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DEAFBLINDNESS: EDUCATIONAL SERVICE GUIDELINES: DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE IEP

This fact sheet has been developed to guide you through the development of an individualized education program for your child with deaf-blindness. It is based on the Deafblindness: Educational Service Guidelines (Guidelines).ⁱ

Your child's educational rights are protected by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA guarantees the right to a "free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment" for all children with covered disabilities from age 3 to 21, including deaf-blindness. Once your child has been determined eligible for special education services, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) must be developed. The IEP team includes you, your child's general education teacher; an individual qualified to provide or supervise special education; someone who can interpret evaluations; and a district representative who can make decisions. At least one member should have expertise in deaf-blindness. This person should have knowledge of issues relating to students with deaf-blindness: their diversity and unique needs; the importance of and strategies to strengthen communication, literacy, and numeracy skills; appropriate service options and supports; appropriate assistive devices and technology (AT); and relevant legislation and resources, including state deaf-blind projects. All team members must also value your input into the process, including your knowledge about how your child behaves and learns. The IEP must contain:

Present levels of educational performance: This should include how your child's deaf-blindness and other disabilities affect academics, social and emotional development, behavior, functional life skills, self-awareness, and ability to communicate. This section must list *strengths* and *needs*. This section must include detailed information on the degree of hearing and vision loss and how your child communicates needs, emotions, and knowledge.

Measurable annual goals and short term objectives or benchmarks: There should be at least one set of goals and objectives for each need identified above. Make sure the focus is on your child's *potential*, not just *limits*.

Special education (specially designed instruction) and *related services* (services your child needs to benefit from his/her education). Special education services should foster peer-to-peer, student-teacher, and student-parent communication; literacy and numeracy; development of social skills; and the ability to use (AT). The IEP should specify the types of professionals who will be involved in educating your child and needed expertise:

- ♦ **Deaf-Blind (DB) Specialist:** A DB Specialist may provide direct service to your child, or may act as a consultant to teachers and support staff. S/he can address communication, learning, mobility, social skills, etc.
- ♦ **Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (TVIs):** TVIs can help your child use optical (low vision) and non-optical devices (e.g., reading stands); identify and/or modify visual materials (e.g., large print); and acquire materials from the American Printing House for the Blind.
- ♦ **Teacher of the Deaf:** This teacher can help with communication and assisted listening devices, and address hearing-related literacy issues.
- ♦ **Orientation and Mobility (O&M) specialist:** O&M instruction will help your child develop skills, including independent travel skills, to navigate the environment. The O&M specialist must be able to use your child's mode of communication (sign language, touch or object cues, etc.).
- ♦ **Intervener:** An intervener is a one-to-one service provider with training and specialized skills in deaf-blindness. S/he facilitates your child's access to environmental information; the development and use of receptive and expressive communication skills; and positive relationships to promote social and emotional well-being.
- ♦ **Paraprofessionals:** One-on-one instructional aides/assistants provide support for communication, sensory access, movement, delivery of direct instruction, and personal care. The IEP should specify where and when paraprofessionals are needed; required knowledge, expertise and training; responsibilities; and who will supervise them.
- ♦ **Interpreter** (if your child uses sign language as the primary language). If your child requires tactile (touch) interpretation, the interpreter must have specialized training in interpreting for students who are deaf-blind.

Supplementary aids and supports: These are the services and supports that will be provided to or on behalf of your child to help her/him attain the specified goals, to be involved in and progress in the general curriculum (the curriculum for all children), and to participate in extra-curricular activities. This is where you would include information on specific training for your child's teacher, paraprofessional, or service provider(s). The *projected date for beginning of services; the frequency, duration and location of services; and responsibility for implementation*, should be specified for each service.

Equal program access: Your child has a right to access the same educational and extra-curricular and non-academic services and activities available to children without disabilities, with needed accommodations.

Assessment: The extent of your child's *participation in state and district assessments*, and any *modifications or accommodations*, must be specified. If your child will not be participating, the IEP must describe alternate ways to measure your child's progress in the general curriculum. The IEP must also specify how the school will *determine your child's progress toward the goals in the IEP* at least as often as reports are provided to other parents.

Placement: Your child's placement, which should be in the regular classroom to the maximum extent appropriate, must be specified. Consider the full range of placements as well as the types of supports that might be needed to make less restrictive, more inclusive settings work for your child.

Personnel development: Professional development may be needed to ensure that everyone who works with your child is qualified and can use effective practices that meet your child's needs. This includes how to create an environment where your child feels comfortable and accepted, and where your child's curiosity and problem-solving skills are stimulated.

Special Circumstances:

Under the IDEA, there are special issues that must also be discussed at *every* IEP meeting, and if needs are identified, they must be addressed. Your child with deaf-blindness will likely need services in each of these areas.

Communication: Your child has the right to learn how to communicate with teachers, peers, and you, in their mode of communication.

Literacy: Your child has the right to instruction in how to read. Any decision not to teach your child Braille must be justified in the IEP.

Extended school year (summer) services: Most children with deaf-blindness need year-round services in their IEP to maintain progress toward goals.

Assistive technology: Computers, tape recorders, communication devices, and other devices and services for school and home use must be specified.

Behavior: Functional behavior assessment and a positive behavior support plan may be needed in the IEP if your child has challenging behaviors that interfere with his/her or other students' ability to learn.

Transition to adult life: Transition services should be in the IEP for the school year in which your child turns 16 at the latest, or earlier if appropriate. (Some states still require transition to start at age 14). Services should include teaching your child self-advocacy and independent living skills.

Tips for Parents of Children with Deaf-Blindness: The IEP Meeting

Review your child's school folder and any reports or evaluations prior to the meeting. Make a list of concerns or issues that you feel are important to discuss. Talk to your child's teacher(s), related services providers, communication specialists, and other professionals who work with your child. Discuss any questions or concerns you have *prior* to the meeting so meeting time can be used productively to formally develop the plan. Request that a team member with expertise in deaf-blindness participate.

Remember that you are an expert on your child. Be prepared to share your observations of your child's functioning in all areas, as well as your expectations and vision for his/her future. If your child already has an IEP, familiarize yourself with the current IEP. If your child is not yet receiving services, talk to other parents of children with deaf-blindness. What kinds of services and supports have worked for their children?

Think about whether your child should attend the meeting and discuss this with the teacher and IEP team. (You have the right to involve your child in the meeting at any age. At age 16, your child has the right to participate). If your child will not be attending the meeting, be sure to get their input.

For more information about the IEP process and your rights, contact your state parent center (www.parentcenternetwork.org). For more information about IEP development for children with deaf-blindness, go to www.perkins.org and put "service guidelines" in the search bar. To find your state deaf-blind project, go to the website of the National Consortium on Deaf- Blindness at www.nationaldb.org and click on your state or call 800-438-9376.

*This fact sheet was developed in collaboration with the Statewide Parent Advocacy Network and the Perkins School for the Blind, with help from state deaf-blind projects and parents of children with deaf-blindness.*ⁱⁱ

ⁱ Deafblindness: Educational Service Guidelines, www.perkins.org/resources/educational-publications/deafblindness-educational-service-guidelines/

ⁱⁱ Funding provided by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation