



Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Outreach Programs

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Let's Talk Deafblind Eligibility – FAQs and Their Answers

1. Question: What is the eligibility definition for students who are deafblind in the Commissioner's/State Board of Education (SBOE) Rules Eligibility Criteria?

Answer(s):

Texas Administrative Code (TAC) **§89.1040. Eligibility Criteria.**

Deaf-blindness: A student with deaf-blindness is one who has been determined to meet the criteria for deaf-blindness as 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 deaf or hard of hearing specified in subsection (c)(3) of this section and visual impairment specified in subsection (c)(12) of this section;
- (B) Meets eligibility criteria for visual impairment and has a suspected hearing loss that cannot be demonstrated conclusively, but there is no speech at an age when speech would normally be expected, as determined by a speech/language therapist, a certified speech and language therapist, or a licensed speech language pathologist;
- (C) Has documented hearing and visual losses that, if considered individually, may not meet the requirements for deaf or hard of hearing or visual impairment, but the combination of such losses adversely affects the child's educational performance;
or
- (D) has a documented medical diagnosis of a 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.

2. Question: What is the benefit of adding the deafblind eligibility?

Answer(s):

- A student with a dual sensory impairment (i.e. deafblind) may have very different needs than those who have a single sensory impairment (vision impairment (VI) or Deaf/hard of hearing (DHH). It is important for the student, or their family and school staff to consider access from a **combined sensory loss, (deafblind)** perspective. Staff who are trained in a single sensory area may need additional support to identify and implement deafblind specific educational assessments, programming strategies, and resources in order to develop an appropriate IEP.

Typical educational approaches for students who are DHH involve the use of vision as a compensatory strategy. For students who are visually impaired, compensatory approaches often rely upon the use of hearing. Identifying a student as deafblind may provide a clearer description of the student's needs.

- There are specific resources and unique services for young children and students who are deafblind, their families, and school staff. Resources are included in number 6 below.

3. Question: Does the deafblind eligibility qualify a student for additional services that the DHH/VI label does not?

Answer(s):

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

4. Question: Why should a child or student who has a mild visual impairment and/or is hard of hearing be considered deafblind?

Answers(s):

- A student with deafblindness is one who:
(C) "Has documented hearing and visual losses that, if considered individually, may not meet the requirements for deaf or hard of hearing or visual impairment, but the combination of such losses **adversely affects the child's educational performance;**"
- The question to consider is whether the **combined effects** of the mild differences in vision and/or hearing impact educational performance. Do these **combined** sensory levels affect the student's ability to gather information and participate to the highest level of their ability in their education? If so, the student may need modifications, accommodations, special technology, or unique strategies that require both the Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (TSVI), a Teacher of Students who are Deaf/ hard of hearing (TDHH), and if available, a Teacher of Students who are Deafblind (TDB) to participate in assessment and program development.

- If a student qualifies as deafblind under the eligibility criteria section C, a TSVI, a TDHH, and if possible, a TDB will participate in the student's IEP meeting.

5. Question: Why is it recommended that deafblind always be ranked as the primary disability?

Answer(s):

There are two separate counts that students who are deafblind are 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 is required by 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. See: <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/data/> and <https://www.afb.org/research-and-initiatives/education/education-initiatives-afb/estimates-severely-visually-impaired>
- **The primary ranking is the only one reported** to the federal government for IDEA data collection. Therefore, unless the deafblind eligibility is stated as the **primary disability** it will not be recorded on this count. This information is used in policy development. Since deafblind eligibility is the rarest of the low incidence eligibility groups, it is important to be sure these students are not missed. Policy makers may not see the separate Deafblind Child Count that OSEP collects from the state Deafblind Projects.
- The primary eligibility category should be representative of the disability that has the greatest impact on the student's education. It would be a rare occasion that any one disability would impact a student's access to their education more than an impairment in both of their distal senses. Only in those rare situations, should something other than deafblind be the primary disability category.

Deafblind Child Count:

- The Texas Education Agency (TEA) Division of Special Education is required to report annually on individuals, birth -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.

6. Question: What information on community and state service resources for individuals who are deafblind is provided for families, young children, and school age students?

Answer(s):

Due to the low incidence of individuals who are deafblind, information is often not included in the typical resource packets regarding vision loss and services available for young children and students who are Deaf/hard of hearing distributed by school professionals.

It should be noted that there are specific resources and unique services for students who are deafblind and their families. For instance:

- Texas Deafblind Project
- Deafblind services through Health and Human Services and Texas Workforce Commission
- National Center on Deaf-Blindness
- Deafblind Multiple Disabilities Medicaid Waiver
- Helen Keller National Center
- iCanConnect

7. Question: If the Texas Deafblind Child Count is due before the Full and Individual Evaluation (FIE) process of assessing vision and hearing is complete, should the child be reported?

Answer(s):

- The answer to this question is yes. Reporting students for whom vision loss and hearing differences are suspected, but who have not yet been tested, on the Deafblind Child Count should occur. These students may remain on the child count for one year. During that year, evaluation of the student's 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](#)

Although deafblind is not recognized as a separate disability condition within the early childhood intervention (ECI) system in Texas, it is critical to identify these infants and young children so their families and support providers have access to personnel and resources.

For more information please visit txdeafblindproject.org or contact txdeafblindproject@tsbvi.edu.