



# **Illinois State Board of Education**

## **Special Education Department**

# **Driver's Education for Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing: Frequently Asked Questions**

This document is intended to provide non-regulatory guidance on the subject matter listed above. For specific questions, please contact the Illinois State Board of Education.

**Dr. Carmen I. Ayala, State Superintendent**

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# Driver's Education for Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing: Frequently Asked Questions

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## Frequently Asked Questions

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### **Question 1: Can a person who is deaf or hard of hearing be licensed to drive?**

It is a common misconception that individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing cannot be licensed to drive. In reality, individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing are just as capable as everyone else behind the wheel! In fact, due to the development of compensatory skills, individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing may have better peripheral vision and are more attentive to visual information than hearing peers. Students who are deaf or hearing impaired may simply require some accommodations or specialized instruction to develop the skill. Students who are deaf or hearing impaired should be given the same opportunity to learn to drive as hearing peers and should be treated as capable drivers.

Sometimes, students need the support of a sign language interpreter. The interpreter facilitates communication among the student, teacher, and other members of the classroom community.

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### **Question 2: How do students communicate with the instructor during the behind-the-wheel portion of the course?**

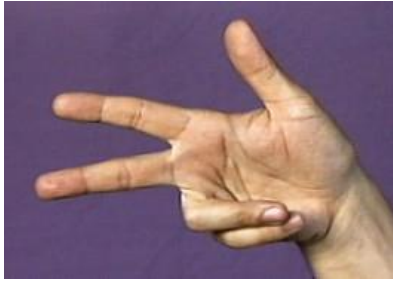
Facilitating communication during the behind-the-wheel portion of driver's education can be tricky. Some suggestions for facilitating communication include the following:

- The educational interpreter can sit in the passenger seat and lean forward slightly to sign.
- The educational interpreter can sit in the rear passenger seat in full view of the rearview mirror.
- The driver's education instructor can use predetermined hand signals or visuals to give feedback and direction to the student from the passenger seat.

It is important to consider options in facilitating communication for driver's education students which are safe and do not put the student in danger of distracted driving. You should discuss options with the student to come to an understanding of the preferred and best possible option.

Students and instructors can choose to use predetermined hand signals or visuals which can eliminate the need for an interpreter while driving. If the student and instructor choose this option, it is important that both discuss the hand signals or visuals before getting behind the wheel. It may be helpful to practice using the signals or visuals in the classroom before getting behind the wheel. Instructors can become familiar with some basic signs related to driving such as focus, look, stop,

go, and wait. Instructors can also learn “classifiers” or common hand shapes for driving related concepts. An example is the classifier handshape for a vehicle:



As students and instructors become more comfortable, communication should become easier.

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**Question 3: Is there a time when an interpreter must be present when a student who is deaf or hard of hearing is receiving driver’s education?**

If the student is taking driver’s education in the school system, an educational interpreter is appropriate. However, if the student is taking driver’s education through an outside source or driving school, a licensed interpreter is required. Please see 68 Illinois Administrative Code (IAC) 1515: [Interpreter for the Deaf Licensure Act of 2007](#) or the [Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission](#) for more information.

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**Question 4: Do students who are deaf or hard of hearing need to make special arrangements in order to get their driver’s license at the end of driver’s education?**

Students who are deaf or hard of hearing can take the driving test at the end of the course as is the case with any student.

Students who are deaf or hard of hearing reserve the right to utilize an interpreter for the driving test under the Americans with Disabilities Act. As with taking the course, the student should be consulted to make the best decision about facilitating communication during the test. If the student chooses to use an interpreter for the test and is taking the test at a Secretary of State facility, he or she should contact the facility several days in advance to request interpreter services. Please see [this link](#) for instructions on how to contact the Secretary of State’s office regarding an interpreter.

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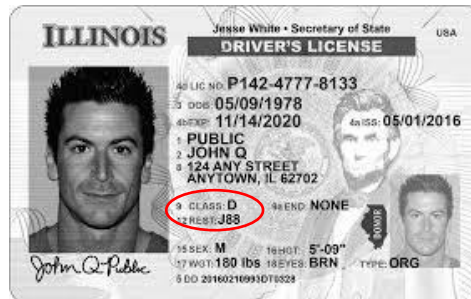
**Question 5: Are there special accommodations for drivers who are deaf or hard of hearing?**

Once the student passes the test, he or she may receive a license plate with “HI” printed on it for “hearing impaired” as an indicator to other drivers and law

enforcement. Information on a specially printed license plate can be found via the Secretary of State's website at [this link](#).



The Illinois Secretary of State's office also has an option to add a notification to the driver's license called the [J88 Notation](#). This notation would alert law enforcement about a driver's hearing status prior to approaching the vehicle. The J88 Notation is voluntary, and the driver must apply for it.



Some drivers who are deaf or hard of hearing also keep a card or pamphlet in the car describing their hearing status and communication needs in the case of an interaction with law enforcement or an emergency situation. It may be helpful for instructors to review how to interact with law enforcement and first responders during driver's education. An example of a pamphlet used by drivers who are deaf or hard of hearing for interaction with law enforcement and first responders can be found [here](#).

Drivers who are deaf or hard of hearing may also use some assistive technology such as light up panels to indicate noise in the environment like sirens; however, many deaf or hard of hearing individuals do not require any special supports or accommodations to drive.

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**Question 6: Can individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing be licensed to drive motorcycles and commercial vehicles?**

Yes. Individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing can be licensed to drive any vehicle a hearing person can. As of 2013, the U. S. Department of Transportation allows drivers who are deaf or hard of hearing to apply for an exemption to the hearing requirements to obtain a commercial driver's license. Article: <https://www.nad.org/2013/02/01/dot-recognizes-deaf-and-hard-of-hearing-truck-drivers-in-a-historic-victory-for-deaf-and-hard-of-hearing-truckers-the-united-states-department-of-transportation-dot-announced-today-after-decades/>

## **Resources**

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[Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission](#)

[Office of the Illinois Secretary of State](#)

[Illinois Association of the Deaf](#)

[National Association of the Deaf](#)