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RECENT EDUCATION COMMENTS RAISES QUESTIONS IN DEAF COMMUNITY

In light of the recent visit from the U.S. Secretary of Education, LPS Superintendent Steve Joel made comments regarding Nebraska's stance on school choice. "Nebraska is a choice state. Students can attend any school they want to – and do," Joel said. Adding that making Nebraska a 'choice state' fosters competition.

The NCDHH Full Board has made deaf and hard of hearing education a top priority to improve in Nebraska. A vote was made to create a task force to diagnose and recognize the challenges and opportunities needed to improve education for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Within the task force as well as recent Individual Education Program (IEP) meetings our representatives have attended, parents with children who are deaf or hard of hearing have requested to send their child to a residential school setting at the Iowa School for the Deaf and were told they cannot go. Reasons include lack of financial support or simply stating their current school provides a better choice.

The NCDHH Full Board is comprised of individuals with years of education experience, including Secretary Dr. Peter Seiler. "Disabled children, especially those who are deaf or hard of hearing, have long been denied a chance at quality education," he said. "I suggest Nebraska allow disabled children the same right to choose a school as those who are without a disability. Because of this, we are seeing parents move out of state in an effort to get quality education for their child."

NCDHH Board Chairman and retired educator at the New Mexico School for the Deaf, Margie Propp says it is time for a change. "Having a school choice, public or residential schools, has long been a challenge for families of deaf or hard of hearing children for a long time, even before the Nebraska School for the Deaf was closed," she said. "It is time for deaf or hard of hearing children to have the same right to choose a school the same as their hearing peers.

Parents are told to utilize the Individuals with Disabilities Act appeals process in an attempt to convince education officials that a residential school setting, or a different school *of their choice*, is best for their child. If parents have to utilize the due process appeal system to obtain the same right of 'school choice' as children without disabilities, is that a true 'choice' after all?

The Commission's role is to advocate for communication access and equality in all aspects of the community, including education, for Nebraskans who are deaf or hard of hearing. If you have education questions or concerns regarding your child's education situation, please contact our Education Advocate, Jenny Corum at jenny.corum@nebraska.gov.

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