language Exposure Assessment Tool

Presenter: Dr. Matthew Hall, Beacon Center

Dr. Matthew Hall, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Communication Sciences & Disorders in the College of Public Health at Temple University, where he directs the First Language Foundations Lab. He applies knowledge from cognitive/developmental psychology, linguistics, speech-language pathology, and public health to questions that concern DHH children. He is committed to increasing the quality of the empirical evidence so that clinicians and families can make better-informed decisions toward the shared goal of promoting the long-term and holistic well-being of DHH children.

Session Description: We all agree that it's important for DHH children to master at least one language as early and as completely as possible. We also know that DHH children's language outcomes are impacted by a large number of factors, but most current efforts to understand language outcomes do not measure what may be the most crucial factor: the child's access to language input, especially during the crucial language-learning years of infancy and toddlerhood (0-3y). This presentation introduces Language Access Profiles and explains how they can be useful for both statewide programs and individual clinical/educational practice.

Learning Objectives:

- Explain why it's critical to measure language access if you want to understand language outcomes for both public health and clinical/educational practice
- Explain the concept of Limited Access and why it's both important and difficult to measure
- Describe the current version of the DHH Language Exposure Assessment Tool (D-LEAT) and how it can be applied in both public health and clinical/educational practice.

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Session 3: December 16, 2025 12-2:15pm

Bridging the Gap: Educational Strategies for Supporting Language Acquisition in Part C and Part B

Presenter: Dr. Leah Geer, Language First

Leah is the Director of the Early Intervention Studies graduate programs at Gallaudet University—programs she herself completed as a student. A proud three-time Gallaudet alum, she holds an MA in Linguistics (2010), a Graduate Certificate (2023), and an MA (2024) in Early Intervention Studies. She earned her PhD in Linguistics from The University of Texas at Austin. Leah is the co-author of ASL at Home, a routine-based ASL curriculum for families with young deaf children, and serves as a Commissioner for the Commission on Collegiate Interpreter Education (CCIE) and as a Board Member of the American Board of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (ABDHHS).

Session Description: Early language access is critical for children who are deaf or hard of hearing (DHH), and both Part C (Early Intervention) and Part B (Preschool and School-Aged Special Education) provide essential frameworks for supporting families. This session will highlight concrete educational strategies that help DHH children build strong language foundations across settings. Participants will learn how service providers can coach families in daily routines, embed visual and auditory language supports, and create environments that encourage communication in both home and school contexts. We will also explore how parents can initiate services through self-referral, even without a formal diagnosis, and how collaboration during the transition from Part C to Part B (typically at 27–33 months) can ensure continuity of services. Recent LEAD-K data from California and Kansas will be used to illustrate trends and challenges in language acquisition, with discussion on how these findings can guide practice. Attendees—including teachers, SLPs, audiologists, and related service providers—will leave with strategies to strengthen language learning opportunities, tools to support smooth transitions, and approaches for advocating alongside families.

Learning Objectives:

1. Identify the key differences between Part C and Part B services as they relate to language acquisition in DHH children.
2. Explain the process and legal right of parent self-referral to early intervention services.
3. Analyze the importance of timely and coordinated transition planning for DHH children at 30 months.
4. Use LEAD-K data to inform educational strategies and advocate for early language access in DHH children.

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Session 4: January 28, 2026 12-1pm

AI for Language Strategies DHH

Presenters: Morgan Nodsle, Teacher DHH & Kelsey Black, MN Department of Education

Morgan Nodsle is an elementary deaf and hard of hearing resource room teacher in the Anoka-Hennepin School District. She has seven years of experience as an itinerant TDHH in various districts around the state, and two years as a center base resource room teacher. Morgan completed her bachelors in Deaf Education and Elementary Education in 2016 from Augustana University and her Education Technology Master's program in 2024 from Minnesota State University, Mankato.

Kelsey Black is an Education Specialist for the Minnesota Department of Education, specializing in Developmental and Cognitive Disabilities. With 13 years of experience as a paraprofessional and teacher, she served students from kindergarten through transition across educational settings. She then worked as a district level Secondary Teaching and Learning Specialist before joining the Minnesota Department of Education. Kelsey holds a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from the University of Minnesota (2010) and a Masters in Special Education (2023).

Session Description: This presentation explores AI's potential in deaf education. We'll demonstrate tools that enhance student learning through personalized content and accessibility features and ways to help maximize time and energy spent on differentiating materials. Practical applications and ethical considerations will be discussed.

Learning Objectives:

1. Explain how to write a prompt for use with an AI generator.
2. Identify AI websites and tasks that can be used to support language acquisition and learning.
3. Enhance teaching by using AI to generate new content for students.