



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Atlanta Area School for the Deaf

State Schools of Georgia

Mr. John A. Serrano, Superintendent

890 North Indian Creek Drive

Clarkston, GA 30021-2299

Executive Summary

Description of the School

Describe the institution's size, community/communities, location and changes it has experienced in the last three years. Include demographic information about the students, staff and community at large. What unique features and challenges are associated with the community/communities the institution serves?

The Atlanta Area School for the Deaf (AASD) is a state-operated day school established for children who are deaf and hard of hearing. The State Superintendent of Schools serves as the local superintendent, and the State Board of Education serves as the local board of education. AASD is funded through appropriations from the Georgia General Assembly and does not receive FTE funds. AASD was first accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) and the Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf (CEASD) in 1988 and has maintained full accreditation.

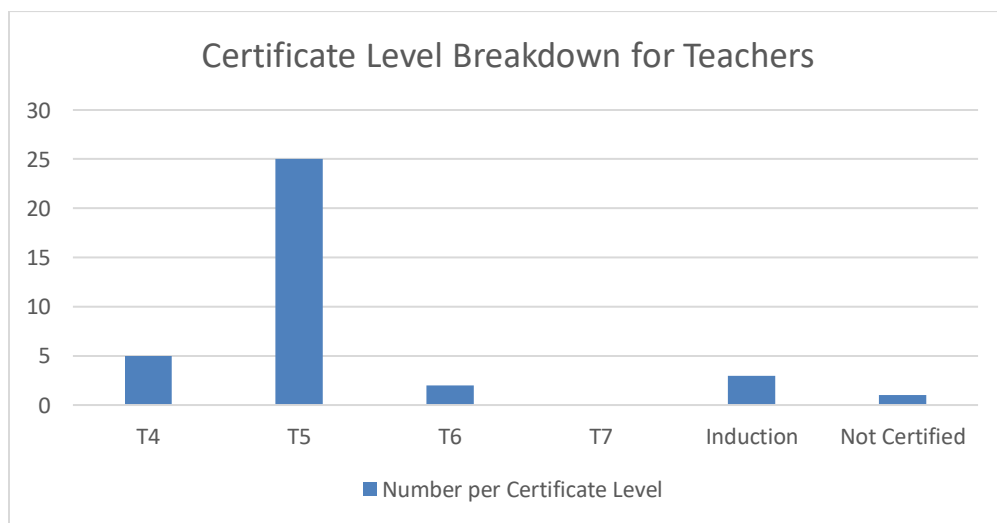
All students attending AASD are referred from their local school system. Placement at AASD is considered appropriate and necessary if it has been determined that the child's need cannot be met by the local school system. AASD specializes in providing appropriate educational programs for students who are deaf and hard of hearing, including students with multiple disabilities. Consequently, AASD has a varied student body of students ages 3 through 21 coming from a large catchment area of 30 local school systems including students from rural and urban Atlanta districts. Student transportation to and from school is a related service provided by the local school systems. In addition, AASD also serves 15 months to 3 years old D/HH as AASD recently expanded the Toddler Program for 2 years old in partnership with the state's early intervention services known as Georgia P.I.N.E.S (Parent Infant Network for Educational Services). Families of students aged under 3 years old are responsible for providing their own transportation. Once they turn 3, IEP meetings are conducted to initiate special education services and to determine placement. AASD's instructional day is tied directly to local school systems' transportation schedules. The local school systems cannot adjust their route schedules because they must provide transportation services to their own students as well as to AASD students.

AASD is comprised of five buildings and is located on 14 acres in Clarkston, GA. AASD opened in 1972 with two buildings and approximately 80 students in preschool, elementary, and middle school. In 1978, a high school program was added with the first graduating class in 1983. AASD is situated in Metro Atlanta. Currently AASD serves 31 school systems. This number has stayed consistent over the past five years. Many students have a long commute and parental involvement is a challenge due to the distance some families live from the school. Since the previous accreditation visit, AASD has added a Family Engagement Specialist who assists with planning events for families and facilitating communication. Parent Compacts provide an agreement between the school, student, and family annually and emphasize the importance of the home-school partnership. Communication expectations for staff have been implemented and families are contacted a minimum of 4 times per year by their children's case manager. Additionally, all service providers are required to reach out to families and make personal connections quarterly. A Hispanic Family Liaison ensures that our Spanish speaking families have access to all communications as well.

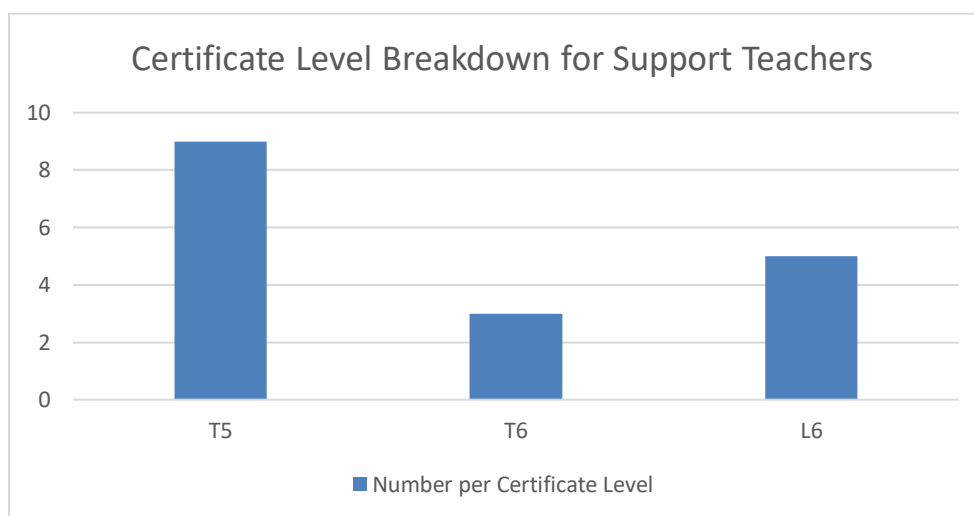
Currently, AASD has 173 students: 45 in Early Childhood and Elementary; 36 in Middle School; and 92 in High School. We serve babies and toddlers as well currently with four one-year olds coming Tuesdays and Thursdays 9:30-11:30 and two-year olds Monday through Friday from 8:00 am-2:00 pm. Since the last AdvancED review, there have been organizational changes that have impacted the school. The school structure has changed and is now is governed by the school-level Superintendent with four Department Heads who function as Assistant Principals over designated areas: Elementary, Middle, High, and CTAE/Transition. Personnel breakdown includes two instructional coaches (math and literacy) and 42 classroom teachers. This number includes 2 Work-Based Learning teachers and staff for the toddler program. There are 12 paraprofessional positions. Support staff include one accounting specialist, two secretaries, one personnel technician, two program associates, one IEP coordinator, two audiologists (one full time and one part time), four speech language pathologists, one nurse, one social worker, three behavior support personnel including a paraprofessional, two school psychologist, one graduation coach / transition coordinator, one media specialist / librarian, one instructional technology employee, one

athletic/recreation director, two ASL interpreters, one ASL specialist, one vacant ASL teacher position, one Spanish interpreter/liaison, three video studio positions (two are vacant), one Outreach / Support Services Supervisor, one Special Education Supervisor, one maintenance supervisor, one head custodian and two custodians, one supply inventory clerk, four school nutrition employees, one IT specialist, one student testing coordinator, one part-time Physical Therapist and two part-time Occupational Therapists (contracted through an agency), one family engagement specialist, one part-time baby program teacher.

Given that the Atlanta Area School for the Deaf is a special education facility, all teachers are required to have multiple certifications (special education/deaf education and content area/s) and American Sign Language proficiency. Hiring experienced and high qualified teachers can be challenging and not always obtainable, due to the specialized nature of the services provided. In light of the new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plan, state certification requirements were revised to reflect professional qualifications. Our classroom teachers are expected to be professionally qualified by possessing appropriate content certification for their teaching assignments. At the beginning of the school year, the leadership team including the HR office created individual plans for non-PQ teachers to identify action steps to become professionally qualified which includes taking the Georgia Assessments for the Certification of Educators (GACE).

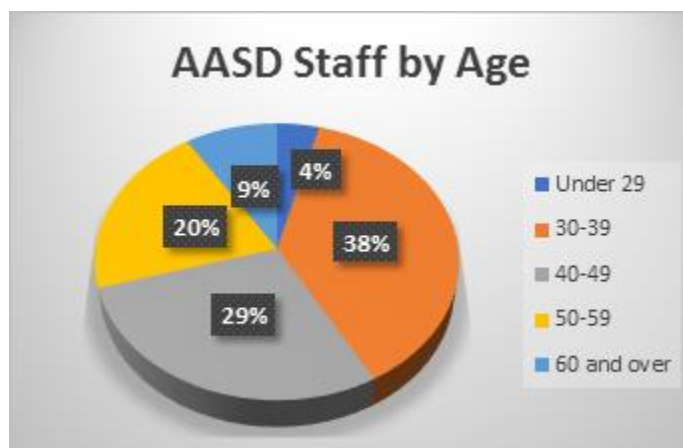


In order to ensure that all students receive the most effective instructional services possible, given the variability of experience and certification preparation level, every teacher is provided with the following as needed: support from academic coaches; participation in the teacher induction program; ongoing, job embedded professional learning, frequent lesson plan review and feedback; opportunities for peer observation and modeling of instructional practices; shared planning times; and participation in data teams. In addition, new teachers are enrolled in a New Teacher Institute. Various topics covered include IEPs, Tier One strategies, the vast amount of resources contained at AASD, etc.

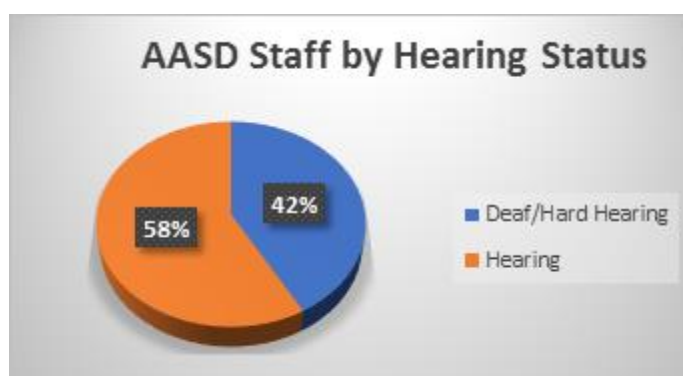


There have been some changes in some of our staff demographics. Particular demographics have changed and some have been consistent. We have had staff retirements and made new key staff hires. Almost half of our staff population (39%) have worked at AASD between 1-5 years, 6-10 years at 25% and 0-11 months at 14%. This does not include additional work experience outside of AASD. Staff who have worked at AASD from 0 to 10 years accounts for 68% of our entire staff. The remaining 32% have worked at AASD longer than 10 years. At the last accreditation visit, 0-10 years staff accounted for 62% which would make it a 7% increase. The majority of the 1-5 years staff are classroom teachers. The number of classroom teachers/staff with at least 15 years or more has decreased slightly due to staff retirements in the past five years, most notably former superintendent who served AASD for 30 years. In the past several years, we have ramped our efforts to improve our retention efforts through our teacher induction program and improving school

climate in various ways as an effort to boost staff morale. At the last accreditation visit, the staff was divided evenly in terms of age. However, the trend has changed as the majority of our staff are between ages 30 to 39 while other age groups have decreased slightly.

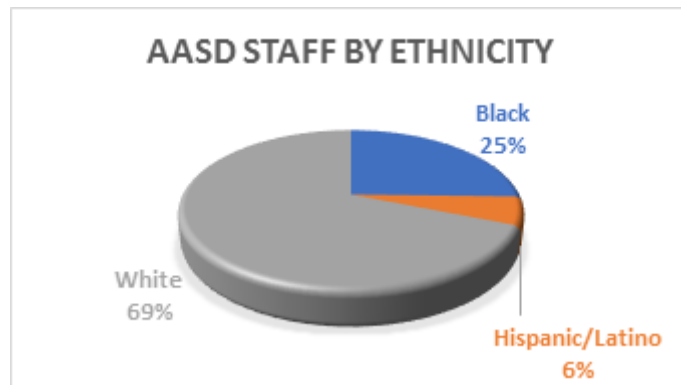


There has been an increase in the number of deaf teachers and staff since the last accreditation visit. 25% of the AASD staff was either Deaf/Hard of Hearing but this year, it is 42%. Fifty one of our staff are Deaf/Hard of Hearing while the remainder of our staff are hearing, making it 58%. This is a result of our ongoing efforts to increase the number of Deaf/Hard of Hearing role models for our students since the beginning of our transformation to a bilingual school.



The majority of our staff are white at 69% while 25% are Black and 6% are Hispanic at 6%. We recognize that the majority of our students are students of color (75%) and that

it's essential for our students to be exposed to a variety of role models. We are constantly seeking ways to recruit highly qualified staff of color.



Purpose

Provide the institution's purpose statement and ancillary content such as mission, vision, values and/or beliefs. Describe how the institution embodies its purpose through its program offerings and expectations for students.

The mission for the Atlanta Area School for the Deaf is to provide a language-rich, student centered environment through American Sign Language and English for the purpose of empowering our students to live independent, fulfilling lives and to become productive, contributing members of society.

By providing a quality, over the top education, students at AASD can and will become the best they can be. The six belief statements were developed to support the mission of AASD.

- We believe optimal learning occurs in an ASL/English bilingual environment.
- We believe each student is a valued individual with unique physical, social, emotional, and intellectual needs.
- We believe that school, family, and community support is critical to student achievement.
- We believe early intervention and language acquisition are imperative for student success.
- We believe in utilizing innovative and differentiated strategies that include the use of technology.
- We believe in ongoing, collaborative, professional learning to foster the continuous improvement of our program.

The Atlanta Area School for the Deaf was established for children who are deaf and hard of hearing. Placement at AASD is considered appropriate and necessary if it has been determined that the child's needs cannot be met by the local school system. All students attending AASD are referred from their local school system. Local school systems refer students to AASD for a variety of reasons. Some school systems do not have a program serving Deaf/Hard of Hearing (D/HH) students because of the extremely low incidence in their county. Other systems will refer students who are D/HH if they have additional disabilities and are not able to participate in traditional mainstream academic classes with an interpreter. Some refer out of respect for the wishes of the parents or students to attend a school for the deaf where they are surrounded by their culture and a rich communication environment. Sometimes students are referred to AASD if they are not progressing in their local school system programs. Consequently, AASD has a varied student body including students ages 3 – 21 coming

from a large catchment area inclusive of students from rural districts as well as from urban Atlanta. AASD specializes in providing appropriate educational programs for students with hearing loss, including students with multiple disabilities. AASD also serves as a resource center for deafness, offering information and technical assistance to parents, school systems, community groups, and other agencies.

As a day school serving 30+ counties, AASD has numerous barriers and challenges. Language acquisition and access are significant challenges for deaf and hard of hearing students. On a state and national level, students are often multiple grade levels behind their hearing peers. Ninety percent of students go home to families with hearing parents. The majority of our families are not proficient in American Sign Language and cannot communicate with their children beyond basic signs or gesturing. Previous data related to student enrollment showed students are referred to AASD in middle school and high school however the trend is now changing to a greater number of elementary referrals. Students who arrive at AASD in any grade typically have language and academic gaps in their learning that are significant because of limited access to language, limited exposure to consistent language models, qualified staff to work with deaf and hard of hearing students, and lack of signing peers. While students at AASD are all on IEPs and present with unique learning challenges, the requirements for them to receive a diploma are the same as their hearing peers. Since the elimination of graduation tests for students, the vast majority of graduates at AASD receive traditional high school diplomas. The few students who earn certificates are late arriving to high school and not able to meet the graduation requirements before aging out or students who have left school and then returned. With this change and our stronger relationship with Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA), students have a higher rate of positive post-secondary outcomes. Students who are not documented citizens are not eligible for support from GVRA and must rely on family or their community to obtain work.

Despite these challenges faces on a day to day basis, AASD has received consistent favorable reviews from accreditations and audits in the past. Changes such as the graduation requirements, the Career Technical Agriculture Education program,

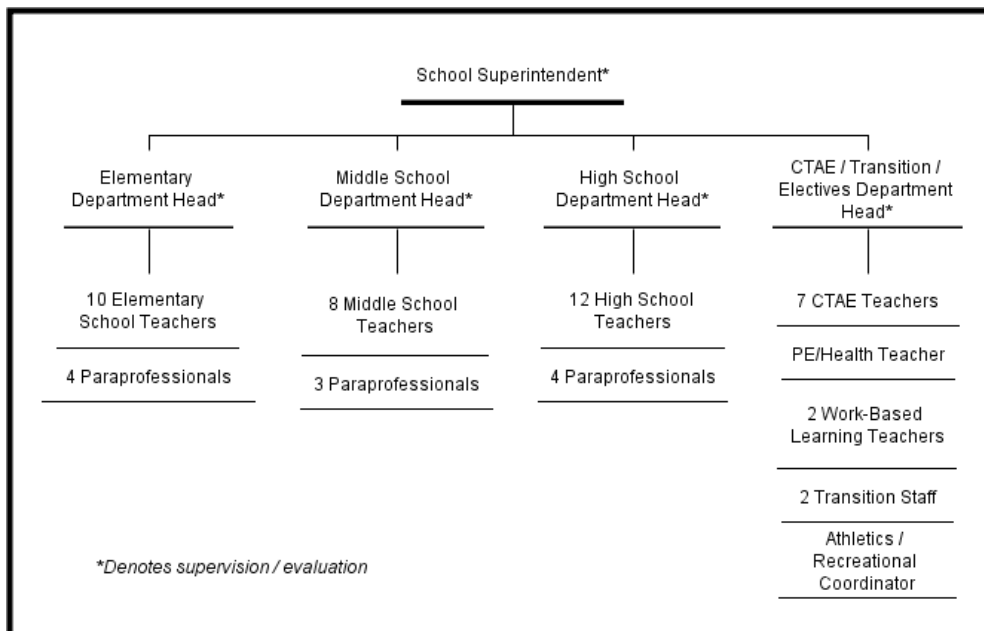
and the partnership with GVRA, and Dual Enrollment to name a few, students are able to overcome some of these barriers and graduate being career and/or college ready.

Notable Achievements and Areas of Improvement

Describe the notable achievements and challenges experienced by the institution in the last three years. Additionally, describe areas for improvement or next step priorities that the institution is striving to achieve in the next three years.

Based on recommendations from the Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf (CEASD) accreditation review, the school

organization was restructured. Previously, there was a Principal and two Assistant Principals to serve the whole school. This was challenging to manage. Now there is a school-level Superintendent with four Department Heads. The departments are Elementary, Middle, the core academic High school classes, and CTAE / Transition. This has been both positive and challenging. While we have better flow of duties and responsibilities within the departments, the different departments are more siloed, meaning there is not as much knowledge shared between the departments. Communication is an ongoing area of need and the silo effect can be changed by implementing different modes of communication. The addition of Department Heads overall has been a positive change and every teacher and staff including families have a “go to” person. Department Heads are responsible for the oversight of instruction in their departments, evaluation of teachers and paraprofessionals, and serve on multiple committees.



During the previous accreditation, the Career Technical and Agriculture Education (CTAE) department was just beginning. Since that time multiple additional

components and changes have been made. AASD now has six CTAE pathways: Nutrition & Food Science, Plant & Landscape Systems, Audio, Video Technology & Film, Graphic Design & Communication, and Internet of Things. AASD secured funding for a new greenhouse through DOE and added Graphic Design & Communication. Business Technology was not a popular pathway for many years. After evaluating the trends in the workforce, it was decided that Internet of Things would be started in place of Business Technology. This has been a constructive change. The Graphic Design lab received funding through DOE as well and is in the second year of implementation. Students in the CTAE classes take their End of Pathway Assessments. Also, there is a strong Career Technical Student Organization. The students in CTSO attend events through the Career & Technical Instruction (CTI) student organization. CTI is for any student served by an IEP in the state of Georgia. CTI provides several leadership events during the year as well as competition in the spring. Students at AASD have attended the Spring Leadership Conference for five years and always bring home the gold. In addition, students who have met their credits receive work experience and dual enrollment opportunities. There is a strong collaboration with GVRA as AASD is one of the state's E3 Pilot schools. High School High Tech promotes visits for students to various business and post-secondary training programs. These different components have better prepared our students for life outside of AASD.

Another positive change has been the addition of a full time Athletic / Recreation Director. As a result, we have been able to expand our afterschool programs to provide additional extracurricular opportunities for students. The sports program and after school tutoring in addition to other after school events are very popular for students, although transportation is still a barrier. After one parent diligently self-advocated with the county, she was able to get IEP documented provision of transportation for extracurricular activities for her child. This parent then advised a couple other parents to do the same. As such, there are a few counties now who provide limited transportation for students to participate in after-school programming. This continues to be something that we are unable to tackle directly as we are required to work collaboratively with our local school system partners, many of whom, are not open. At

this point, parents have the greatest influence to make this happen and we continue to work to empower families to self-advocate.

On the other end of the spectrum is the expansion of our outreach to younger ages. We now have three programs that provide site based early language acquisition and family education. Toddler Time and Baby and Me consists of Tuesdays/Thursdays 9:30-11:30 for one year olds, Wednesday mornings for infants 10:00-11:00, and Monday-Friday for Twos. The two year old program originally operated from 9:30-11:30 however this year, in partnership with Georgia PINES we have expanded that to be a full six hour program from 8:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m. All programs include a family group meeting weekly as well as ASL class weekly for parents. Our Twos includes monthly VIP programs that have parents or special guests spending the day with the children in the classroom. We also include home visits at the start of the year to begin that home-school partnership. The Parent/Family Discussion Group provides parents with ongoing discussions about child development, language development, the transition process to school, assessments of young children, potty training, and also provides exposure in an intimate setting with deaf adult role models and a student panel annually.

Another area of expansion in Outreach is our assessment program to provide Toddler Outreach Assessment for children all over the state of Georgia, assisting county programs and parents with the transition from Part B to Part C. A team of AASD staff that includes a school psychologist, speech language pathologist, ASL specialist, and educational diagnostician work collaboratively to provide a comprehensive assessment to families that looks at all developmental areas in a comfortable setting. While many of these families are from outside counties and may not have intended to enroll at AASD, some of them come back to us later after their children are not as successful as they had hoped in their home programs. Their initial visit to us for assessment makes a positive lasting impression. The assessment ends with a wrap up meeting sharing initial impressions and families receive a comprehensive report a couple weeks later that they use in their IEP meetings. The Support Services Outreach Supervisor supervises the Speech Language Pathologists, Family Engagement Specialist, Hispanic Liaison / Spanish Interpreter, ASL Interpreters, Behavior Staff, Social Worker, and two School Psychologists. In addition, this person supervises the ASL Specialist, Instructional

Technology Specialist, Video Studio Staff, Toddler Program Teachers, Toddler Program Paraprofessional, and Infant/Toddler Teacher.

Community ASL Classes have also been a part of our Outreach expansion. In addition to classes of varying levels for adults, sibling class, and childcare on Saturdays at AASD, we have added weeknight even classes regionally so that some families and community members can take class closer to home.

The technology committee which is made up of teacher and staff representatives is strong and we have a system IT specialist who serves the three state schools in addition to our school-based technology specialist. There are several system-wide changes that have been implemented such as Go IEP, SLDS, and the addition of Canvas (a learning management system) next school year. Student data is also more centralized and contained in the SLDS platform. There are many resources in SLDS that our teachers are not utilizing. Training in use of SLDS and Canvas will provide our staff more resources that can be used for instruction. Additionally, the IEP process is compliant and is smoother. While not perfect, there are more structures in place that ensure the families, students, and teachers are all involved in the process. AASD has centralized all subscriptions and these are now housed with the media specialist. It is beneficial because usage reports can be pulled to see what resources are being used, how many are using it, is the subscription a good use of taxpayer dollars, etc. The school continues to follow our procedures for assessing students with the NWEA Measures of Academic Performance. MAP has been in place for some time, there is now enough reliable data that can be used in several ways. MAP data provides longitudinal data progress for students, parents, and teachers. Likewise, the data can be used to compare with other schools for the Deaf across the country. Due to the variation for state tests, a comparison could not be made. However now we have that information that is shared with staff.

AASD is fortunate to have many competent and knowledgeable staff who represent AASD in a variety of ways. Teachers and support staff are encouraged to attend workshops and conferences that will benefit their jobs. Staff also present at the

state and national level. This is part of the outreach program. AASD is a premier school for the Deaf and should be at the state and national conferences sharing best practices.

Additional Information

Provide any additional information you would like to share with the public and community that were not prompted for in the previous sections.

Given the high level of scrutiny on school safety, the critical need for AAS to maintain a good relationship and open communication with Clarkston Police Department and local emergency responders was recognized. Over the years, AASD ramped up the partnership with Clarkston Police Department and local emergency responders. AASD has regular communication with Dekalb Emergency Management Agency (DEMA) regarding weather emergencies and other safety-related issues. Last fall, AASD hosted our first Open House for emergency first responders to give them opportunity to learn more about our students' unique needs and school. It was very well received as over 20 responders showed up. AASD has hosted workshops inviting local enforcement officials to give presentations to families on a variety of topics such as internet safety and drug trends. In addition, AASD hosted visits from GaDOE leadership to perform safety audit visits where they toured the school and made recommendations to boost our safety for our students and staff.

Being a bilingual school serving D/HH students, AASD strives to maintain a visible presence among the deaf community by hosting a variety of community events. Our annual go-to event, Fall Festival, is a popular event that usually draws large crowds. Throughout the year, AASD hosts a variety of presenters, particularly Deaf/HH presenters, to expose our students to as many deaf role models as possible. This allows for the development of a network with our local deaf leaders and members. In addition, community tours are held for those who are interested in learning more about AASD. In addition, AASD has ongoing partnership with several teacher preparation programs where they send their student teachers to work with our teachers depending on availability. Some notable programs are the University of Tennessee, Valdosta State University, Georgia State University, University of Rochester and Gallaudet University. To continue this engagement, AASD works with colleges and universities on conducting university research projects and we have a process in place to screen research requests.

Georgia is one of many states that are not a “Parent Choice” states which ultimately means that students have to be referred by their local school systems (LSS) in order to be enrolled at AASD. This means that AASD has to maintain a positive working relationship with many neighboring LSS representatives. Metro Schools meeting consisting of D/HH teachers and D/HH representatives from all over the state that meet on a regular basis at AASD. The meetings are facilitated by the State Schools D/HH Outreach Specialist. The meetings are used to exchange information about topics and issues concerning D/HH students in Georgia. Recently, AASD capitalized the opportunity to share information about AASD’s bilingual program to educate others as well as to dispel myths and misconceptions of AASD. We believe that our outreach services is critical to the viability of our school. By providing outreach through evaluations, testing, and audiological services as well as technical support to programs serving deaf/hard of hearing students all around Georgia, relationships are created that make most counties open to the idea of referring their students to AASD.

As with many states, the perspective on early intervention and early childhood education is critical. The Georgia Pathway to Language and Literacy Consortium or otherwise known as “GA Pathway” was started through discussion between leadership

staff of the Atlanta Speech school and the State Schools for the Deaf in a response to the continued delays in students' language acquisition and literacy development, regardless of the language/modality used (e.g., ASL, Listening and Spoken Language, or both). Several years ago, the Pathway committee started working on drafting a bill that would mandate accountability and tracking for all D/HH children from the time of their diagnosis to elementary related to their language development. The bill also mandated the need for an advisory committee/taskforce to make recommendations for improvements in literacy and early education intervention and services for D/HH children in Georgia. The bill was passed during the 2018 Legislative Session. This is considered a major victory for early intervention advocates. The State Schools Office hired a full-time individual to oversee the implementation of the new bill otherwise known as the Georgia Pathway to Literacy. The role of AASD and other state schools will be crucial in strengthening and streamlining the services and support for D/HH students and families in Georgia. This will, no doubt, have an impact on the viability of AASD as it pertains to early detection and intervention. Another major player in the early intervention is Georgia Parent Infant Network for Educational Services (GA PINES). It is an agency under the State Schools Office that is also housed at AASD. Several years ago, the GA PINES underwent an audit and the audit team made some short and long term recommendations. The State Schools Office is working on implementing some of the recommendations which will, no doubt, have an impact on the state schools including AASD in terms of raising visibility and awareness of state schools. Last year, the director retired and a new director was hired to oversee GA PINES. The new director is a former LSS representative from a large county and there was already a prior relationship. We believe that by having a good relationship is critical to our future in getting referrals and in the parent advisors they employ to accurately reflect what AASD is, does, and can provide. We continue to provide baby and parent groups weekly and we recently expanded our toddler program in partnership with GA PINES to offer five days a week for full day.