



Chapter 5

Supportive Structure and Administration

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Issue II. State and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) should ensure that every student who is deafblind is served by a well-coordinated educational team with the specialized knowledge and skills to fulfill its responsibilities for developing and meeting the requirements of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and Individualized Transition Plan (ITP).

Issue III. State and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) should develop strategies to recruit and retain personnel who have the knowledge and skills to work with students who are deafblind.

Issue IV. State and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) should identify and use specialized resources to meet the needs of students who are deafblind and their families.

Issue V. State and local education agencies should ensure that students receive ongoing and appropriate assessments that will enable educational teams to develop and implement individualized education programs.

Issue VI. State and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) should implement planning strategies for the important transitions that students who are deafblind will experience throughout their education.

Issue VII. State and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) must ensure the availability of a full array of appropriate services that meet the unique needs of students who are deafblind.

Issue VIII. State and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) should ensure that students who are deafblind receive instructional materials, adequate resources, and appropriate reading media on schedule with their sighted-hearing peers.

Issue IX. State and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) should ensure that instruction for students who are deafblind will extend beyond the boundaries of the school and the school day.

Introduction

Deafblindness is a low-incidence disability; therefore, it is important that state and local administrators work collaboratively and creatively with existing resources and develop new resources when necessary to expand state capacity and to assure that students have quality IEPs/ITPs developed by teams that have expertise in deafblindness. A common challenge is that state and local educational administrators are often unaware that some of their special education students are deafblind because those students, especially when they have multiple disabilities, are counted under different categories of disabilities.

Issues and Practices

Issue I. State education agencies (SEAs) should have designated personnel to ensure that the provisions and policies related to students who are deafblind are implemented.

States have the responsibility to oversee and monitor educational services provided to students who are deafblind. Every state should have a mechanism to ensure that quality educational services are indeed provided and that monitoring does occur. Each state should have at least one designated person whose primary responsibilities are oversight and statewide coordination of educational services for students who are deafblind and their families. This person should have expertise in the education of students who are deafblind.

Most states also have a federally funded deafblind project, usually administered through a state or private agency. These are technical assistance projects that are intended to support and not supplant states' responsibilities to monitor and oversee deafblind services. These projects can provide invaluable information and support for educators and administrators.

In many states, especially those with extensive rural areas, special and creative efforts are necessary to ensure that students with deafblindness and their families receive specialized services that will meet their unique needs, including a full array of placement options and appropriate support services. Some rural localities lack expertise because of low student numbers and critical personnel shortages. SEAs should assist local education agencies by providing support to develop cooperative services among districts, hiring regional deafblind specialists, and by encouraging other forms of intrastate regionalization or whatever model of service that will maximize resources.

Issue II. State and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) should ensure that every student who is deafblind is served by a well-coordinated educational team with the specialized knowledge and skills to fulfill its responsibilities for developing and meeting the requirements of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Individualized Transition Plan (ITP).

No Child Left Behind clearly states that every child should be served by a qualified teacher (NCLB, 2001). As stated consistently throughout this document, every team serving a student who is deafblind must include a qualified deafblind specialist as well as personnel with competencies necessary to provide adequate services. Educational outcomes for students who are deafblind are directly linked to the qualifications and competence of the individuals working with them. Personnel working with this population require specialized knowledge and skills. (See Appendix A-Competencies for Teachers of Learners Who Are Deafblind)

Personnel Preparation/Training of Teachers

Teacher training should be done within recognized programs. Most states do not have university training programs for the education of students who are deafblind. However, states must still ensure that appropriate pre-service training options are in place for teachers and other personnel who will be working with them. In more highly populated states, the number of students who are deafblind is high enough to justify the establishment of training programs. In states with lower numbers of identified students, neighboring states can collaborate to establish regional personnel preparation programs. The National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness maintains an up-to-date listing of such programs (<http://nationaldb.org/peoplePrograms.php>).

Existing university programs in the fields of severe disabilities, vision impairments, and/or deafness can play a vital role in the future in responding to the need to train more teachers in deafblindness. They should be encouraged to develop teacher training programs in deafblindness to best utilize existing resources.

Every state education agency should have a system for endorsing or certifying personnel who have competencies to work with students who are deafblind. States should also ensure that their certification or endorsement requirements are reciprocal with other states so that they can recruit freely from a national pool.

Inservice Training

SEAs should work closely with federally funded state deafblind projects to provide inservice training. Each state project is mandated to maintain a census of all students in their state who are deafblind. These etiological and demographic census data are useful for identifying training needs. Every state should have an organized program of inservice training to bring needed skills to educational team members (including teachers, family members, clinicians, and paraprofessionals)

who are responsible for the care and education of students who are deafblind. Personnel working with students who are deafblind need specialized knowledge and skills to achieve the objectives of social and academic inclusion into school, home and community life.

The breadth of knowledge and skills required by educators who work with students who are deafblind is extensive. Therefore, training programs preparing educators to adequately implement students' IEP should be comprehensive. Educational administrators and direct service providers should present all aspects of instruction that foster development of appropriate, individualized programs as well as of collaborative planning strategies. (See chapter 4 on program planning.) In addition, administrators should also incorporate training in the issues and practices in deafblindness into state Comprehensive Systems of Personnel Development (CSPD) plans and professional development opportunities at the local level.

Issue III. State and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) should develop strategies to recruit and retain personnel who have the knowledge and skills to work with students who are deafblind.

State and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) should employ personnel trained in the education of the deafblind to ensure that the students' needs are addressed in accordance with the law. SEAs are therefore obligated to facilitate the recruitment effort for their local agencies. Schools have an obligation to recruit and employ trained personnel and their efforts to recruit new staff should specifically target professionals and paraprofessionals who have training and experience in deafblind education. Administrators should provide incentives to retain qualified personal (e.g., support and encourage participation in specialized training activities) as well as encouragement to existing personnel to pursue further training specific to the educational needs of students who are deafblind. Administrators should recruit at conferences, in newsletters, and at professional organization events in which teachers and other specialized personnel participate. In addition, the National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness (NCDB) web site should be accessed to enhance recruitment efforts.

Issue IV. State and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) should identify and use specialized resources to meet the needs of students who are deafblind and their families.

Meeting the complex needs of students who are deafblind requires the coordination of many agencies throughout the state. Students will need appropriate educational settings and families will need access to a variety of resources throughout their children's educational years and transition to adult services.

Since deafblindness is an extremely low-incidence disability and the number of highly qualified personnel in this area of special education is limited, SEAs should seek collaboration with agencies offering specialized services. The state deafblind projects are one source of assistance that can provide consultation, inservice training, and support for developing appropriate early intervention, educational, and transitional services for students who are deafblind. However, these projects should not be considered the sole source of support for students who are deafblind and their families.

Other resources in the state should be identified and established by the SEA and made available to local teams and families through statewide interagency agreements. The majority of students who are deafblind, about 91 percent, have additional disabilities (Killoran, 2007) and may require the support of multiple agencies (e.g., departments of mental retardation, developmental disabilities, public health, blindness agencies, and deaf and hard-of-hearing agencies).

Specialized schools for the deaf and/or blind can be valuable resources in meeting the needs of learners who are deafblind and their families. Most states have one or both of these types of schools as a placement option and/or as a resource center for assessment and training. Specialized schools often have outreach programs that can assist the local school district in building its capacity to meet the needs of students who are deafblind and their families.

Issue V. State and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) should ensure that students receive ongoing and appropriate assessments that will enable educational teams to develop and implement individualized education programs.

A comprehensive assessment is mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act for all students who have IEPs. (IDEA 2004 [34 CFR §300.320 (a)(2)(ii)]) A student who is deafblind should be assessed by professionals who are knowledgeable about and highly skilled in the field of deafblindness. At a minimum, one person on the assessment team should be competent and able to help other team members interpret the impact of combined vision and hearing losses on their assessment and results (Miles & Riggio, 1999, p. 281). If a district does not have qualified personnel to assess a student who is deafblind, it is the responsibility of administrators to seek outside resources.

Issue VI. State and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) should implement planning strategies for the important transitions that students who are deafblind will experience throughout their education.

Traditionally, within the educational service system, formal transition planning occurs during

transitions from early intervention to preschool, preschool to school age, and school to adult services. Students who are deafblind lack the information typically obtained through use of vision and hearing, or this information is distorted. Because of the inherent difficulties in communication, transitional planning for students who are deafblind should occur every time there is a change of staff, placement, class, or living environment. The SEAs and LEAs should have competent personnel on the teams to assist in transitions in order to minimize regression and ensure consistency and continuity of programs.

The SEA and LEA need to know who is coming to their district. Through close cooperation with the state deafblind projects, these agencies can become aware of students on the deafblind census (National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness) and make adequate plans for their entrance into a program.

Transition to Secondary School

As students who are deafblind grow older, the transition issues often become increasingly complex. The transition from elementary to middle school or high school is a major change for students who are deafblind. In many cases, students will have different teachers and classroom settings for each subject; thus, a larger group of teachers will require assistance, resources, and training to help these students. One educator usually serves as case coordinator. A teacher with competence in deafblindness should assume this role or share the responsibility with the building-based special educator to share expertise among team members.

Federal law mandates that at age 14 a discussion of a student's life after high school should take place (IDEA, 2004 §. 614(d)(1)(A)(i)(viii)). Preparing for the future should be an ongoing part of program planning for students who are deafblind.

Transition to Adult Life

Career and vocational education and exploration should be included in the individualized education program beginning not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child is 16, and updated annually thereafter. Preparation for adult life may include career awareness activities, instruction on job-seeking skills, work experiences at school and in the community, attendance at career seminars or conferences, college preparation, exposure to various career settings, and contact with deafblind adults who are positive role models.

SEAs, LEAs, and adult service agencies should collaborate with students who are deafblind and their families to develop and implement appropriate transition plans. Effective transition into appropriate adult services will require careful and creative planning to ensure that students' capabilities are recognized (Mount, 1992, p. 2).

Issue VII. State and local educational agencies (SEAs and LEAs) must ensure the availability of a full array of appropriate services that meet the unique needs of students who are deafblind.

The decision of whether a student should be served in a typical classroom, in a special day class in the neighborhood school, or in a state operated or private specialized school should be made independent of funding. To comply with federal law, decisions should be driven by need rather than cost. In making an array of placement and service options available, the state education agency should also establish a system of financial support that reflects a placement-neutral funding approach. In the spirit of offering a free, appropriate public education for all, states should make these added costs tolerable for local communities.

Issue VIII. State and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) should ensure that students who are deafblind receive instructional materials, adequate resources, and appropriate reading media on schedule with their sighted-hearing peers.

The timely availability of appropriate instructional materials is a basic educational right that should be included in the individualized education program. A student who is deafblind must begin the school year with the materials and texts required for participating in the regular curriculum with his/her peers (National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard [NIMAS]). When materials arrive late, the student will not truly be included in the class and learning will be delayed. The school administrator/ LEA is responsible for ensuring that materials are provided in a timely manner.

Many states have an instructional resource center for materials appropriate for students who are blind or visually impaired. Students who are deafblind are entitled to access these materials if they are determined to be legally blind. Through these centers, schools can access or borrow texts, materials, equipment, and other adaptive devices, including materials from the American Printing House for the Blind (APH) through its quota system (See web site www.aph.org).

Issue IX. State and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) should ensure that instruction for students who are deafblind will extend beyond the boundaries of the school and the school day.

Students who are deafblind have great difficulty acquiring knowledge and concepts of the world that surrounds them. They must learn concepts and skills in natural settings (Heubner, Prickett, Welch, & Joffe, 1995, p. 27; Alsop, 2002, p. 1) and require instruction that must extend

beyond the school building, the school day, and the school year. The SEA and LEA should allow and encourage participation of students in experiences in the community in addition to the school environment.

Students require training in orientation and mobility to learn safe travel in the neighborhoods of home and school and in his/her home environment. As students progress, orientation and mobility classes will take more of their time, and so should be offered during both daylight and evening hours. Some students who are deafblind have severe night blindness, and they need opportunities to learn skills when it is dark.

Many students who are deafblind will require year-round services to meet their educational needs and minimize regression. IEP teams should determine if students need extended school year programs.

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