

BABY SIGN LANGUAGE BECOMING A CLASSROOM STANDARD

By Patricia Faulhaber • May 11, 2011



Teacher, Heather Crookston, works with her class of two-year olds on the sign for the word friend. (Photo by Pat Faulhaber)

Jackson TWP, Ohio—American Sign Language is gaining momentum in becoming one of the most studied languages in high school and college classrooms. Surprisingly, it is also becoming a favorite in preschool and daycare center classrooms as well, at least it is at The Goddard Schools in Jackson Township and in Akron. All of the classes, from ages 6 weeks to 6 years old, learn one new sign every day at The Goddard Schools.

According to a report by Modern Language Association, Enrollments in Languages Other Than English in United States Institutions of Higher Education, Fall 2009 found through a study that American Sign Language (ASL) was the fourth most studied language other than English at colleges and

universities in the U.S. in 2009. Spanish, French and German were the top three.

And, according to Karen Marinos, owner of the two Goddard Schools, parents, teachers, and the young students at both schools enjoy teaching and learning baby sign language as part of their enrichment programming.

“Repetition is key to teaching and to learning,” said Marinos.

“Baby sign language and learning to speak go hand-in-hand and our teachers encourage the children to say the word as they are signing it. Parents have long taught and rewarded their children when they ask the child, how big are you, and the child puts his or her hands in the air to say this big. That is a form of sign language.”

The younger children begin learning sign language with very basic words such as more, eat, milk and please. Then they progress to words such as horse, turkey and cookie.

Signing allows the child to communicate with adults and other children as well other benefits such as:

- Reducing frustration of not having their needs understood.
- Children feel a sense of accomplishment by being able to communicate.
- It encourages cognitive thinking because the child has to think about the sign before doing the sign.
- Signing also sparks creative thinking in children.

“We start signing with the babies because they are like sponges when it comes to learning. Plus, their self-esteem doesn’t get hurt so they don’t get embarrassed at that age,” said Marinos.

According to Marinos, each sign is associated with one word and one word is associated with one concept. As such, baby sign language enhances the cognitive and thinking skills.

“Children at around the age of 2 start to pick up the sign language really well and we start expanding the list of words we teach,” said Heather Crookston, a teacher at The Goddard School.

Babysignlanguage.com lists several other benefits of teaching and using baby sign language including building a strong bond with parents, signing allows parents to see what their young child is thinking when they sign, it reduces fussiness and the occurrence of temper tantrums.

“There is a misconception by some parents that if you teach a baby to use sign language it will delay him or her in learning to speak when really it only enhances the child’s communication skills,” said Marinos.

For more information about baby sign language, talk with your pediatrician, visit the ASL website or check out a few books from the local library.