May 9, 2022

Los Angeles Unified School District
Board of Education
333 South Beaudry Avenue, 24th Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90017

Dear Superintendent Carvalho and Members of the LAUSD School Board:

I am writing on behalf of the membership of American Cochlear Implant Alliance—a non-profit organization of parents of children with hearing loss, adults with hearing loss, cochlear implant clinicians, and educators of children who are deaf and hard of hearing. We respectfully ask that you oppose Resolution 029-21/22, which is in violation of Federal law and does not take into consideration the demographic diversity of the school district nor the diversity of hearing loss in children which includes those with mild, moderate, and unilateral hearing loss—children who typically listen and talk with their families and friends utilizing the language of the home which may be English, Spanish, or a range of other languages.

This Resolution is in violation of Federal law which specifically provides parents with decision-making on how they wish for their child with hearing loss to communicate and further requires (via IDEA) that early intervention support the approach selected by the family. Federal law, including the Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) Act and IDEA, requires that all options be offered equally. The Resolution being considered by LAUSD ignores the underpinning of IDEA that each child with a disability have an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) and an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IFSP and IEP is to be developed to address the unique needs of the child in collaboration with the child’s family. There is no one approach that works for all children. Further, this resolution would conflict with a key provision of Federal IDEA law requiring a “multi-disciplinary assessment of the unique strengths and needs of the infant or toddler and the identification of services appropriate to meet such needs” (IDEA 2017). Given the diversity of the LAUSD, the approach ignores the diversity of languages and socio-economic characteristics of the population, whose families home language is not English and hence could not serve as the child’s “first teacher” as we emphasize for all children taking advantage of parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents, friends, and neighbors—all playing a role in our children’s development of language.

Over 80% of children identified under newborn hearing screening programs have mild to moderately severe hearing loss (National Center for Hearing Assessment and Management). Of
those 20% born with severe or profound hearing loss, some 55-60% receive cochlear implants (Sorkin 2013, 2016). Children who use cochlear implants may use spoken language only, spoken language and Cued Speech, or spoken language and ASL. Current data shows that 66% of families choose listening and spoken language and 6% use mostly sign language. The spoken language is typically the language used at home – whether it is Spanish, English, or any of the other 93 languages spoken in the Los Angeles Unified School District. If the family’s home language is Spanish, for example, language development experts encourage families to use the language of the home as the child’s first language. It is unrealistic to expect a family to learn both English and American Sign Language (ASL). The majority will not do so, and the child is then left with minimal language interactions with family members.

Children with hearing loss today are identified at birth and should be offered a range of language development options with full parent choice as to those options. Our role is to support all communication modalities and the choices of the family, not push one option. Language cannot be legislated.

Please vote no on Resolution 029-21/22 and continue to provide support for children who are deaf or hard of hearing in the diverse ways that recognize the diversity of this population and the uniqueness of each child.

Sincerely,

Donna Sorkin
Executive Director
American Cochlear Implant Alliance
www.acialliance.org

Attachments:
Supporting Parent Choice for Children Who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing
Demographic Considerations in Serving Children Who are Hard of Hearing or Deaf, White, Karl. National Center for Hearing Assessment and Management (NCHAM), Utah State University