



# Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Outreach Programs

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## IEP Checklist for Proficient Communicators Who Are Deafblind

### 1. Address *requisite concept* (foundational concept) development

Address requisite concept (foundational concept) development through assessment and instruction. Being deafblind results in gaps in foundational information that are essential for concept development. Identifying and remediating these gaps is necessary for progress in the general curriculum. Requisite concept development is an area that must be systematically evaluated. (See the *Requisite Concept Evaluation* tool.)

### 2. Modify the curricular content

Modify the curricular content; develop standards-based IEP in core subjects. For students who are deafblind, gathering information takes much longer than typical learners so the pace of instruction should be much slower. Sensory loss limits or prohibits incidental learning throughout the student's life. This results in the child having significantly less essential background information in comparison to peers. The scope of the information in a general education classroom can be overwhelming. Modifying the curricular content prioritizes the curriculum so it is both manageable and instructive. The general education teacher in collaboration with the TSVI, TDHH, and TDB should specify individual TEKS (or general curriculum items) the student will focus on for specific content domains.

Note: it is important to consider graduation requirements in terms of the student's graduation program and the student's transition needs when determining how much the curriculum can be modified.

### 3. Define comprehension checks

Define comprehension checks and include a description of the student's individual comprehension check strategies in the student's accommodations. Regular comprehension checks are an important tool in checking for understanding. Many of the academic students who are deafblind will reply "yes" when asked if they understand the content. Instead of asking students if they understand the material, use open-ended questions or ask them to explain it.

### 4. Build time into the day to intervene

Build time into the day to intervene; add an elective (e.g. innovative ECC course) or time in a resource classroom. Students who are deafblind need additional instruction to master essential concepts. They also require instruction in the expanded core curriculum (ECC) for students who

are blind/low vision, deaf, and deafblind. There is often inadequate time in the current schedule to provide appropriate instruction in these three areas. An elective class would allow that time to focus on these essential concepts.

## **5. Apply adaptations and modifications to homework assignments**

Apply adaptations and modifications to homework assignments: shorten, provide additional time, allow oral responses. Consider assigning alternative projects, and/or reducing or eliminating homework. Students who are deafblind have to work much harder than their peers to gather information and often experience fatigue. Strategies to reduce or eliminate homework may be necessary for some students. Providing alternative assignments allows the student to apply knowledge that will help with concept development and understanding.

## **6. Consider the student's technology needs**

Consider the student's technology needs; develop a technology plan in the IEP minutes or deliberations. Students who are deafblind often require technology to compensate for the combined vision and hearing loss. They often acquire, and may be responsible for, many more devices than other students in special education. This includes learning to use and maintain or troubleshoot issues with the technology, efficiency in selecting technology to share information with staff and others, and being able to get the technology transported from one location to another. This may involve informal assessment focused on student preference, available technology, and its function in actual settings within the school environment.

## **7. Monitor indications of stress and consider counseling**

Monitor indications of stress; consider counseling to support the student with stress management. Many students who are deafblind put forth a great deal of energy and effort over the course of a school day. They have to work harder than their peers to keep up with real-time instruction which could lead to feelings of inadequacy and failure. This can result in extremely high levels of stress, and sustained high stress could lead to [toxic stress](#) syndrome.

This may be an area where the development of social networks can be of support to the student. Some districts may have staff who are knowledgeable about issues related to being deafblind, but generally, this resource is not available. Even in the private sector, there are not enough counselors who have knowledge regarding deafblind issues or who have the ability to use sign language. Sometimes taking care of the stressors related to homework, travel, time for comprehension checks, advocating for access and accessibility, and improving strategies to help with instruction and classroom interaction greatly reduces the stress for the student. Also, specific instructions to do a check-in about feelings and emotions can be helpful.

## **8. Consider the impact that being deafblind has on behavioral issues**

Consider the impact that being deafblind has on behavioral issues. For students who are deafblind, issues of challenging behavior are usually closely tied to sensory access and communication. Behaviors are often natural responses to *distress*. Behavior is often the result of coping with situations that seem confusing or threatening due to a lack of information available from others or from the environment. It can be the result of frustration about being ineffective in communicating about important topics in more socially acceptable ways. It could also be the inability of the communication partner to understand and/or respond effectively. Difficulty in

recognizing, trusting, and bonding with others can have an impact on the student's comfort or distress level.

## 9. Consider the unique social skills needed

Consider the unique social skills needed for a student who is deafblind, include these in the IEP, and provide direct instruction. Being deafblind impacts the ability to form and maintain relationships and respond to interactions with others in typical ways. For example, a lack of environmental information makes it difficult to identify people, locate them, know what they are doing, or understand what they want. Without direct and effective access, it may also be difficult to understand and navigate conversational situations such as knowing the topic of conversation, knowing when to join/leave the conversation, or knowing who is involved at any given time. Many ordinary interactions may seem threatening, negative, or confusing to the student. In turn, the student's need to gather information by close viewing and/or touch can offend or be off-putting to others. It is not unusual to see withdrawal and problems with bonding. It is important to consider that social problems for a student who is deafblind are often the result of an ongoing lack of essential information.

## 10. Consider the unique self-advocacy skills needed

Consider the unique self-advocacy skills needed for a student who is deafblind, include these in the IEP, and **provide direct instruction**. Being an effective self-advocate for communication and access to information is essential for success in higher education, employment, and other community settings.

Note regarding **advocacy fatigue**: It is important to acknowledge that each child differs in their ability to be a self-advocate and that the demands of constantly having to advocate for basic needs related to access can be incredibly fatiguing for an individual. Some may find it easier to let go of their desire for equal access and participation in activities related to education, employment, and community involvement.

## 11. Considers the need for additional resources, training, or staff

The discussion for supplemental needs and services considers the need for additional resources, training and/or staff to provide in-class support (intervener, additional interpreter, etc.). Certain related services and supports are designed for students with sensory impairments and should be considered for all students who are deafblind. For example, an intervener is a paraeducator with special skills and training who is designated to work individually with a student who is deafblind. Sign language interpretation and orientation and mobility (O&M) are also examples of specialized services. Additionally, the effects of being deafblind should be taken into account in assessments, evaluations, and delivery of all related services provided to the student.

## 12. Consider the unique transition needs

Consider the unique transition needs of a student who is deafblind and include these in the IEP. As a student enters the teen years and nears graduation, there are considerations for both educational programming and community services. The need for experientially based vocational assessment and instruction in real-world environments is heightened when sensory issues affect access to environmental information and practical experience. Additionally, referrals to community services designed for people who are deafblind lead to better adult outcomes (e.g.

community intervener, support service provider, co-navigator, interpreter, specialized residential & vocational support). Tools for helping develop an effective and realistic transition plan include person-centered planning and the development of personal networks. There are many resources for utilizing this process.


Another important area of consideration in the transition plan is O&M needs for the individual to be able to obtain and access services and resources in the community and at home. This could include learning about social security benefits, how to apply for services, apply for jobs, and other issues related to independent living. This feeds into future vocational needs and quality of life issues for the individual. Can the individual travel independently or with minimal assistance to take care of activities of daily living, socialize, and participate in recreational activities? Are they able to navigate new environments such as college campuses or workplaces? Can they access the O&M support they need after leaving school?

# IEP Checklist for the Proficient Communicator

**Student Name:**

**Date:**

Review the student's IEP for these 12 items and place a check beside each item discussed and documented in the IEP.

 IEP Checklist Item
1. Address requisite concept (foundational concept) development through assessment and instruction.
2. Modify the curricular content; develop standards-based IEP in core subjects.
3. Define comprehension check and include an individualized description in the student's accommodations.
4. Build time into the day to intervene for individual or small group work; add an elective or time in a resource classroom.
5. Apply adaptations and modifications to homework assignments: shorten, provide additional time, allow oral responses, etc. Consider assigning alternative projects, and/or reducing or eliminating homework.
6. Consider the student's technology needs; develop a technology plan to include in the IEP minutes or deliberations.
7. Monitor indications of stress; consider counseling and other strategies to support the student with stress management.
8. Consider the impact that being deafblind has on behavioral issues that present as a result of student distress, fatigue, and overall mental health.
9. Consider the unique social skills needed for a student who is deafblind, include these in the IEP and provide direct instruction.
10. Consider the unique self-advocacy skills needed for a student who is deafblind, include these in the IEP and provide direct instruction.
11. Consider the need for supplemental and related services such as training for staff and family, in-class support (e.g., intervener, additional interpreter, support to participate in school clubs).
12. Consider the unique transition needs of the student in the discussion of supplemental needs and services and related services for a student who is deafblind, and include these in the IEP.