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Determining the Need for an Intervener in Educational Settings

Figure A young woman using a braille device communicates with her intervener using tactile signs.

Developed by Texas Deafblind Project

Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired

Outreach Programs

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An intervener is a paraprofessional who provides direct support to a student with deafblindness for all or part of the instructional day. The intervener receives training in communication methods and sensory accommodations that are needed for an individual student with deafblindness to access information in various learning environments. The intervener supports the existing service delivery model, collaborating with the student’s team in implementing the student’s IEP.

Most students with deafblindness need to develop a bond and a trusting relationship with a consistent communication partner in a predictable environment in order to progress to higher-level learning. For many students who are deafblind, this trusted communication partner is the intervener.

Teaming is essential in the success of this model. Classroom teachers and other professionals on the instructional team provide the supervision, direction, and support that are necessary for interveners to be effective in their role. An intervener should never carry out his/her duties independently, but instead function as an integral part of the student’s instructional team.

# Primary roles of the intervener

In summary, the primary role of the intervener is to:

* facilitate the access of environmental information usually gained through vision and hearing, but which is unavailable or incomplete to the individual who is deafblind;
* facilitate the development and/or use of receptive and expressive communication skills by the individual who is deafblind; and
* develop and maintain a trusting, interactive relationship that can promote social and emotional well-being. (Alsop, 2002)

More information on the roles and responsibilities of the intervener, teacher, and administrator using this model of instruction can be found in the booklet [**Interveners in the Classroom: Guidelines for Teams Working with Students Who Are Deafblind.**](http://intervener.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Booklet.pdf) (Alsop, et al, 2007)

# Is an intervener needed for your student?

### This document is designed to help the IEP team to determine whether an intervener is an appropriate support for an individual student with deafblindness in a school setting. It is a guideline for discussion about all supports needed to provide the student full access to the educational experience based on: 1) individual student assessment; and 2) consideration of the existing and/or proposed services for the student.

## Step 1: Complete, Update, and Review Assessment

In order to use this form effectively, student assessment in critical areas must have been completed or updated to reflect the impact of deafblindness on instruction. Critical areas may include, but are not limited to:

* vision and hearing, including the degree and complexity of sensory losses:
* orientation and mobility;
* communication:
* concept development:
* self-help and daily living skills:
* adaptive technology;
* behavior;
* and social/emotional needs.

The questions asked in the next steps of this document will clarify issues to focus upon when reviewing or completing assessments, so that appropriate issues related to deafblindness are fully considered and addressed. The deafblind-specific accommodations needed to appropriately support the student’s full access to instruction will be suggested by these questions, and will be helpful in guiding current and future assessment.

If you would like additional understanding of the issues that lead to meaningful assessments for students with deafblindness, you might also find the following documents helpful:

* *Documenting Instructional Considerations for the Student with Deaf-Blindness* by Robbie Blaha, Education Specialist and Kate Moss, Education Specialist, Texas Deafblind Outreach
* *IEP Quality Indicators for Students with Deafblindness* developed by Texas Deafblind Outreach
* *10 Issues to Always Consider When Intervening for Students with Deafblindness* by David Wiley, Texas Deafblind Outreach
* *A Process for Identifying Students Who May Be At-Risk for Deafblindness* by Robbie Blaha, et al, Texas Deablind Outreach
* *Assessment of Deafblind Access to Manual Language Systems (ADAMLS)* by Robbie Blaha & Brad Carlson (2007). From DB-LINK: <https://nationaldb.org/library/page/88>

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| Have all critical student assessments been completed, updated when needed, and reviewed in light of the issues raised throughout this document and other literature about deafblindness? |
|  | Yes ­– Use assessment information when answering the questions found in this document. |
|  | No – Complete, update, and/or review assessments before making decisions about an intervener. Use the questions in Steps 2 & 3 steps to help guide assessments. |

## Step 2: Questions about the Student with Deafblindness

The decision by the IEP team to provide intervener services is based on the level of support a student who is deafblind needs in order to gain access and effectively participate in all of his/her instructional environments. The team should discuss how to address all identified issues.

A variety of support approaches and strategies may be creatively employed by the team to address the student’s individual needs. In some cases an intervener trained in deafblind-specific knowledge and skills may be the most appropriate, effective, and/or efficient service delivery model.

The questions in the following table can assist the team in determining how to address the supports related to the student’s deafblindness.

| Questions about the Student with Deafblindness |
| --- |
| 1. Does the student need assistance to effectively detect, gather, and/or prioritize information from communication partners and the surrounding environment?
 | Yes | No |
|  |  |
|  If yes, how will this access issue be addressed, and by whom? |
| 1. Does the student rely on the sense of touch or near vision to gain information, so that he/she is unable to reliably get information that other students get from a distance?
 | Yes | No |
|  |  |
|  If yes, how will this need be addressed, and by whom? |
| 1. In a group instructional setting, is it difficult for the student to gather information or follow a discussion?
 | Yes | No |
|  |  |
|  If yes, how will this need be addressed, and by whom? |
| 1. Does the student use equipment or adaptive aids, but not efficiently or effectively enough to keep up with the pace of the instruction being given?
 | Yes | No |
|  |  |
|  If yes, how will this need be addressed? |
| 1. Is the student unable to orient him/herself to the environment or move to different learning environments without assistance?
 | Yes | No |
|  |  |
|  If yes, how will this need be addressed? |
| 1. Does the student rely on communication methods not generally used or understood by many of his or her communication partners (teachers, staff, or peers)? Consider all the various environments the student accesses throughout the entire school day.
 | Yes | No |
|  |  |
|  If yes, how will this need be addressed? |
| 1. Does the student often need individual intervention by a trained or knowledgeable support person in order to communicate effectively receptively and/or expressively?
 | Yes | No |
|  |  |
|  If yes, how will this need be addressed? |
| 1. Does the student need a high degree of consistency in strategies and communication systems, so that working with numerous people during the day causes him/her confusion and frustration?
 | Yes | No |
|  |  |
|  If yes, how will this need be addressed? |
| 1. Due to sensory isolation, does the student have difficulties in trusting, bonding, or relating and responding to a variety of people?
 | Yes | No |
|  |  |
|  If yes, how will this need be addressed? |
| 1. Because of sensory impairments, is the student unfamiliar with certain common information, so that in order to fully understand concepts or common references used in instruction or conversation, the student frequently needs more explanation than that given to other students.
 | Yes | No |
|  |  |
|  If yes, how will this need be addressed? |
| 1. Is the student unable to access the same information as classmates who are not deafblind?
 | Yes | No |
|  |  |
|  If yes, how will this need be addressed? |

## Step 3: Questions about the Instructional Team

Answering the questions in the next table will help the ARD committee decide if the support described above can be provided in the proposed or current instructional arrangement without additional supports.

| Questions about the Instructional Team | Yes | No |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1. Does the student’s need for effective deafblind-specific intervention strategies and communication methods require additional education and training for staff members?
 |  |  |
| * If numerous staff will need training, would it be more efficient to concentrate training on fewer specialized individuals?
 |  |  |
| 1. Does the specialized educational programming recommended through assessment and the IEP create a need for an additional trained support person? Before answering this question, examples to consider include, but are not limited to:
* due to other demands in the classroom, does the instructor find it difficult to remain in close enough proximity so the student can maintain visual, auditory, and or tactile access to instruction;
* due to the needs of other students, does the instructor find it challenging to adjust the pace of instruction so the deafblind student has enough time to get understandable information through either modified communication or tactile/close-vision exploration;
* do any instructors have difficulty or unfamiliarity with the student’s preferred communication modes (e.g. tactile symbols, sign language, tactile sign);
* does existing staff find it challenging to schedule time for deafblind-specific material adaptation and equipment maintenance (e.g., communication aids, vision devices, hearing devices, etc.) ;
* Other (explain). \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
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| 1. Is it challenging to limit the number of individuals working with the student so that he/she can form trusting relationships?
 |  |  |
| 1. Is it challenging for the team to be consistent due to the large number of individuals working with the student?
 |  |  |
| 1. Is it challenging for the team to provide necessary background and fill-in information to help the student fully understand instruction and conversation across all settings?
 |  |  |

## Step 4: Determine the Need for an Intervener

Now that you have completed the Steps 1-3, you are ready to use that information to discuss and make a recommendation about the need for an intervener for the student with deafblindness. Any items answered “yes” in steps 2 and 3 should result in discussion and planning.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Is an Intervener Needed? | Yes | No |
| Is a paraprofessional with specific knowledge and skills in deafblindness needed for all or part of the educational day to ensure that the student can access information and effectively participate in all of his/her instructional environments to complete IEP objectives.  |  |  |

# Additional Information

If an intervener is recommended, this should be noted in the Supplemental Aids and Services section of the IEP.

[***IEP Quality Indicators for Students with Deafblindness***](http://www.tsbvi.edu/attachments/other/IEP_Indicators.pdf) is another tool designed to help educational teams develop appropriate IEPs for students with deafblindness. Completing that document can also provide input for the intervener question.

# References

Alsop, L., Blaha, R., & Kloos, E. (2002). *The intervener in early intervention and educational sttings for children and youth with deafblindness* (Briefing Paper). Monmouth, OR: NTAC, The National Technical Assistance Consortium for Children and Young Adults Who Are Deaf-Blind.

Alsop, L., et al (2012). A Family’s Guide to Interveners for Children with Combined Vision and Hearing Loss. Logan, UT: SKI-HI Institute.

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Texas Deaflind Outreach. (2009). *IEP Quality Indicators for Students with Deafblindness*. Austin, TX: Texas Deafblind Project at Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

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# Additional Resources on Interveners

For more information on the topic of the Intervener Team Model, visit:

National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness (NCDB): [nationaldb.org/library/list/74](https://nationaldb.org/library/list/74)

NCDB Intervener Initiative: <https://nationaldb.org/groups/page/9/national-intervener-services-initiative>

SKI-HI Institute, Utah State University[: intervener.org](http://intervener.org)

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