Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Outreach Programs
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Let's Talk Deafblind Eligibility: FAQ and Answers

There seems to be some confusion around the topic of determining a student's educational eligibility for Deafblindness. It is a fascinating subject and one that we love to talk about here at the Texas Deafblind Project. We have tried to assemble some common (and not so common) questions to help alleviate confusion and allow everyone a better night's sleep.

Question: What is the eligibility definition for deafblindness* in the Commissioner's/SBOE Rules Eligibility Criteria?

§89.1040. Eligibility Criteria.

2) Deafblindness. A student with deaf-blindness is one who has been determined to meet the criteria for Deafblindness as stated in 34 CFR, §300.8(c)(2). In meeting the criteria stated in 34 CFR, §300.8(c)(2), a student with deaf-blindness is one who, based on the evaluations specified in subsections (c)(3) and (c)(12) of this section:

> (A) meets the eligibility criteria for auditory impairment specified in subsection (c)(3) of this section and visual impairment specified in subsection (c)(12) of this section;
>
> (B) meets the eligibility criteria for a student with a visual impairment and has a suspected hearing loss that cannot be demonstrated conclusively, but a speech/language therapist, a certified speech and language therapist, or a licensed speech language pathologist indicates there is no speech at an age when speech would normally be expected;
>
> (C) has documented hearing and visual losses that, if considered individually, may not meet the requirements for auditory impairment or visual impairment, but the combination of such losses adversely affects the student's educational performance; or
>
> (D) has a documented medical diagnosis progressive medical condition that will result in concomitant hearing and visual losses that, without special education intervention, will adversely affect the student's educational performance.

Question: What is the benefit for the IEP committee to assign a Deafblind label to a student?

Answer(s):

- A student with dual sensory impairment (i.e. Deafblindness) can have very different educational needs than those with a single sensory impairment (AI or VI). It will be important for her team to think about questions of access from a **combined sensory loss, or Deafblind,** perspective. Staff who are trained in a single sensory area may need additional support specific to deafblind educational assessment and programming strategies in order to develop an appropriate IEP.

  Typical educational approaches for students with AI labels involve the use of vision as a compensatory strategy. For those students with a VI label, compensatory approaches involve the use of hearing. Emphasizing the Deafblind label can help to more clearly define the uniqueness of the disability.

- There are specific resources and unique services for students with Deafblindness and their families. Without the Deafblind label, teams and families may not be made aware of information about the Texas Deafblind Outreach Project, Deafblind services through HHSC and the TWC, the National Center on Deafblindness, the DBMD Waiver, Helen Keller National Center, or iCanConnect. – *See Resource Guide for Parents of Students with Deafblindness.*

- Some families or students may identify as Deaf/hard of hearing and not as a person with Deafblindness. For example, a person with Usher syndrome may identify strongly with the Deaf community and culture. They may lack important information about their visual impairment and its implications. While it is very important to be sensitive to these issues, the Deafblind label can help the education team identify resources and strategies around counseling, braille instruction, tactile sign, Orientation and Mobility, and other supports that may be beneficial to the student and family.

- **While either DB or AI/VI are acceptable, it is recommended that Deafblind (DB) be selected and then ranked in the primary position** – *see question 5.*

Question: Does the Deafblind label qualify a student for additional services that the AI/VI label does not?

- **Generally speaking, a student qualifies for the same services, regardless of whether they have an AI/VI label or a DB label**. All students with both VI and AI eligibility will be counted on the Deafblind Child Count and can access the support of the TX Deafblind Project.

Question: Why is the student with mild dual sensory impairments considered Deafblind?

*A student with Deafblindness is one who:

(C) "has documented hearing and visual losses that, if considered individually, may not meet the requirements for auditory impairment or visual impairment, but the **combination** of such losses **adversely affects the student's educational performance;"**

Answers(s)

- We affectionately call this "***The third way".*** The question to consider is whether the **combined effects** of the mild vision and hearing losses impact educational performance. Do these **combined** sensory deficits affect the student's ability to gather information and participate in the instructional environment? If so, to address this problem, the child may need accommodations, special technology, or unique strategies that require professionals with a background in dual sensory loss to participate in assessment and program development.

- If a student qualifies as Deafblind under the eligibility criteria section C, a Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (TVI), as well as a Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (TDHH), will participate in the student's ARD. This means the professionals with training in these types of sensory losses will be involved in programming for this student. Among other things, they are needed to address optical and amplification devices, accommodations that assure appropriate access to information, and the development of IEP objectives, which address self-advocacy and effective use of sensory devices. They will need to consider the combined impact of the mild sensory losses when designing programming.

Question: Why is it recommended that DB always be ranked as the primary disability?

Answer(s)

There are two separate counts that students with Deafblindness should be reported on each year. The first is the US Department of Education, IDEA count. The second is the Deafblind Child Count that is collected by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

IDEA Count:

- The US Department of Education (ED) is required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to report to Congress annually on the number of children receiving special education, by disability category, for ages 3-21 years. The count must be unduplicated - that is, children can only be counted in one category, regardless of the number of disabilities they experience.
  http://www.afb.org/Section.asp?SectionID=3&TopicID=138&DocumentID=3350

For this count, **the primary ranking is the only one reported** to the federal government for IDEA data collection. Therefore, unless the Deafblind label is stated as the **primary disability** it will not be recorded on this count. This information is used in policy development. Since Deafblindness is the rarest of the low incidence groups, it is important to be sure they are not missed. Policy makers may not see the separate Deafblind Child Count that OSEP collects from the state Deafblind Projects.

Deafblind Child Count:

- The Texas Education Agency (TEA), Division of Special Education, is required to report annually on individuals, 0-21 years of age, who are Deafblind in Texas. This information, collected by state Deafblind Projects, informs the National Deafblind Child Count recorded by OSEP.

- **The Deafblind Child Count collects different information than the IDEA count, and provides information that is used for regional and statewide planning to develop funding and appropriate services for infants, children, and youth who are Deafblind.**

Students with both the Deafblind and the combined AI/VI eligibility labels are reported on the Deafblind Child Count. Using either the AI/VI as primary/secondary (i.e. first and second) or Deafblind as primary is best practice. There is no impact on funding or services either way.

Question: What information on community and state service resources for Deafblindness is provided for the parents and student?

Due to the low incidence of Deafblindness, information is often not included in the typical resource packets distributed by school professionals regarding vision loss and deafness.

- It should be noted that there are specific resources and unique services for students with Deafblindness and their families. For instance, information about the Texas Deafblind Outreach Project, Deafblind services through HHSC and TWC, the National Center on Deafblindness, the DBMD Waiver, Helen Keller National Center, or iCanConnect. The Texas Deafblind Project has assembled a resource guide for parents and students with Deafblindness – *See Resource Guide for Parents of Students with Deafblindness.*

Question: If the Texas Deafblind Child Count is due before the FIE process of assessing vision and hearing is complete, should the child be reported?

- Yes! Students for whom vision and hearing loss are suspected, but who have not been tested, may be reported on the Deafblind Child Count and remain there for one year. During that year, evaluation of their sensory functioning should be completed. Technical assistance related to appropriate assessment techniques is available from the Texas Deafblind Project at the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired".

  Instructions for completing the Deafblind Child Count

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