



Qualified Personnel for Children with Low-Incidence Disabilities Focus on Deaf-Blindness

November 2017

The difficulty of serving children with low-incidence disabilities (particularly deaf-blindness) has always included the challenge of training and supporting qualified personnel. The Interveners and Qualified Personnel Initiative, created to address this challenge, is guided by:

- A recognized need for qualified personnel in deaf-blindness
- Council for Exceptional Children standards for teachers and interveners
- Collaboration with personnel preparation programs and state deaf-blind projects.

This document contains two parts:

Part 1: Intervener Services

Information about initiative activities related to building an infrastructure for intervener services in the United States.

Part 2: Teachers of Students Who Are Deaf-Blind

An overview of efforts in the field of deaf-blindness to raise awareness and develop models for training and supporting teachers with expertise in deaf-blindness.

Part 1: Intervener Services

Information about intervener services activities is presented in the form of a timeline describing the development and implementation of the [NCDB Recommendations for Improving Intervener Services](#).

Table 1. Initiative Activities Timeline

Year	Activity	Description
2011	Initial Request OSEP requested intervener recommendations	<p>The Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) asked NCDB to collect information about current intervener services across the country and develop recommendations for improving national, state, and local services.</p> <p>To respond to this request, NCDB collaborated with many others in the field who have worked to promote intervener services.</p>
2012	Data Collection Gathered data on intervener services, including parent perspectives	<p>NCDB gathered information from a variety of sources. The information was compiled in a series of Intervener Services Initiative Data Summaries.</p> <p>Parent perspectives (excerpt):</p> <p>In a 2012 survey, 119 parents and guardians of children and youth who are deaf-blind shared their observations of the impact an intervener had on the lives of their children.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 69% indicated significant improvement in their child’s participation in classroom activities• Most also observed better awareness (63%) and exploration (63%) of the classroom environment• Parents observed greater social interactions in terms of relationships with peers (62.3%) and participation in social activities (70%).• Overall, a large majority of parents indicated that their child was happier at school (83.3%) and that their behaviors had improved (70%).

Year	Activity	Description
2012	<p>Recommendations Developed 10 Intervener Recommendations designed to achieve four goals</p>	<p>The <i>Recommendations for Improving Intervener Services</i> were based on a series of surveys, interviews, focus groups, and reviews of documents from stakeholders who had knowledge of and experience with interveners in the United States.</p> <p>Published in 2012, the recommendations created a national map for the development of a sustainable path to ensure that qualified Interveners are available to support children who are deaf-blind.</p> <p>The recommendations were designed to achieve four broad goals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal 1: Increase recognition and appropriate use of intervener services • Goal 2: Establish a strong national foundation for intervener training and workplace supports • Goal 3: Build the capacity of families to participate in decisions about intervener services for their children and in efforts to improve these services • Goal 4: Sustain high-quality intervener services through the inclusion of intervener services in national special education policy
2013	<p>Technical Report Produced technical report on the definition of intervener services</p>	<p>The <i>Definition of Intervener Services and Interveners in Educational Settings: Technical Report</i> synthesized the process and information used by NCDB in the development of a consistently applied definition of intervener services.</p> <p>It addressed challenges and questions, provided comparisons between interveners and paraprofessionals, and offered definitions of roles and concepts used by many states.</p>
2013	<p>Technical Work Group Established a technical work group for the intervener initiative</p>	<p>A technical work group was established in 2013 to provide advice and support on the implementing the recommendations. The group now includes a number of subcommittees.</p>

Year	Activity	Description
2013-2014	Home and Community Work Group Established a home and community intervener work group	<p>Although the focus of NCDB’s initiative is on the use of intervener services in early intervention and educational settings, the nature of the disability of deaf-blindness makes these services important in home and community settings as well. Coordination across service settings is essential. Therefore, within the first recommendation, there was an implementation strategy calling for a work group to explore issues related to interveners in home and community settings.</p> <p>The work group completed a position paper that summarizes current knowledge about the use of interveners in homes and communities and proposes actions to provide greater access to interveners for people of all ages who are deaf-blind. <i>Interveners in Home and Community: An Under-Recognized Imperative</i>.</p> <p>In addition, the National Family Association for Deaf-Blind (NFADB) and NCDB sponsored a webinar called Role of the Intervener in the Home and Community Across the Lifespan that explored the role an intervener can play within these settings.</p>
2014	Definition Developed definition of Interveners in Educational Settings	<p>One of the implementation strategies that emerged in the <i>Recommendations for Improving Intervener Services</i> was the need to develop a consistently applied national definition of intervener services.</p> <p>This definition represents the best knowledge of intervener services in educational settings that is currently available. It is not meant to apply to interveners who work in other (e.g., home and community) settings.</p>
2014	Family Training Created a family training course on intervener services in partnership with NFADB	<p>The National Family Association for Deaf-Blind (NFADB) and NCDB joined forces to sponsor an online parent training course on the topic of intervener services using “Module 3: The Role of Interveners in Educational Settings” from the <i>Open Hands Open Access (OHOA) Deaf-Blind Intervener Learning Modules</i>. Cohorts of learners continue to enroll.</p>

Year	Activity	Description
2015	IEP Guide Produced IEP Guide to Intervener Services	<p>NCDB produced and disseminated the guide, Are Intervener Services Appropriate for Your Student With Deaf-Blindness? An IEP Team Discussion Guide. IEP teams can use the guide to make informed decisions about the need for initial or continued use of intervener services for an individual child or youth.</p> <p>A special thank you goes to Texas Deafblind Outreach for giving NCDB permission to draw heavily from their document, <i>Determining the Need for an Intervener in Educational Settings</i>.</p>
2015 - 2017	OHOA Learning Modules Created modules for intervener training	<p>The Open Hands Open Access (OHOA) Deaf-Blind Intervener Learning Modules are a national resource designed to increase awareness, knowledge, and skills related to intervention for students who are deaf-blind and are being served in educational settings (ages 3 through 21). The modules are aligned with the Council for Exceptional Children's Specialty Set: Special Education Paraeducator Intervener for Individuals With Deafblindness.</p> <p>The OHOA link above provides information about each of the 27 modules and access to the Moodle platform that houses the modules. Anyone can register to use the modules for self-study (registration and login required). Currently, state deaf-blind projects, universities, and other entities can use copies of the modules for technical assistance, preservice training, and professional development. For information about TA and technical support for use of the modules see Technical Assistance and Support for OHOA.</p>
2017	Certification Process Developed national intervener certification process	<p>At the request of OSEP, and consistent with the recommendation to “expand opportunities for interveners to obtain a state or national certificate or credential,” NCDB, in collaboration with partners, developed a certification processes for individuals who can demonstrate competency as interveners in educational settings.</p> <p>The National Intervener Certificate E-Portfolio (NICE) is an assessment process that interveners use to submit evidence of their knowledge and skills to the</p>

Year	Activity	Description
		<p>Paraprofessional Resource and Research Center (PAR²A Center), at the University of Colorado Denver. The evidence, which consists of digital documentation such as video samples, described pictures, and other documents from the intervener’s training and practice, is evaluated by expert reviewers in the field of deaf-blindness. The process is aligned with CEC standards for interveners.</p> <p>Portfolios are scored by at least two trained reviewers who are members of the NICE Review Board. All certification determinations are made by the PAR²A Center, which manages portfolio submissions, the NICE Review Board, and scoring.</p>

Part 2: Teachers of Students Who Are Deaf-Blind

Throughout the process of developing the *Recommendations for Improving Intervener Services*, it became clear to NCDB and our partners that the need for trained teachers with the knowledge and skills to serve children who are deaf-blind was just as critical as the need for interveners. As a result, we included a recommendation to develop strategies to ensure that interveners have knowledgeable supervisors and access to experts in deaf-blindness to provide consultation and coaching.

Efforts to raise awareness and develop models for training and supporting teachers of students with deaf-blindness were already underway within the field at the time that recommendation was written and have strengthened in recent years. The following table outlines these efforts.

Table 2. Evolving Role of Teachers of Children Who Are Deaf-Blind

Topic	Description
Teachers of Students With Deaf-Blindness	In a 2009 article , Blaha and colleagues outlined the role of teachers of students with deaf-blindness. They described a need for teachers who can provide both direct and consultative services.
Roles and Responsibilities	<p>Direct instruction may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision awareness or vision efficiency activities

Topic	Description
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Auditory awareness or training • Activity routines to facilitate the use of object symbols, tactile symbols, and spoken, signed, or picture symbols • Tactile awareness training leading to tactile symbol or pre-braille activities • Spatial awareness and exploration • Literacy awareness including pre-braille or print activities • Assistive technology devices and applications <p>Consultative services include supporting and participating in planning with the entire educational team, particularly the classroom teacher and intervener. Areas in which the teacher of students with deaf-blindness will have particular expertise are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment and evaluation of sensory and communication skills • Creating, providing, and supporting the use of materials appropriate for a student's sensory needs • Information and support of communication systems • Support for the use of assistive technology • Collaborating on accommodations and modifications of instructional materials and activities to meet the student's sensory needs • Developing meaningful educational activities. <p>Source: Blaha, R., Cooper, H., Montgomery, C., Irby, P., & Parker, A. (Spring 2009). Teachers of students with deafblindness: Professionalizing the field. <i>TX SenseAbilities</i>, 3(2).</p>
<p>CEC Special Interest Division CEC Division for Visual Impairments and Deafblindness (DVI/DB)</p>	<p>For many years, NCDB has collaborated with personnel preparation programs across the United States that deliver deaf-blind content. This collaborative effort continues via work with the Council for Exceptional Children's (CEC's) Division on Visual Impairments and Deafblindness (DVIDB) to cultivate an active professional home for teachers and technical assistance providers in the field of deaf-blindness.</p>

Topic	Description
<p>CEC Standards Initial Specialty Set: Deafblindness</p>	<p>Experts in the field of deaf-blindness, including personnel preparation program faculty collaborated with the CEC to develop the Initial Specialty Set: Deafblindness, which lists essential knowledge and skills for special education professionals who work with children who are deaf-blind.</p>
<p>Teacher Preparation Teacher Preparation Programs in Deaf-Blindness</p>	<p>NCDB maintains a list of teacher preparation programs in deafblindness that include significant content in deaf-blindness for undergraduate or graduate students. A <i>DB content</i> field specifies whether the university has courses dedicated solely to deaf-blindness or integrates content about deaf-blind learners into other special education courses. A <i>Format</i> field specifies whether the program is online, on campus, or a combination (hybrid).</p> <p>Please note that this list is not comprehensive, and programs change frequently, so contact the programs themselves for the most up-to-date information.</p>
<p>Example from the Field: Texas Teacher of Deafblind Pilot Project</p>	<p>For many years, the Texas Deafblind Project has been a national leader in raising awareness of the need for teachers of students with deaf-blindness and promoting training models. From 2011 through 2013, the project partnered with Regional Service Center 4 (serving the Houston area) to conduct a pilot project to provide participating teachers with increased knowledge, skills, and strategies for serving students with deaf-blindness. The program’s highly-structured approach involved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A series of group workshops on the role of the teacher of students with deaf-blindness on the IEP team and other specific topics related to deaf-blindness. • One-to-one site visits immediately following the workshops to support implementation of ideas and concepts presented in the workshops • One-to-one mentorship • Meetings with administrators in participating districts <p>For more information: Montgomery, C. (2014). Teacher of the deafblind pilot program in Texas: Part 1. Visual</p>

Topic	Description
<p>Example from the Field: Utah Building the Roles of Interveners and Teachers</p>	<p>Impairment and Deafblind Education Quarterly, 59(5), 34-40.</p> <p>Montgomery, C. (2015). Teacher of the deafblind pilot program in Texas: Part 2. Visual Impairment and Deafblind Education Quarterly, 60(1), 15-32.</p> <p>Utah has both teachers of students who are deaf-blind and a robust program of intervener services. Establishment of these roles and training programs were the result of the work of a legislative task force’s advocacy for laws, regulations, and funding in the late 1990s. Utah administrative code requires that all interveners must complete the Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind training or a national certification. Teachers are trained at the University of Utah or Utah State University. Utah also has a state-recognized endorsement in deaf-blindness.</p> <p>Nelson, C., & Sanders, D. (2014). Collaboration to ensure effective education of student who are deafblind. <i>Visual Impairment and Deafblind Education Quarterly, 59(5)</i>, 26-32.</p> <p>Utah Administrative Code. Rule R277-801. Services for Students who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Blind, Visually Impaired, and Deafblind. As in effect on October 1, 2017.</p>

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DEAF-BLIND NETWORK
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ACROSS THE NATION

