



Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired Outreach Programs

www.tsbvi.edu | 512-454-8631 | 1100 W. 45th Street | Austin, TX 78756

Determining the Need for an Intervener in Educational Settings - 2nd Edition



Figure 1: A young woman using a braille device communicates with her intervener using tactile signs.

Developed by The Texas Deafblind Project
For Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired
Outreach Programs

Determining the Need for an Intervener in Educational Settings

An intervener is a paraeducator who provides direct support to a student who is deafblind for all or part of the instructional day. The intervener receives training in communication methods and sensory accommodations that are needed for an individual who is deafblind 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 who are deafblind 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; they should 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 (Alsop, 2002),
- facilitate the development and/or use of receptive and expressive communication skills by the individual who is deafblind (Alsop, 2002),
- develop and maintain a trusting, interactive relationship that can promote social and emotional well-being (Alsop, 2002), and
- provide support to help a student form relationships with others and increase social connections and participation in activities.

More information on the roles and responsibilities of the intervener, teacher, and administrator using this model of instruction can be found on this website and in the booklet [Interveners in the Classroom: Guidelines for Teams Working with Students Who Are Deafblind](#). (Alsop, et al, 2007)

Is an intervener needed for your student?

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

Step 1: Complete, Update, and Review Evaluation Data

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

- Vision and hearing, including the degree, complexity, and impact of sensory losses

- Orientation and mobility
- Communication
- Concept development
- Self-help and daily living skills
- Adaptive technology
- Behavior
- Social/emotional needs

In order to get a comprehensive understanding your student’s access needs, and to ensure you have all of the necessary information to continue with this document, please complete the following evaluation tool and refer to the following article:

- *Assessment of Deafblind Access to Manual Language Systems (ADAMLS)* by Robbie Blaha & Brad Carlson (2007). <https://documents.nationaldb.org/products/ADAMLS.pdf>
- *10 Issues to Always Consider When Intervening for Students with Deafblindness* by David Wiley, Texas Deafblind Outreach <https://www.tsbvi.edu/spring-2014-items/tx-senseabilities-spring-2014-home/106-tx-senseabilities/fall-2011/3114-10-issues-to-always-consider-when-intervening-for-students-with-deafblindness>

Have all critical student evaluations been completed, updated when needed, and reviewed?	
	Yes – Use evaluation information when answering the questions found in this document.
	No – Complete, update, and/or review evaluations before completing this document.

The questions and considerations throughout the remainder of this document will clarify issues to focus on when reviewing evaluations and making instructional decisions, so that appropriate issues related to being deafblind are fully considered and addressed. The deafblind-specific accommodations and modifications 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 evaluation.

Step 2: Questions about the Student who is Deafblind

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 educational 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, training an intervener in deafblind-specific knowledge and skills may be the most appropriate, effective, and/or efficient way to meet those needs.

The questions in the following table can assist the team in determining how to address the supports related to the student who is deafblind.

Questions about the Student who is Deafblind		
1. Does the student need assistance to effectively detect, gather, and/or prioritize information from communication partners and the surrounding environment?	Yes	No
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>If yes, how will this access issue be addressed, and by whom?</p> <p><i>Questions for consideration:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Does the student need manual markers (Is the student able to read facial expressions and facial grammar? Does the student need you to tell them you asked a question?)</i> ● <i>Do significant modifications to the proximity of communication partners need to occur in order for the student to communicate effectively?</i> ● <i>Is the student able to receive information (both instructional and non-instructional) within a distance typical of their peers?</i> ● <i>Do you find that you need to point out things in the environment for a student to notice them?</i> ● <i>Is the student able to filter through content to determine what is most important?</i> 		
2. 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
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>If yes, how will this need be addressed, and by whom?</p> <p><i>Questions for consideration:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Does the student miss information happening around them (incidental learning), such as conversation between peers, someone entering the room, etc.?</i> ● <i>Does the student know what the teacher is referencing when they point, say "this", etc.?</i> ● <i>Does the student use tactile methods of communication? (tactile sign language, tactile symbols, hand tracking, touch cues)</i> ● <i>Does the student need a reduced distance to receive visual information?</i> 		

3. In a group instructional setting, is it difficult for the student to gather information or follow a discussion?	Yes	No
<p>If yes, how will this need be addressed, and by whom?</p> <p><i>Questions for consideration:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Can the student take notes while receiving instruction?</i> ● <i>Can the student follow the pace of instruction?</i> ● <i>Can the student follow speaker changes in a group discussion without missing information?</i> ● <i>Is the student impacted by the number of students in the classroom and their positioning? (ex. Student may need to be in a small group and need the students to be positioned in a semi-circle in order to follow discussion.)</i> 		
4. 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
<p>If yes, how will this need be addressed?</p> <p><i>Questions for consideration:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Is the student able to independently organize and manage their instructional equipment in all of their environments throughout the day? (ex. CCTV, augmentative communication, laptop, iPad, FM/DM, etc.) This can include:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>switching between pieces of equipment during a lesson,</i> ○ <i>transporting equipment between classes,</i> ○ <i>knowing which piece of equipment to use for which task, and</i> ○ <i>knowing where equipment is charged and stored and being able to get this done efficiently.</i> ● <i>Is the student able to independently use and troubleshoot their instructional equipment?</i> 		
5. Is the student unable to orient him/herself to the environment or move to different learning environments without assistance?	Yes	No
<p>If yes, how will this need be addressed?</p> <p><i>Questions for consideration:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>In addition to the Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist's services and recommendations, does the student need ongoing support to orient and travel safely?</i> ● <i>Does the student require enriched environments that promote movement and exploration?</i> ● <i>Does the student need touch cues in order to understand information regarding travel?</i> 		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Does the student require focused attention on body awareness and how they relate to the space around them?</i> 		
6. 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
<p>If yes, how will this need be addressed?</p> <p><i>Questions for consideration:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Does the student use: tactile sign, tactile symbols, picture symbols, sign language, adapted signs, object symbols, or other augmented communication system?</i> • <i>Does the student have a limited group of communication partners that clearly understand them?</i> • <i>Does the student need assistance in order to have their communication attempts be understood?</i> • <i>Is the student able to communicate with peers independently, especially during unstructured time such as recess, lunch, etc.?</i> 		
7. 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
<p>If yes, how will this need be addressed?</p> <p><i>Questions for consideration:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Does the student need pre-teaching and/or re-teaching of vocabulary for lessons?</i> • <i>Is the student able to communicate (receptively and expressively) with a variety of communication partners (peers and staff)?</i> • <i>Outside of targeted instruction, does the student need on-going support in developing their expressive and receptive language in order to effectively communicate?</i> 		
8. 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?

Questions for consideration:

- *Does the student become frustrated or confused by subtle differences in routine such as using different vocabulary, hand placement, natural differences in how a communication partner communicates?*
- *Is the student able to understand differences in tone, body language, facial expressions, in a variety of situations?*
- *Is the student able to independently gather information from a variety of people about what is happening, what other people are doing, other people's expectations, and what to expect?*
- *Is the student independently able to manage their time so that they are able to complete all assigned tasks within the given time frame? A lack of closure can lead to frustration/distress and they may need shortened assignments to allow them to have the accomplished feeling of completing their work.*
- *Does the student need assistance in order to decrease moments of distress, regulate their emotions and/or support their sensory needs?*
- *Does the student require support in order to foster feelings of success, independence, connectedness, and safety?*

9. Due to sensory isolation, does the student have difficulties in trusting, bonding with, or relating and responding to a variety of people?

Yes	No

If yes, how will this need be addressed?

Questions for consideration:

- *Does the student need support to increase social connections with peers?*
- *Does the student need support to initiate age-appropriate peer interactions?*
- *Does the student have difficulty forming new relationships with either peers or staff?*
- *Does the student have access to ongoing sensory information in order to feel connected and secure to learn and explore with multiple people?*

10. 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?

Questions for consideration:

- *Does the student need the concepts typically learned incidentally, explicitly taught (social skills, concepts about the world, etc.)?*
- *Does the student need explicit instruction on grammar and language typically learned incidentally?*
- *Does the student have conceptual gaps? If yes, do they need:*
 - *assistance prioritizing content?*
 - *one-on-one support and/or hands-on experiences to help fill in those gaps?*
 - *modified curriculum?*
- *Does the student have difficulty gathering complete information of developmentally appropriate concepts?*
- *Does the student require modified pace and/or reduced assignments?*
- *Is the student able to independently anticipate and complete the beginning, middle and end of each activity in order to ensure the student experiences feelings of closure?*

11. 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?

Questions for consideration:

- *If yes, how can the team ensure equity of access for this student?*
- *What are the next steps in supporting the student in accessing their education?*
- *What are the needs of the student's educational team in order to meet the needs of the student outlined within this section? (continue to the next section)*

Step 3: Questions about the Instructional Team

Answering the questions in the next table will help the IEP committee decide if the needs identified above can be supported in the proposed or current instructional arrangement, or if additional strategies or personnel are needed.

Questions about the Instructional Team		
1. Does the student’s need for effective deafblind-specific intervention strategies and communication methods require additional education and training for staff members?	Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If numerous staff will need training, would it be more efficient to concentrate training on fewer specialized individuals? <p>Consider: <i>Students need consistency throughout their day. Fewer individuals who have specialized training could bridge communication and access between the student and the rest of the educational team within the student’s school day.</i></p>		
2. 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:	Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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, low vision devices, hearing devices, etc.) ; Other (explain). _____ <p>Consider: <i>Look back at the 11 questions within step 2. Is an additional trained support person needed to meet the needs outlined above?</i></p>		
3. Is it challenging to limit the number of individuals working with the student so that he/she can form trusting relationships?	Yes	No

Consider: Current staff not assigned to a specific student may have other responsibilities that may or may not include support to the student who is deafblind.

4. Is it challenging for the team to be consistent due to the large number of individuals working with the student?

Yes	No

Consider: Multiple changes of educational staff within a school day can prohibit consistency in communication and relationship development.

5. 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?

Yes	No

Consider: The student may need pre-teaching and re-teaching of concepts so that the student is able to be an active participant in real-time instruction. The student will need to have opportunities for confirmation, anticipation, motivation, meaningful conversation, inquiry, and reflection within all of their activities throughout the school day.

Step 4: Determine the Need for an Intervener

Now that you have completed 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 who is deafblind. Any items answered “yes” in steps 2 and 3 should be addressed.

Is an Intervener Needed?

Is a paraeducator with specific knowledge and skills in deafblind-specific strategies needed for all or part of the educational day to ensure that the student can access information, effectively communicate and connect with all peers and professional personnel, and actively participate in all of his/her educational environments.

Yes	No

Consider: Review the overall information gathered above regarding the needs of the student and the needs of the instructional team in order to make this decision.

Next Steps

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](https://www.pathstoliteracy.org/sites/pathstoliteracy.perkinsdev1.org/files/1800_IEP_Indicators.pdf) is another tool designed to help educational teams develop appropriate IEPs for students who are deafblind. Completing this document will guide the team to ensure the IEP meets all of the unique needs of an individual who is deafblind.

https://www.pathstoliteracy.org/sites/pathstoliteracy.perkinsdev1.org/files/1800_IEP_Indicators.pdf

References

- Alsop, L., Blaha, R., & Kloos, E. (2002). *The intervener in early intervention and educational settings 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 Deafblind Outreach. (2009). *IEP Quality Indicators for Students with Deafblindness*. Austin, TX: Texas Deafblind Project at Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired.
- Texas Deafblind Outreach. (2000). *Interveners for students with deafblindness in Texas*. Austin, TX: Texas Deafblind Project at Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Additional Resources Regarding Interveners

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

- National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness (NCDB): nationaldb.org/library/list/74
- NCDB Intervener Initiative:
<https://nationaldb.org/groups/page/9/national-intervener-services-initiative>
- National Intervener and Advocate Association, SKI-HI Institute, Utah State University:
intervener.org

For questions or permissions, contact TSBVI Outreach: outreach@tsbvi.edu.

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Figure 2 TSBVI logo.



"This project is supported by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). Opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the position of the U.S. Department of Education."

Figure 3 IDEAs that Work logo and OSEP disclaimer.