

From the Access Ramp To Equity and Quality: Alberta Teachers' Experiences of Educating Deaf/Hard of Hearing Students



shutterstock.com · 1523241707 Free image



PowerPoint Background image

Nicole Short
nicole.short@grasslands.ab.ca

Dr. Colleen McClure
camcclur@ualberta.ca

Agenda for our time together this morning



CASS connections

Introductions

Why this Study Now

DHH students in Alberta

Research questions

Participants

Themes and Sub-Themes

Findings

Research Project Discussion Highlights

Research, Policy and Practice
Recommendations

School authority connections

Roundtable Discussions: Your thoughts,
next steps

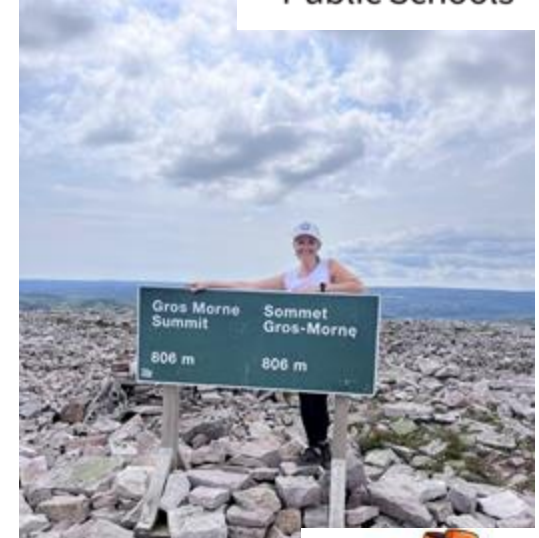
AMA (ask me anything) or more
appropriately AUA (Ask us anything).

NICOLE SHORT

Grasslands Public Schools

- Assistant Superintendent of Support Services
- Director of Student Services
- School Admin- K-9 school
- Teacher/LST

A proud parent of a DHH individual!



Retired Associate Superintendent of Schools

Acting Director/Supervisor/Consultant:
Multidisciplinary team serving students/teachers in
Edmonton /Northern Alberta

Special Education/Leadership Services Consultant:
Edmonton Public Schools (EPSB)

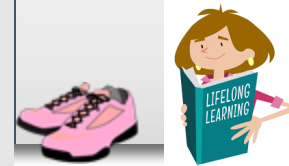
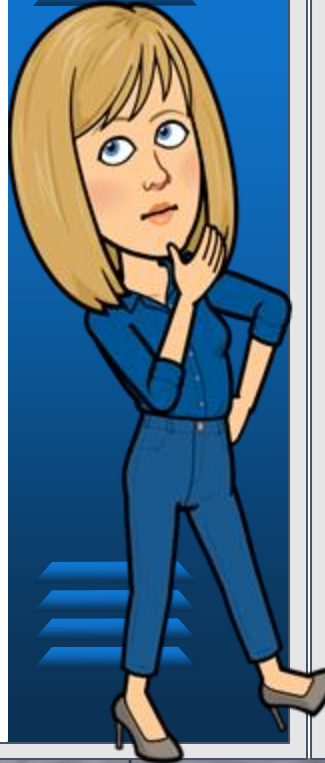
Teacher (first EPSB program for DeafBlind
children). Alberta School for the Deaf:
Intervenor/Lunch Time Aide

Junior High School Teacher/Assistant Administrator

Alberta Education Manager (seconded twice)

Post-Secondary Special Education Instructor:
U of A/ Athabasca University

PhD. Educational Psychology/Special Education



Colleen
McClure



Researcher Background: A Lifetime in K to 12 Schools

Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard

Quality superintendent leadership occurs when the superintendent's ongoing analysis of the context, and the superintendent's decisions about what leadership knowledge and abilities to apply, result in quality school leadership, quality teaching and optimum learning for all students in the school authority.

ALBERTA EDUCATION MINISTERIAL ORDER #003/2020

1 Building Effective Relationships

2 Modeling Commitment to Professional Learning

3 Visionary Leadership

Leadership Quality Standard

Quality leadership occurs when the leader's ongoing analysis of the context, and decisions about what leadership knowledge and abilities to apply, result in quality teaching and optimum learning for all school students.

ALBERTA EDUCATION MINISTERIAL ORDER #002/2020

1 Fostering Effective Relationships

2 Modeling Commitment to Professional Learning

3 Embodying Visionary Leadership

4 Leading a Learning Community

5 Supporting the Application of Foundational

SLQS and LQS
Competencies linked to this
session:

- Modelling Commitment to Professional Learning
- Leading Learning
- Providing Instructional Leadership

Why this study now?



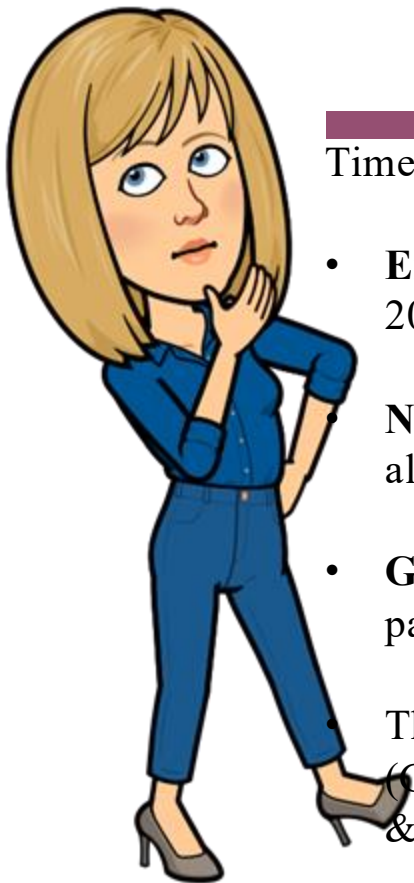
DHH students represent a low-incidence, historically underserved population (Antia et al., 2009; Marschark et al., 2015; Moses et al., 2018; Punch & Hyde, 2011; Slobodzian, 2011).

The consultation service model has been in place in Alberta for half a century to serve DHH students and teachers. Times have changed:

Why this study now?

Times have changed in the last half century;

- **Enrollment trends** (Consortium for Research in Deaf Education, 2023; Hall et al., 2019; van der Straaten et al., 2021).
- **New research and understandings** (Gagnon et al., 2024; Grote et al., 2024; Illg et al., 2024 Weber et al., 2025)
- **General classroom teachers in neighbourhood schools** are an **understudied** participant group in DHH education (Kauffman et al., 2018; Roppolo, 2016)
- There is a paucity of research on **efficacy of the TDHH consultation model** (Grisham-Brown et al., 2018; Guldberg, 2019; Luckner & Ayantoye, 2013; Paulsrud & Nilholm, 2020; Wellen, 2024)
- **Achievement gaps for DHH students persist** (Cawthon & Garberoglio, 2021; Chadha & Cieza, 2021)



DHH Students in Alberta: 1096 coded DHH students (23/24 stats)

	Hearing Disability (code 55)	Deafness (code 45)
1991	428	314
2016-2017	500	393
2020-2021	634	441
2023-2024	669	427

Alberta Education reported that 8,517 students (6,790 mild/moderate, 1727 severe) were classified as having multiple disabilities and 1,430 students were assigned more than one severe special education code (Alberta Education, January 2024). It is likely that some of these students are also DHH. <https://open.alberta.ca/opendata/special-education-needs-population-by-grade-code-and-code-category>

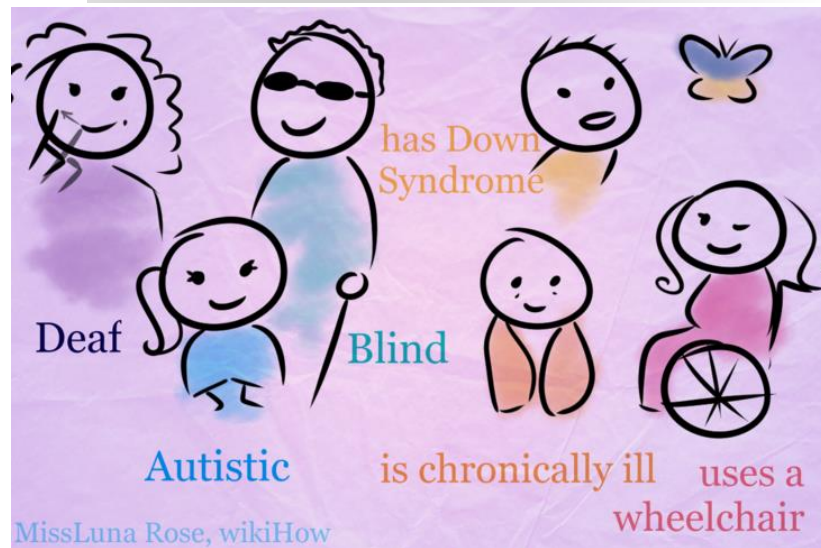
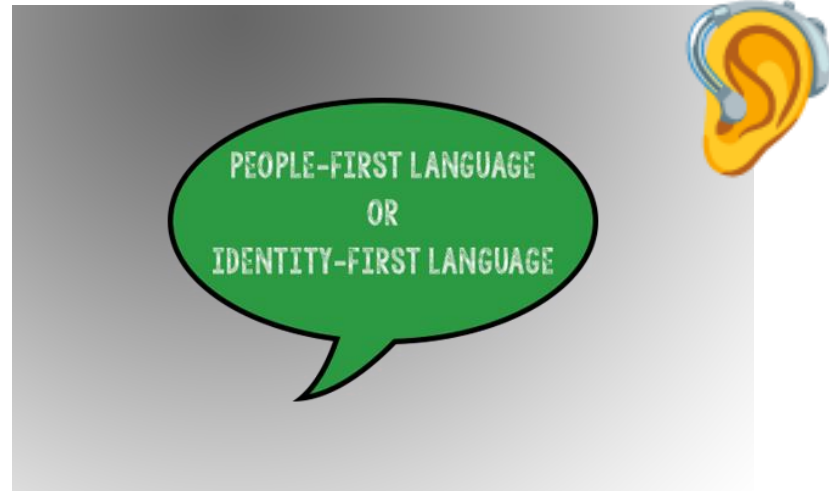
The importance of language

Person First Language: If you are unsure ask.



THE MOST APPROPRIATE LABEL IS
USUALLY THE ONE SOMEONE'S PARENTS
HAVE GIVEN THEM.

© 1999 MICHAEL GIANGRECO, ILLUSTRATIONS KEVIN RUELLE



MissLuna Rose, wikiHow

The Study: The wonder that shaped the research questions

In Alberta, generalist classroom teachers are responsible for providing DHH students with opportunities to “meet the standards of education set by the minister” (Education Act, 11[4], p. 26). At the same time, as the percentage of DHH students in neighbourhood school classrooms has increased, the number of credentialed Teachers of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (TDHHs) and graduate preparation programs providing specialized DHH training has decreased across North America (Jackson et al., 2022; Luft, 2019; Meyer, 2021). I wondered about the extent to which generalist classroom teachers perceived they were equipped to educate this unique, heterogenous, at-risk student population and what their access to specialist TDHH services was in Alberta.

I stay with my knitting: teachers and K to 12 schools

A range of professionals contribute greatly to the education of DHH students. I did include survey items regarding TDHHs, Educational Audiologists, SLPs, Interpreters and Educational Assistants and gleaned some information about teacher support from a range of professionals in interview data. However, my focus was on general classroom teachers, DHH site teachers and TDHHs.

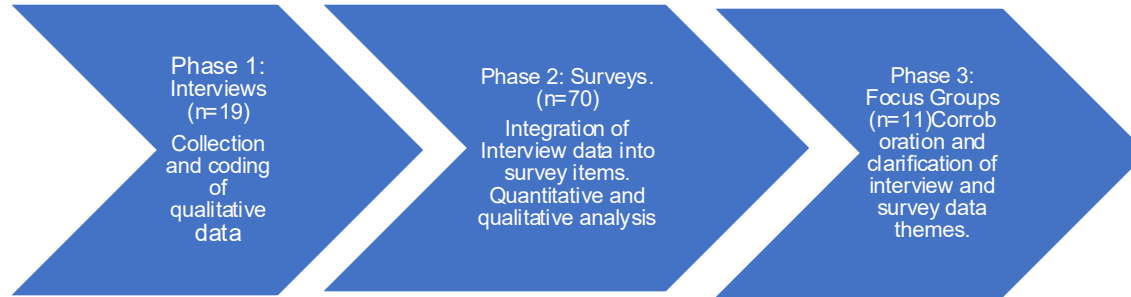




The Study: Research Questions

1. What do classroom teachers and TDHHs identify as the instructional needs of DHH students?
2. What accommodations and instructional practices do teachers and TDHHs implement for DHH students?
3. What are classroom teachers' and TDHHs' experiences with accessing specialized equipment, material resources, and professional services to support DHH students?
4. What factors do classroom teachers and TDHHs believe contribute to or could enhance the quality of educational programming for DHH students?

Mixed Methods



Integrated qualitative and quantitative data strands to understand teachers and TDHHs experiences with educating DHH students in Alberta (interviews, surveys, focus groups). For the final analysis across phases :

47 classroom teachers

19 DHH site teachers

11 TDHHs

83 participants in all

Some interesting data about the general education teacher participants.



Years of Experience	0–2 years	3–5 years	6–9 years	10–15 years	16–25 years	26–34 years
Classroom Teachers (n=47)	2	6	7	9	16	7

Division	K./Early Education	I Gr. 1 to 3	II Gr. 4 to 6	III Gr. 7 to 9	IV Gr.10 to 12
Classroom Teacher Survey Respondents (n=47)	4	8	12	16	7

Some interesting data about the general education and DHH site teacher participants.



Education degrees (B.Ed. or M.Ed.)	B. Ed. (no Training Deaf Ed.)	Double B.Ed. (Elem./ Deaf Ed.)	B.Ed. & ASL interpreter	Grad. Dip. in Deaf Ed.	Master's Deaf Ed.	Master's other Ed. Area
Classroom Teachers (n=47)	40	0	0	0	0	7
DHH site Teachers (n=19)	16	1	1	0	1	0

Geographic location	Urban	Urban-Rural	Rural
Classroom Teachers (n=47)	32	4	11
DHH Site Teachers (n=19)	19	0	0



Overall, teachers reported that they welcomed and cared about DHH students. They also report perceptions that DHH students belong in neighbourhood schools.

District leaders recognize and address individual DHH student profiles (i.e. need to learn directly in a first fluent visual language for some students, need to work with advanced hearing aid (CI) technology). TDHHs reported that they enjoy working as TDHHs in Alberta.

Findings



Identification of Themes and Sub-Themes

Themes	Sub-Themes	Corresponding Research Questions
Overarching Theme # 1: Instructional Needs	Assessment Access to Classroom Communications	What do classroom teachers and TDHHs identify as the instructional needs of DHH students?
Overarching Theme # 2: Instructional Practices	Instruction for All Peers as Supports Specialized Instruction	What accommodations and instructional practices do teachers and TDHHs implement for DHH students? What factors do classroom teachers and TDHHs believe contribute to or could enhance the quality of educational programming for DHH students?
Overarching Theme # 3: Resources	Time as Coin Knowledge as Currency	What are classroom teachers' and TDHHs' experiences with accessing specialized equipment, material resources, and professional services to support DHH students? What factors do classroom teachers and TDHHs believe contribute to or could enhance the quality of educational programming for DHH students?

Theme # 1: Instructional Needs

Sub-Theme: Assessment

General classroom teachers:

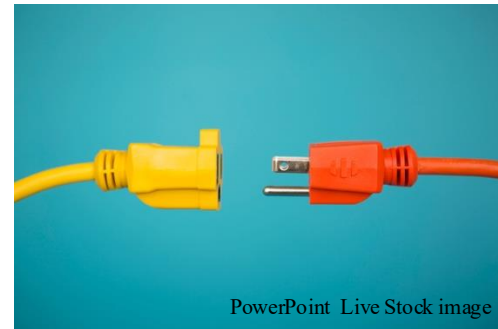
- did not differentiate assessment methods for DHH students
- did not mention use of assessment reports on students' cumulative records
- TDHHs reported little time was available for individualized assessments.
- TDHHs preferred to spend scarce consultation time collaborating with teachers and supporting DHH students.
- TDHHs and teachers reported it is rare to individually assess DHH students who are not DWD or DHH/EAL.



Canadian Test Center

Theme # 1: Instructional Needs: An interesting disconnect

General classroom teachers recognized that DHH students had delays in receptive and expressive language and reading and writing, but also indicated they believed DHH students understood half to more than half of classroom communications. Teachers also reported DHH students are on par with same grade peers in math, science and social studies. IEP goals, in order of priority, addressed writing, reading and language needs. Two teachers reported the DHH student did not need IEP goals.



Theme # 1: Instructional Needs

Sub-Theme: Access to Classroom Communications



PowerPoint Live Stock image

About half of general classroom teachers reported providing auditory (i.e. functioning hearing technology, quiet classrooms) and visual access accommodations (i.e. preferential setting, closed captions on videos), check-ins and extra time. In the few consultations that occur between general classroom teachers and the low incidence service team (TDHHs and educational audiologists), participants reported visual and auditory access₂₁ emphasized.

Theme # 2: Instructional Practices

Sub-Theme: Instruction for All

General Classroom Teachers:

- deliver whole class instruction and provide small group instruction when they have time.
- perceived that DHH students responded readily to class instructions often and were often able to independently read and understand class assignments.
- recognized that DHH students required some individual attention and support.



PowerPoint Live Stock Image

Theme # 2: Instructional Practices

Sub-Theme: Instruction for All

Differences between TDHHs/DHH Site teachers' and general classroom teachers' identifications of the variables that contribute most to DHH students' successes and challenges at schools were noted.

TDHHs and DHH site teachers:
Access to language in the classroom, age-appropriate language skills and tailored individualized instruction contribute most to DHH students' success at school.

General classroom teachers indicated DHH students' **work ethics/perseverance and parent/ family support** contribute most to their success at school. As articulated by Weber et al. (2025) one may speculate that the "additional educational labor" (p. 121) required to succeed at school is placed on the student and family.

General classroom teachers reported that delayed language skills contribute **least** to DHH students' challenges at school. **TDHHs and DHH site teachers indicated that delayed language skills** contribute **most** to DHH students challenges at school.



Theme # 2: Instructional Practices

Sub-Theme: Peer Supports

General classroom teachers indicated that DHH students have friends at school and look to peers for support with learning sometimes. In interviews, TDHHs, more than teachers, expressed concerns about DHH students' loneliness and isolation. The literature does document challenges with sustained peer communications. Participants across groups did not know if DHH students had connections with the larger DHH community.



Theme # 2: Instructional Practices

Sub-Theme: Specially Designed Instruction (SDI)

In the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), SDI “means adapting, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to address the unique needs of the child that result from disability and to ensure access of the child to the general curriculum.

In the Alberta Standards for Special Education (amended 2004), inclusive education is defined as “specially designed instruction and support for students with special education needs in regular classrooms and neighbourhood schools” (Alberta Learning, 2004, p. 3).



Theme # 2: Instructional Practices

Sub-Theme: Specially Designed Instruction

General Classroom teachers did not report an awareness of SDI for DHH students. No teachers reported awareness of the *Essential Components of Educational Programming for Deaf or Hard of Hearing Students* (Alberta Education, 2022) or *Expanded Core Curricula*.

Teachers of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing (TDHHs) have knowledge of SDI, but few opportunities to share this knowledge with general classroom teachers.



Theme # 3: Resources

Sub-Theme: Time as Coin

(availability of professional supports/ time for tailored instruction)

Time is limited for individualized or small group tailored instruction in neighbourhood school classrooms. TDHHs reported consultations with teachers occur, if at all, one to two times per school year, so the time required for a responsive, in depth sharing of expertise is limited.

Barriers described by participants included:

- class size (17 to 40, avg. 25)
- caseloads (60 to 160, avg 115)
- class composition: # of students with complex needs (52.4%, 1 to 3, 28.6% 4 to 6, 17% 7 to more than 10)



PowerPoint Live Stock images

Theme # 3: Resources



Sub-Theme: Knowledge as Currency (expertise sharing in effective instruction for DHH students)

The sharing of expertise in DHH education is limited. TDHHs, SLPs, learning coaches and qualified paraprofessionals are largely unavailable to general classroom teachers. TDHHs and general classroom teachers indicated there are few professional learning opportunities in DHH education.

- Just over 90% of teachers have never or don't know if they have corresponded with a TDHH
- 52% of teachers indicated an SLP or SLP paraprofessional was available in their schools, but only 22% of that 52% described SLP services as accessible
- Just over 63% reported they have never used educational audiology services
- 73% reported infrequent to no access to EA support

Theme # 3: Resources

Sub-Theme: Knowledge as Currency (expertise sharing in effective instruction for DHH students)



In order of priority, teachers reported relying on parents, students and then learning coaches for information about DHH students enrolled in their classrooms.

Arm Stretch

The findings in the study fit with some of my perceptions and experiences with DHH education in Alberta (a little or a lot).



Discussion



DHH students and families have gained access to a range of placement choices, including the neighbourhood school.

Equitable opportunities to participate in a high-quality education, depend on the delivery of specially designed instruction. Visual and auditory access accommodations are helpful, but insufficient.



Discussion



Continuous monitoring of DHH students' language development is rarely practiced.

Without some individual assessment it is difficult to pinpoint and address DHH students' language development needs.



Discussion



Yet, the snowball effects of language deprivation persist throughout the school years.

Recognized challenges in writing and reading are likely linked to language learning challenges.





Discussion

Research emphasizes that effective service models must include regular communication, follow-up services, and the flexibility for TDHHs to tailor their support to individual student needs (Pederson & Beste-Guldbert, 2019; Wellen, 2023). The Alberta Service model is consultative and time for any of the components indicated by researchers is scarce. Without a sharing of expertise in DHH education, it is likely that DHH students will continue to be underserved or unserved.



Practice Implications



- ✓ Increase professional learning for TDHHs and general classroom teachers
- ✓ Adopt a TDHH service model that reaches teachers and is driven by individual DHH students' needs
- ✓ Hire (or advocate for) qualified paraprofessionals and professionals in schools. Even a lead special education teacher in each school would be helpful (Alberta Education, 2011 learning coach model)
- ✓ Educate educational leaders (LISS-DHH/CASS collaborations)
- ✓ Fund the Alberta School for the Deaf to serve as a PD hub and virtual learning center for rural, remote DHH students
- ✓ Reinstate a TDHH graduate education program in Alberta



Policy Implications: The Education Act

The Education Act includes a commitment to “the importance of an inclusive education system that provides each student with the relevant learning opportunities and supports necessary to achieve success” (ED ACT, p. 11). Furthermore, current legislation states that DHH students are entitled to “supports and services in an education program provided in accordance with this Act that will give the student opportunities to meet the standards of education set by the Minister” (Education Act, section 11(4)).

Policy Implications

- ✓ Operationalize current policy
- ✓ Gather and report data about DHH students
- ✓ Advocate for specialized services for DHH students
- ✓ Gather information from schools and families across the province (use code data to do this)
- ✓ Revisit school authority autonomy versus provincial centralized services for low incidence student populations (What are other provinces providing? Are services effective?).



The Alberta
Teachers' Association



Recommendations for Future Research

- ✓ Conduct field studies in schools and classrooms to identify effective supports, services and instruction: co-construct knowledge with teachers.
- ✓ Consider use of the QLE-DHH tool developed by Rivera (2024) to evaluate practices that support DHH students in neighbourhood schools.
- ✓ Gather data on how SDI and language instruction is operationalized in schools.
- ✓ Replicate across Canada to see what the intersections are among service models, SDI and DHH students' (or other populations) achievement in neighbourhood schools.



ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION



Round Table Discussion
This is an informed audience.



Share with your colleagues at your table the practices and policies you are implementing in your school authority to support students with low incidence disabilities ?



What would you like to add to or change ?
(policies and practices).



What are your ideas about how to enhance general education teacher access to professionals with expertise in DHH education. Is it necessary to do so?

Your Questions (AMA or AUA) and Suggestions



With Gratitude

Thank you to Drs McQuarrie, Hayward and Weber for their relentless guidance, wisdom and support.

Thank you to Drs Abbott, Cannon & Lee for their participation in a defense of this research

AND

I am ever grateful for the system leaders, teachers and TDHHs who took time to contribute to the study.



Alberta Education Resources and Supports

Provincial Low Incidence Support Services Unit: DHH PLC. edc.liss@gov.ab.ca

Educational Audiologists
Krista.Yuskow@gov.ab.ca
reanne.pernitsky@gov.ab.ca

Teachers of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing
Joanne.Issler@gov.ab.ca
Gerri.Braye@gov.ab.ca

Essential Components of Educational Programming for Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing [2022]
<https://tinyurl.com/4w8dstwh>



For additional information:

A reference list may be found at:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1uQp0gD0SM_a9KlhRGda2ow2l_WduQQNW4Tyd9DHs8A/edit?usp=sharing

The complete dissertation will be published in the University of Alberta Library in November 2025

Contact: Dr Colleen McClure

camcclur@ualberta.ca

780 700 5841



Thank you for
inviting us to share
this time with you
and for all you do to
support students in
Alberta, their
families and their
teachers.