

2013



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2013 Summary of Need for VI Professionals

A comprehensive review of educational professionals who work with students with visual impairments, including a description of selected characteristics, projections of attrition, and future needs.

2013 Executive Summary of Need for VI Professionals in Texas



Since 1996, the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired has conducted an annual survey to assess the characteristics of and need for VI professionals in Texas. “VI professionals” includes teachers certified in visual impairments (TVIs) and certified orientation and mobility specialists (COMS). Individuals with both certifications are referred to as “dually certified.” This summary will provide information about the results of the survey conducted in September 2013.

The most striking findings include:

- After what appeared to be a post-recession recovery in the number of VI professionals, it was surprising to learn that the number decreased this year. In 2013, the **total number** of full- and part-time VI professionals decreased from 940 to 914 individuals or, overall, a 3% decrease since 2012.
 - The number of full- and part-time VI teachers was 697; two people fewer than the 2012 level. This is only a net growth of 6 TVIs since 2010.
 - In 2013, 236 O&M specialists (182.5 full-time equivalents [FTEs]) were identified, or a 7% decrease from 2012.
- Reports of **increased caseloads** continue.
 - Since 2010, regional VI consultants have been asked about perceived changes in caseloads for TVIs and COMS over the region.
 - For the fourth year in a row, VI consultants reported increasing caseloads for both TVIs and COMS. Fourteen of 20 educational service centers (ESCs) reported increased caseloads for both TVIs and COMS. Six regions reported no appreciable change.
- The **rate of attrition** decreased in 2013, but is projected to increase.
 - In 2013, 42 VI professionals left the field in the previous year. This is a decrease from 2012’s 54 VI professionals and still above 2010’s level of attrition.
 - The projected attrition over the next 3 years increased, from 98 to 113, or 12% of all VI professionals.
- The **cultural diversity of VI professionals continues to be a challenge**. While the diversity is similar to other educators in Texas, it is not keeping pace with the student population.
 - The number of Hispanic VI professionals decreased in 2013, from 94 to 81.
 - In 2013, there were 45 African-American VI professionals, an increase from 2012’s 36 VI professionals.
- **Universities** are training as many VI professionals as funds allow. There are a total of future 144 VI professionals in a program leading to certification as either TVIs or COMS.
- The number of visually impaired students increases each year by an average of 2.6%. At this rate, it will be hard to maintain existing levels of services and accommodate growth and attrition.

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Introduction

Since 1996, the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired has conducted an annual survey to assess the need for VI professionals in Texas. “VI professionals” include teachers certified in visual impairments (TVIs) and certified orientation and mobility (O&M) specialists (or COMS). Individuals with both certifications are referred to as “dually certified.” This report provides information about the results of the survey conducted in September 2012.

Data were collected from the 20 regional education service centers (ESCs) and the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI). TSBVI serves as a statewide resource, with a concentration of students and VI professionals. As a result, TSBVI data were collected separately from that of the ESCs. Unless otherwise noted, TSBVI data are included in the data presented in this report. Data from TSBVI include information about TSBVI professionals who provide direct services via the Comprehensive Program and who provide statewide training, short-term services, and leadership via the Short Term Programs and Outreach Programs.

More information about how data were collected is included in the Appendix.

Characteristics of VI Professionals in Texas

The survey asked about the number of people *functioning* as VI professionals. Many professionals may have certification as a teacher certified in visual impairments (TVI or VI teacher) or an orientation and mobility specialist (COMS or O&M specialist). This report summarizes data on those with *a current job assignment* in visual impairments. Some VI professionals hold both TVI and O&M certifications. However, most are not certified in both areas and do not provide both services. Those whose current job assignment includes functioning in both roles are considered dually certified for this report.

Number of VI professionals in Texas

This information has been gathered annually since 1996. Over an 18-year span, the number of VI professionals has increased with only occasional dips. This year, the number of VI professionals in Texas is 914 individuals, or 843.3 full-time equivalents (FTEs), a 2.8% decrease over the previous year.

The unexpected decrease comes after increases in 2011 and 2012. Combined, over the past 2 years, the number of VI professionals has *increased* by 15 individuals, or less than 2%. During the same 2-year period, the *Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments* indicated a 4% increase in the number of students served by VI professionals (TSBVI, 2013).

It should be noted that the 2013 totals are also two individuals less than the pre-recession 2009 totals. While other areas of education have started to recover from recession-era cutbacks, it appears that the VI fields have not made an equivalent comeback.

Below is a graph that displays the changes in VI professionals since 1996.

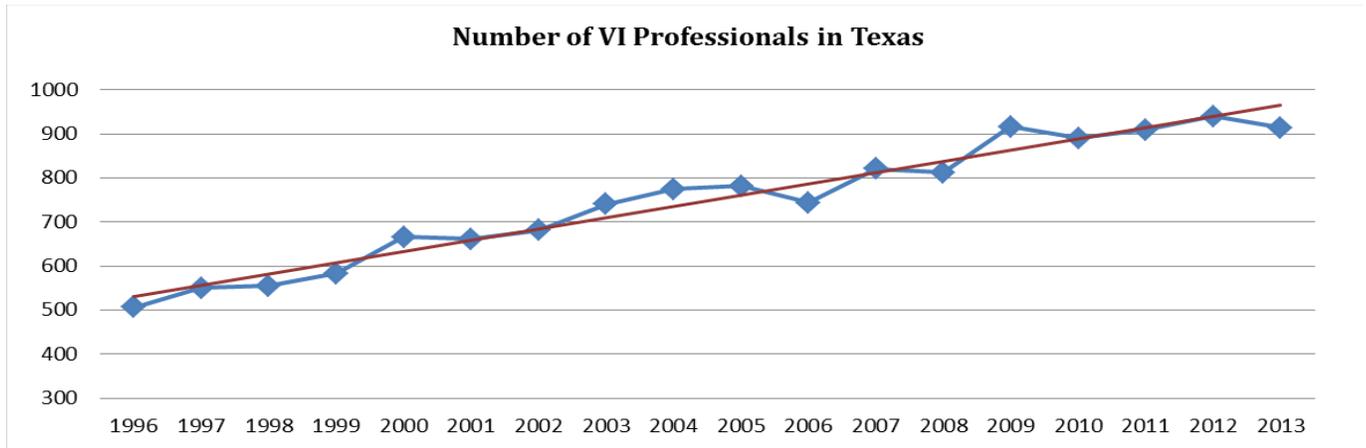


Table 1 that follows provides further details about VI professionals in Texas. The term “individuals” includes both full- and part-time VI professionals. The total number of individuals who are VI professionals decreased by 3%. The FTE data adjusts for the part-time VI professionals, including those who are dually certified. The number of full-time TVIs increased, hence the smaller reduction in the FTEs.

Table 1: Total VI Professionals Statewide

	2011		2012		2013	
	Individuals	FTE ²	Individuals	FTE ²	Individuals	FTE ²
ESC leadership ¹	29	20.4	30	19.7	28	20.7
TSBVI statewide ¹	27	25.5	27	25.5	28	25.6
VI and O&M service providers (adjusted for dually certified professionals)	834	779	883	803.5	858	797
Total VI professionals	890	824.9	940	848.7	914	843.3

¹ TSBVI statewide consulting staff (Outreach and Short-Term Programs) and ESC consulting VI staff provide leadership/technical assistance statewide or within their region. Educators at TSBVI or ESCs who provide direct educational service to students with visual impairments are counted as “VI and O&M direct-service providers.”

² FTE = (part time x .5) + full time for all charts

School districts faced many significant challenges in recent years. Even though official figures are not yet available for the 2012–2013 school year or this current year, many school districts

informally reported an increase in hiring and overall staff in 2013. As a result, it was very unexpected that the number of VI professionals decreased.

Direct-service providers

Below are data about direct-service providers. Direct-service providers include teachers certified in visual impairments (TVIs), certified orientation and mobility specialists (COMS), and dually certified personnel who:

- work with students on a regular basis, and
- are the teacher-of-record for issues related to visual impairments.

This does not include those who provide vision-related leadership, technical assistance, or statewide services at the regional education service centers (ESCs) or the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) through the Short-Term Programs or Outreach Programs. The ESC staff who provide leadership or technical assistance also offer an array of services specifically related to students with visual impairments, but not for individual students. Some have other responsibilities that may include more general tasks related to low-performing schools, state accountability measures, and transition. These responsibilities vary from ESC to ESC.

This survey captures information about the number of individuals working with students with visual impairments in the state of Texas in either a full- or part-time capacity. It does not gather information on the number of districts that employ full- and/or part-time VI professionals. Full- and part-time status is broadly defined. Individuals who work part time but in multiple districts are considered “full-time VI professionals.” As a result, the number of “full-time” VI professionals described may vary from the number of districts or co-ops that employ TVIs on a full-time basis.

For the purposes of this survey, professionals who are certified *and* employed in both visual impairments and orientation and mobility (dually certified) are counted as a part-time teacher in visual impairments (TVI) and a part-time orientation and mobility specialist (COMS). These specialists are embedded in TVI data and the COMS data. Specific information on dually certified VI professionals is listed in Table 4 on page 8. Information about the number of combined direct-service providers has been adjusted for dually certified professionals



In 2009 there were 701 TVI. In 2013 there are 697. In the meantime, 937 more students have been identified. Not surprisingly, caseloads seem to have increased.



Table 2: Direct-Service Providers: Teachers certified in visual impairments (TVI)

	2011		2012		2013	
	Individuals	FTE ¹	Individuals	FTE ¹	Individuals	FTE ¹
Full time TVI	522		524		532	
Part time TVI	171		175		165	
Total VI staff	693	607.5	699	611.5	697	614.5

¹. FTE = part time x .5 + full time for all charts

The total number of *individuals* (full and part time) who work as a TVI has decreased by two individuals since 2012, a less than 1% decrease. Given reports of improved hiring in schools it was expected that the data for VI professionals would follow. The information about the changes in the number of full-time teachers certified in visual impairments (TVIs) and the FTEs is essentially static as well. The number of full-time TVIs increased by a modest 1.5%.

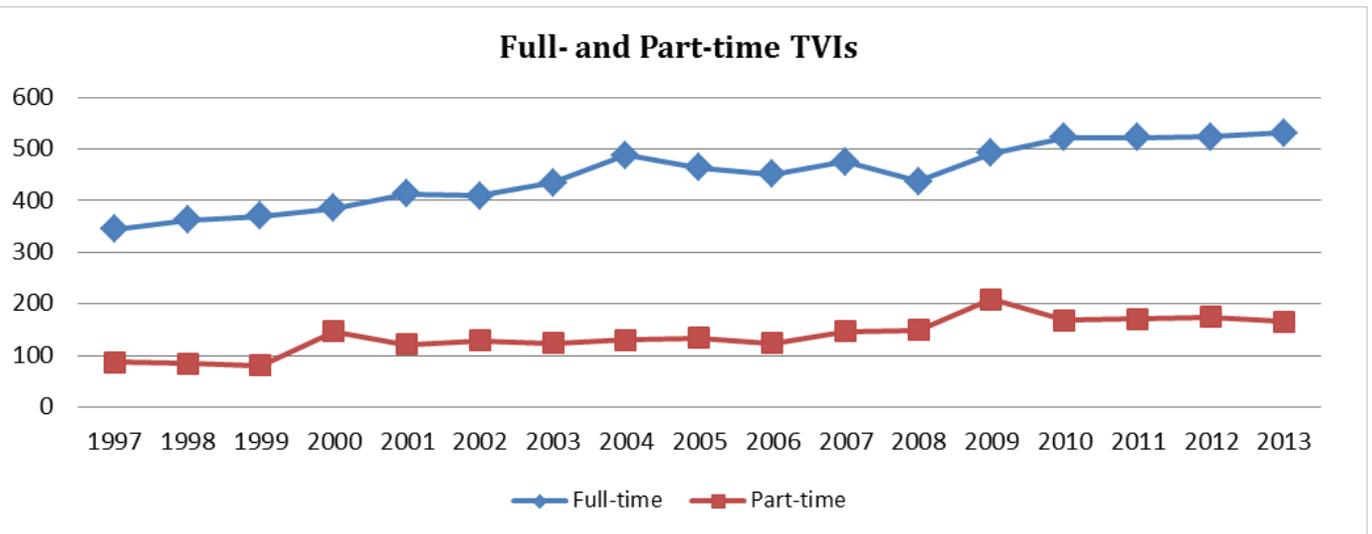


Table 3: Direct-Service Providers: Orientation and mobility specialists (COMS)

	2011		2012		2013	
	Individuals	FTE ¹	Individuals	FTE ¹	Individuals	FTE ¹
Full-time COMS	126		131		130	
Part-time COMS	101		122		106	
Total O&M staff	227	176.5	253	192	236	182.5

¹. FTE = .part-time x .5 + full-time for all charts

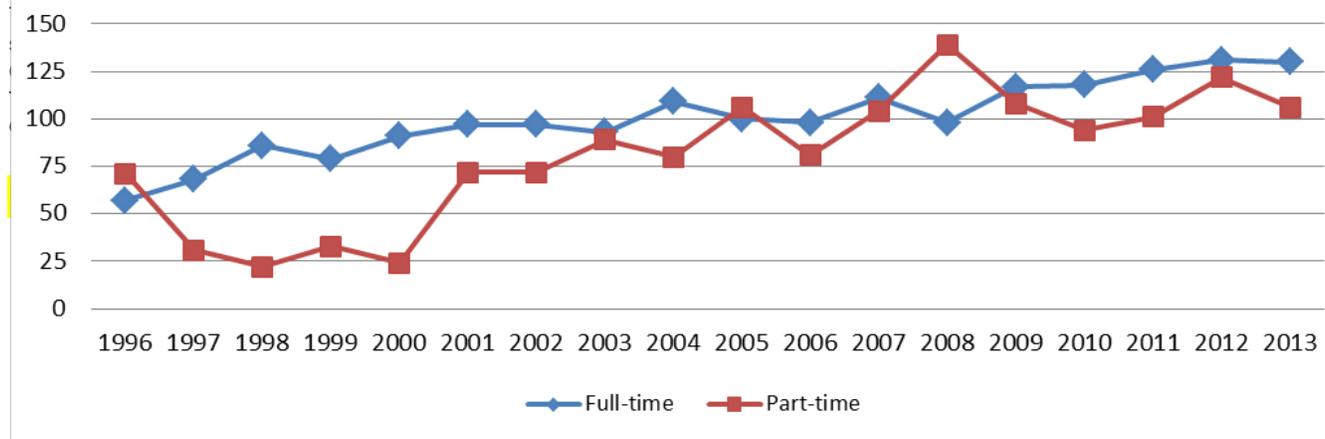
Orientation and mobility specialists (COMS) account for the majority of the decrease seen in 2013. The number of COMS (individuals and FTEs) decreased this year by 7% in 2013, or a 3.5% increase since 2011. The 2013 decrease is of particular concern given the recent

passage of House Bill 59, which requires that all initial evaluations of students with visual impairments include an O&M evaluation by a certified O&M specialist. The evaluation is required to include functional skills in the home, school and community. The reduction in COMS and the increased requirements over the next year may result in limited capacity to meet the needs of students with visual impairments without additional staff.

The total percentage of students receiving O&M evaluations, according to the *Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments* (TSBVI, 2013), has increased by 1% since 2010. In 2010, 53% received an evaluation; in 2013, 54% were evaluated by a COMS. The percentage increased in 2011 and 2012, but fell for 2013. The availability of adequate staff is problematic due to the rate of student population growth and change

The number of orientation and mobility specialists (COMS) has decreased by 17 full-and part-time COMS in the past year. This is a 7% loss.

Full- and Part-time COMS



Dually certified VI professionals

Dually certified VI professionals are those who are certified and function both as an O&M specialist (COMS) and as a VI teacher (TVI). While many professionals may hold both certifications, not all dually certified professionals function in both capacities. This survey gathers data only about those who currently *function* both as a VI teacher and an O&M specialist. This year's data show an increase from last year. Since 2001, the number has fluctuated between 72 and 62, with an average of 67. This is the first year that it has exceeded the historical limit. Changes in dually certified personnel likely reflect a shift in staffing needs within districts.

Table 4: Dually Certified Professionals

	2011	2012	2013
Dually certified	67	69	74

Dually certified professionals are unique and offer districts maximum flexibility. Administrators are able to modify work assignments according to the needs of the district and the needs of students for a particular year. The changes between 2012 and 2013 likely reflect changes in staffing needs statewide.

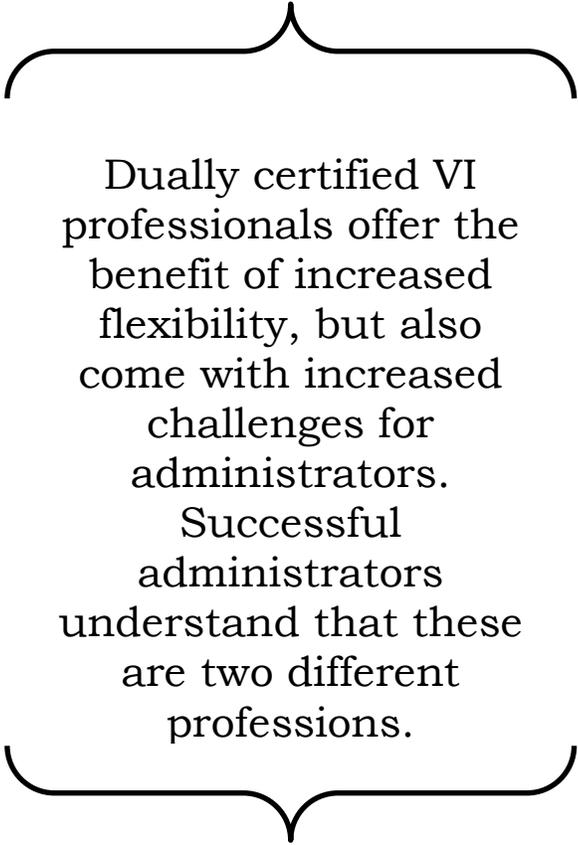
At first glance, hiring dually certified staff may seem highly desirable. However, dually certified professionals face unique challenges and succeed best when administrators have an understanding of both professions. Data show that administrators are highly likely to assign dually certified professionals a full-time VI caseload as well as a significant O&M caseload (Griffin-Shirley, Pogrund, & Grimmert, 2011). Since these are two separate professions, there is evidence that when either professional domain is overloaded, the students' learning will be compromised. Dually certified professionals report frustrations in these situations, sometimes to the point of letting a certification lapse or changing employment (Griffin-Shirley, Pogrund, & Grimmert, 2011).

The role and impact of full- and part-time VI professionals

This survey collects information about the number, characteristics, and need for VI professionals. In short, it gathers information about *individuals*, not the number of districts that employ VI professionals, nor the amount of time districts employ them. Some VI professionals work part time in multiple districts. When the amount of time is totaled, those individuals are employed full time. The reference to "full time" or "part time" refers to the total employment of the VI professional, not to how long a specific district employs a VI professional.

Texas has a long history of using both full- and part-time VI professionals. Part-time VI professionals have advantages:

- They allow districts with a small number of students with visual impairments to meet their local needs.



Dually certified VI professionals offer the benefit of increased flexibility, but also come with increased challenges for administrators. Successful administrators understand that these are two different professions.

- They can increase flexibility in districts that have just a bit more, or a bit less, than a full-time VI professional can reasonably handle and still provide quality services.

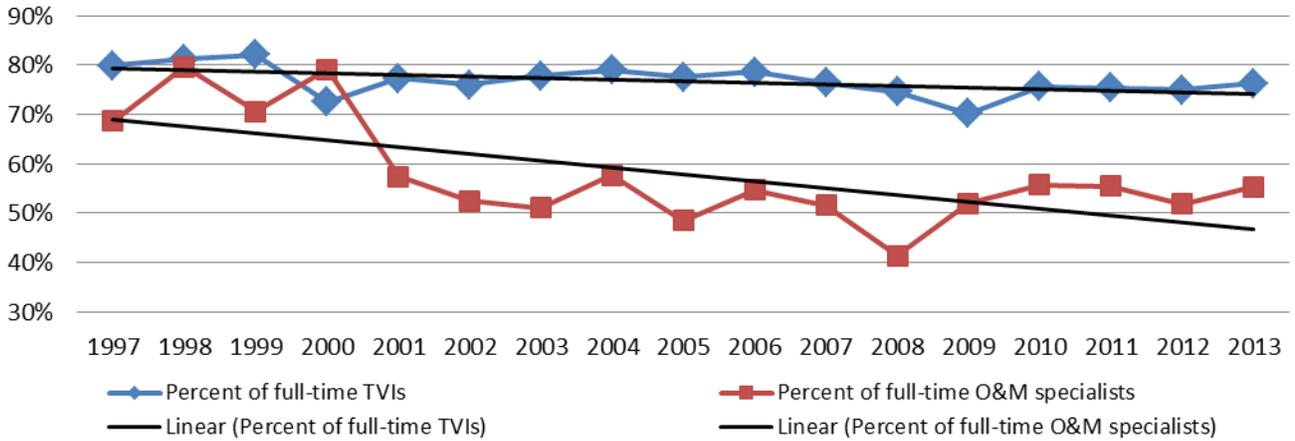
Part-time VI professionals may either be employed by the district on a part-time, contractual basis, or have duties unrelated to visual impairments as a portion of their job responsibilities.

Disadvantages include various challenges to meeting the needs of the students, such as:

- Due to other commitments and/or responsibilities, part-time staff members are at risk for not being able to provide the full caseload management necessary for even small caseloads.
- Those who provide generic special education in a classroom setting plus VI services in that classroom face special challenges. New legislation (Senate Bill 39) clarifies the requirement that VI professionals address the expanded core curriculum (ECC). It is especially difficult to meet the functional and academic needs of students with visual impairments while working with one or two students in a classroom setting along with an array of other students, most of whom require tutoring. VI professionals should not be made responsible for tutoring.
- Students with visual impairments require specialized instruction in skills necessary to access the general or core curriculum and [expanded core curriculum \(ECC\)](#). Those areas have now been legally defined in SB 39. The expanded core curriculum consists of the nine vision-specific educational domains for students with visual impairments. Functional instruction in the ECC may require VI professionals to travel beyond the campus or a designated classroom. This may be a challenge for part-time TVIs who are responsible for VI students at the same time as students with more generic disabilities. (<http://www.eccadvocacy.org/section.aspx?FolderID=13>).
- Dually certified VI professionals are included in each of the disciplines. While these VI professionals may be employed full time in a district, they must split their time and expertise between two different, although related, professions. It takes a skillful and knowledgeable administrator to understand the challenges faced by these professionals and ensure that neither area is slighted.

It is hard to know whether part-time VI professionals offer districts increased flexibility or decreased access to expanded core curriculum, the curriculum unique to students with visual impairments.

Percentage of Full-time VI Professionals

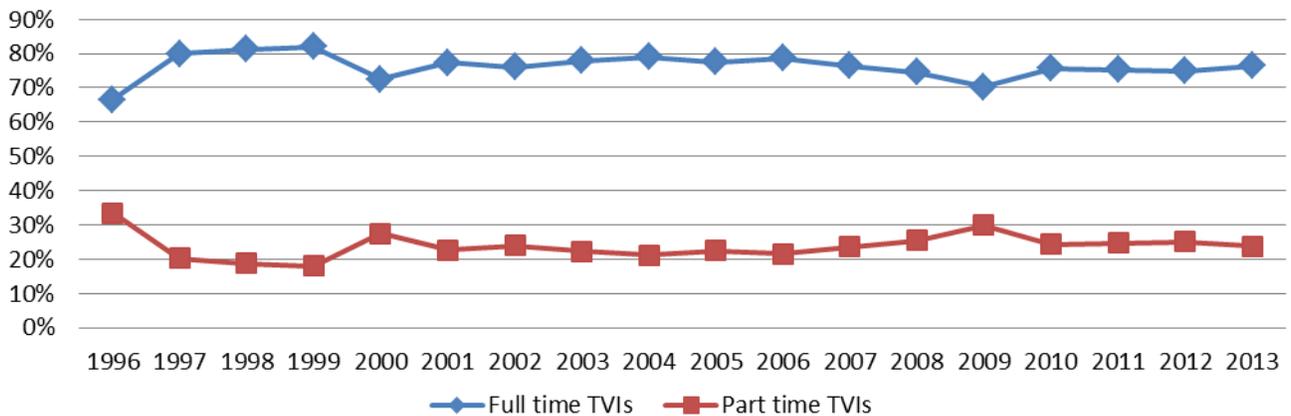


Teachers certified in visual impairments (TVIs)

Statistically, the prevalence of a full-time teachers certified in visual impairments has been inching downwards since 1999. 2013 saw a 1% increase in the number of full-time TVIs. Currently, 76% of TVIs are full time. The percentage has been fairly stable since 2010, but is declining over time. In 1999, 82% were full time. While the total number of TVIs did not increase in 2013, the number who work full time as a TVI increased by 11 individuals.

It is hard to know if this increase will develop into a trend, and if so, if it will be reflecting more diverse and flexible local needs, or perhaps increased availability and instruction in the ECC. Another factor could be changes in local fiscal resources, even if statewide, the number of TVIs didn't change.

Percentage of Full- and Part-time TVIs



Orientation and mobility specialists (COMS)

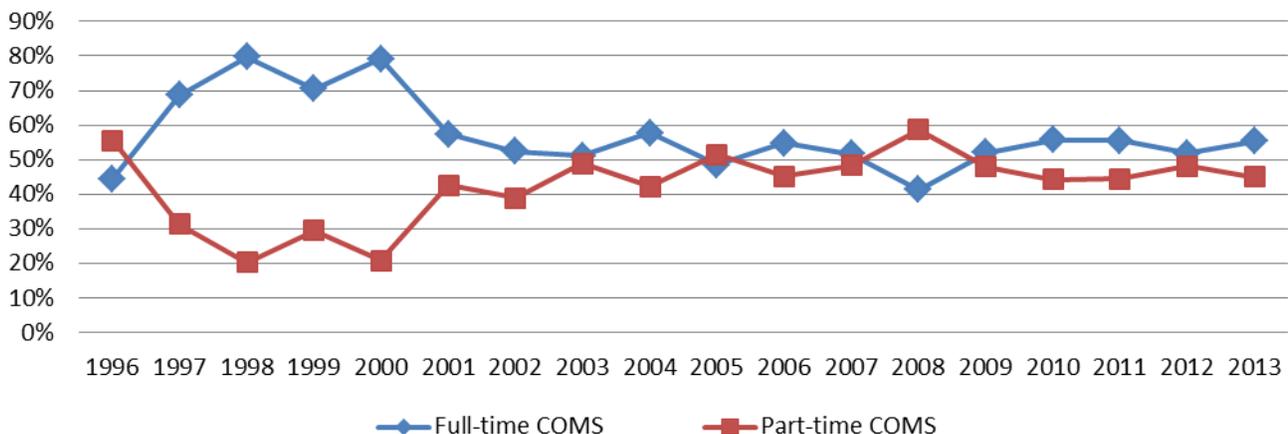
The scenario is quite different for O&M services. Overall, the number of O&M specialists decreased by 7% in 2013. However, the percentage of full-time O&M specialists increased in the past year (up from 52% to 55%) to be more consistent with the 2010–2011 levels.

Many of those considered to be full time are fully employed, but contracting with various districts and not full time within a single district. The need for a full-time O&M specialist may not exist within that district. As a result, “full time” does not necessarily mean that the O&M specialists are employed by a single district or ESC.

Over the years, the percentage of full-time COMS has varied from a high of 80% (1998) to a low of 41% (2008). Currently, it is at 55%. It is strongly hoped that the percentage of full- and part-time COMS will continue to increase so that students statewide can receive adequate access to orientation and mobility services.

The number of *full time* orientation and mobility specialists (COMS) increased in 2013. This is good news given the likely impact of HB 590, which requires all new students to be evaluated by a COMS.

Percentage of Full- and Part-time COMS



It is difficult to project the implications of changes in the full- and part-time ratios. A statistical trend line indicates that overall, the prevalence of full-time VI professionals is decreasing slightly for teachers certified in visual impairments (TVIs) and significantly for O&M specialists. Does this indicate an increase in flexibility and local services, or restrictions in the variety of educational experiences available to students with visual impairments? In the meantime, the

number of students with visual impairments and students needing O&M services is increasing. VI professionals whose time is split with other responsibilities and/or responding to different employers may be challenged when it comes to adequately meeting the VI-specific needs of their students. These elements will be watched more closely in the future to determine if a trend exists and the possible implications of such a trend.

Direct services provided by ESCs

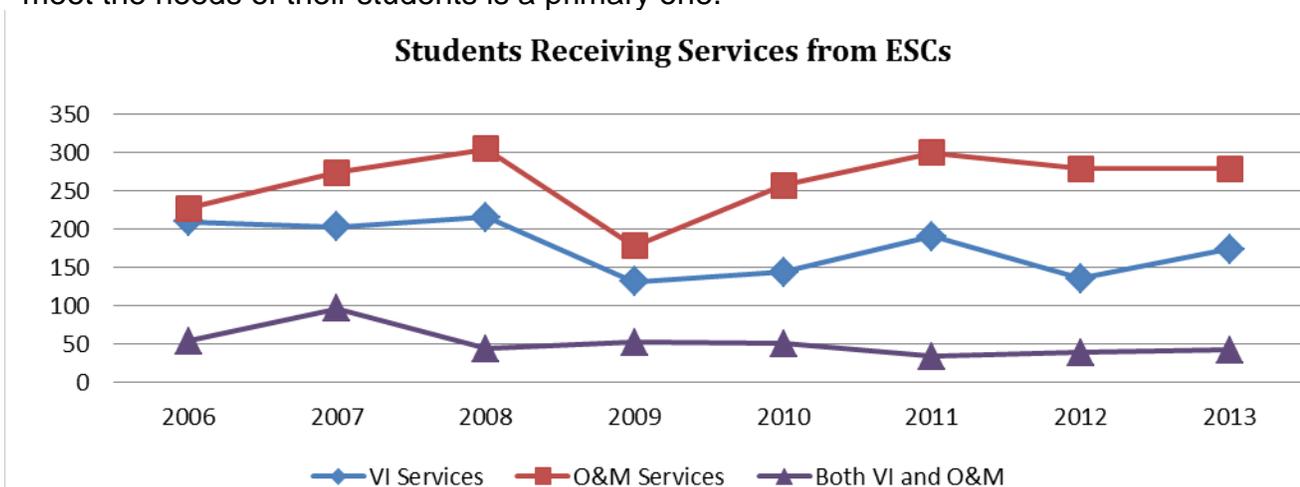
Each regional educational service center (ESC) provides an array of services to districts. Some ESC services include direct services to students with visual impairments. In these regions, the ESC staff members are listed on the IEP. Nine regions provide no direct services. Of the 11 regions that provide *any type* of direct services, three provide VI services to 173 students, 11 provide O&M services to 280 students, and an additional 42 students get both. Six ESCs provide at least 50% of the O&M services delivered in that region.

Table 5: Students Receiving Services from ESCs

	2011	2012	2013
VI-only services (3 regions)	190	135	173
O&M-only services (11 regions)	299	278	280
Both VI and O&M services (3 regions)	34	39	42
Total	523	452	495

The bulk of the 10% increase was from a single region. That region significantly increased the number of students who receive VI services from the ESC and not the district.

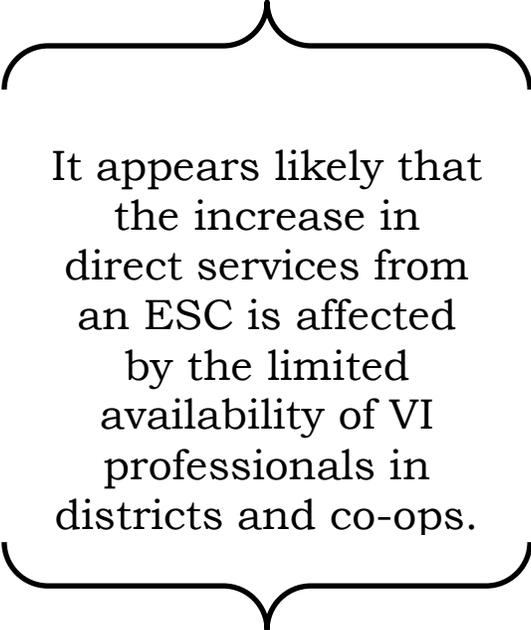
The need for services from an ESC depends on many factors, including population size, region/district agreements, regional service delivery options, and fiscal constraints. While many factors can affect the number of students served by ESCs and not districts, a district's ability to meet the needs of their students is a primary one.



The primary goal is that the students get all the instruction they need to become independent, functional adults. This requires coordinated services by a broad array of educators and from a broad array of service providers, not just VI professionals. The ESCs, whether providing leadership and technical assistance or direct services, are a part of the continuum of services.

Statewide data on the number of students who receive O&M services have been collected since 2001. Since that time, the number of students has increased by 91%, from 1,684 to 3,224. The number of students who receive O&M services from an ESC has increased from 266 to 322. Statewide, districts are expanding their ability to serve students locally, while still relying on ESCs when that service delivery system works best for that district. It seems likely that there is a relationship in the number of COMS available to districts and increases or decreases in services from the ESC.

Eleven regions provide O&M services, the most common direct service provided. These regions include Regions 1, 2, 5, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19. Seven regional O&M specialists have caseloads of 20 or more students. Four regions report caseloads of more than 24 students per O&M specialist scattered around the area. While a caseload of 20 students in an urban or suburban setting may be feasible, if not ideal, a caseload of 20 or more in a region that is larger than many states is alarming. It is a challenge to provide an appropriate level of service to that many students in large geographical areas and to provide training in home, school, and community settings as the law requires.



It appears likely that the increase in direct services from an ESC is affected by the limited availability of VI professionals in districts and co-ops.

In addition to providing direct services, ESCs also are a *major* part of the state's infrastructure that ensures access to high quality VI services. Regional specialists in visual impairments are critical players in the provision of technical assistance, leadership, workshops, and materials for VI professionals, families, and students. The region may also assist in braille production and act as a crucial source of leadership, technical assistance for VI professionals, and information on VI-related issues for special education administrators in the region. A significant portion of Texas' reputation for leadership in visual impairments is due to the high level of skills and services provided by its VI specialists in regional service centers.

Overall perceptions of caseloads

This survey also asked about perceptions of overall changes in caseloads. The changes in overall caseloads are in the table below. The survey did not ask about specific districts or how

many districts in a region experienced a change. The VI consultants were asked to use their professional expertise in their estimate.

Table 6: Regional Overall Changes in Caseloads

	TVIs	COMS
Increases	14	14
Decreases	0	0
No significant change	6	6

A similar question has been asked in the three previous annual surveys. Each time, the overall impression in most ESCs was that caseloads had increased in the previous year for both O&M specialists and TVIs. In 2009, Texas had 861 VI professionals who provided direct services. In 2013, there were 858 direct service providers, a reduction of three VI professionals. In that same time, an additional 937 students with visual impairments have been identified. It is possible that the increased caseloads reported since 2009 have become “normalized”. The concern is that VI professionals have become so overwhelmed with large caseloads that they no longer feel able to advocate for the needs of students.

Ethnic diversity

Texas is a diverse state and requires a diverse workforce. This survey asks about African-American, Hispanic, and Asian VI professionals. It also queries the number of Spanish-speaking VI professionals. The results from the survey follow.

Table 7: Culturally Diverse VI Professionals

Hispanic VI Professionals

2011 2012 2013

TVIs	61	75	68
COMS	11	13	7
Dually certified	5	6	6
Total	77	94	81

Spanish-Speaking VI Professionals

2011 2012 2013

TVIs	92	81	76
COMS	11	16	10
Dually certified	5	6	4
Total	108	103	90

African-American VI Professionals

2011 2012 2013

TVIs	24	20	25
COMS	14	16	19
Dually certified	0	0	1
Total	38	36	45

Asian VI Professionals

2011 2012 2013

TVIs	7	9	5
COMS	1	2	2
Dually certified	0	0	0
Total	8	11	7

This was a year with varied results in assessing diversity of VI professionals in Texas. Overall, the level of diversity seemed to decrease. Looking at specific categories, the only increase seen was in all areas of the African-American category. All other categories showed decreases.

In September 2013, there were 25 teachers certified in visual impairments (TVIs), 19 O&M specialists, and one dually certified VI professional who are African American. Overall, this is a 25% increase. The Hispanic VI professionals included 68 TVIs, seven O&M specialists, and six dually certified professionals, for an overall decrease of 14% in a single year. Seventy-six TVIs, 10 O&M specialists, and four dually certified professionals speak Spanish. This is a 13% decrease from last year. As of 2013, there were five TVIs and four O&M specialists who are Asian. This is a 36% reduction from 2012. However the numbers are so small in this category that even a minor change can be misleading in the amount and severity of the decline.

Recruiting and retaining ethnically and culturally diverse educators remains a serious issue in Texas and around the country.

Attrition

The number of VI professionals decreased this year. Issues related to the economy and other factors discussed below may help account for the gap between growth of the student numbers and the number of VI professionals to serve them.

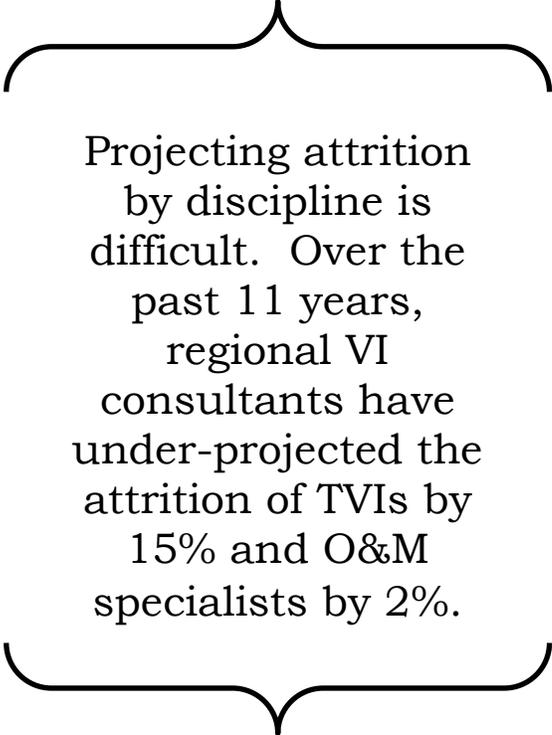
Attrition factors

Much has been written about the increasing rate of educators leaving the field (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). VI professionals are rare and difficult to find. Therefore, retention is of critical concern. Unlike other disciplines, even other high-need areas like math, when a VI

Attrition decreased in 2013, but the question remains: Have we seen attrition for VI professionals peak, or will it plateau for the next few years?

professional is unavailable, typically there is no one else in the district with the specific expertise needed to assess and meet the unique educational needs of students with visual impairments. As a result, students' functional and academic progress may suffer when there is substandard access to critical services from a highly qualified professional.

Several factors affect recruiting and attrition in the VI fields (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Below are factors that affect recruitment and retention of VI professionals. Most VI professionals are mid-career professionals with an average of 7 years of professional experience in other careers and are likely to have shorter careers in this second field.



Projecting attrition by discipline is difficult. Over the past 11 years, regional VI consultants have under-projected the attrition of TVIs by 15% and O&M specialists by 2%.

- Most educators and other likely candidates are unaware that the field exists. Students with visual impairments are a low prevalence and extremely diverse population. Therefore, special recruitment challenges exist. People must be aware of the field and its possibilities before they can become a VI professional.
- It is not uncommon for mid-career professionals to need 2 years before they decide to initiate VI training, and then another 1 to 2 years to be trained. Making such a change mid-career is a big decision, especially given the time and expense they must invest and the likelihood that there will be no increase in salary.
- Distance-education options are making it easier to access training for mid-career professionals who may not be able to leave their home and jobs for training.
- Because VI professionals are so critical to student learning, a change of even one person, in any single district, can have dramatic effects on the annual yearly progress of students.
- Changes in the number of those who *function* as dually certified may or may not reflect attrition of dually certified professionals. Rather, it may reflect a change in how the VI professional functions this year.
- Economic factors drive attrition and hiring. Many districts have had to look at serious cost-cutting factors including reducing their workforce.

- According to the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), 33% of eligible retirees are delaying retirements. There are many (published and unpublished) reports of educators delaying retirement for 2 to 4 years (Fleck, 2011). Additionally, people above the age of 60 are among the fastest growing segment of the labor force (Fleck, 2012).
- As a profession, education is an aging field. A recent study by Ingersoll and Merrill (2010) indicated that in the late 1980s, the age of teachers was in a typical distribution pattern with the peak at 41 years old. The most recent review of that same data showed that the peak is now 55 years old, and that the distribution is no longer in the typical bell pattern; it is flatter.
- In addition to age and economic factors, attrition is affected by factors commonly cited as important for retention. For VI professionals, among the most important retention factors are administrative support and caseload size. As reported previously, there has been a trend for the past 4 years indicating that:
 - caseloads are increasing, and
 - the need for additional VI professionals is clear.

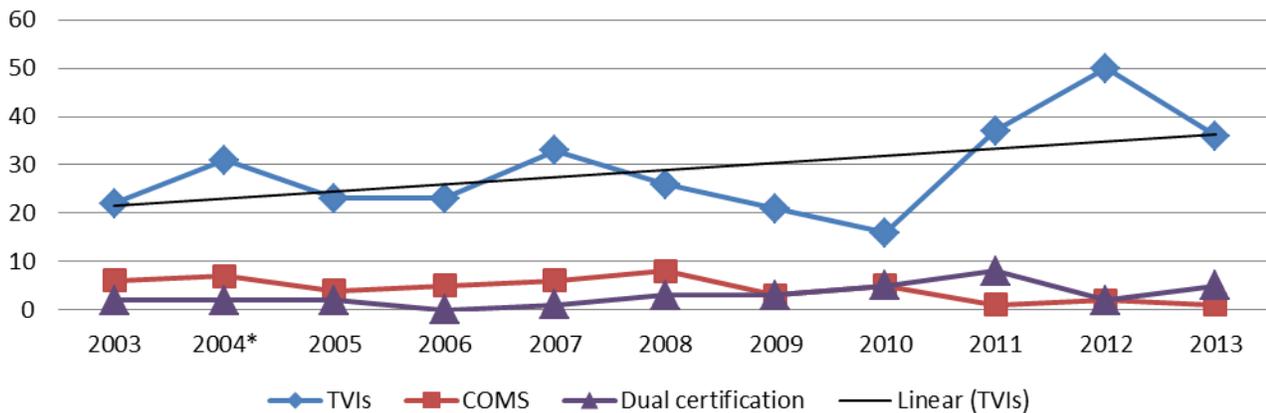
The question remains, will these caseload increases cause people to retire or leave the field in frustration? As the economy recovers, people may feel more able to retire; delayed retirements may also be realized. Additional programmatic cuts may be the factor that tips the scales for VI professionals.

When one reflects on all the factors affecting retention, it is important to consider and analyze the existing and projected attrition rates when considering personnel needs for the future. Typically it takes at least 2 years to recruit and train a teacher certified in visual impairments and a bit longer for O&M specialists. (Certification in visual impairments has an emergency permit option, O&M certification does not.) Significant under-projections of 3-year attrition can affect longer-term planning for VI professionals and discounts the time needed for recruitment and training.

Table 8: Actual Attrition within the Past Year (1-Year attrition)

	2013	2012	2013
TVIs	37	50	36
COMS	1	2	1
Dually certified	8	2	5
Total	46	54	42

Attrition within Past Year by Job Assignment



After 3 years of reductions in attrition, the number of VI professionals who left the field increased markedly between 2010 and 2012. For 2013, the attrition declined. It is hard to know if this decline affirms that the rate of retirement for educators has peaked or not. Informal conversation with HR specialists from all over the state indicates that they expect retirements to peak in 2014 or 2015.

The information on attrition from the past few years raises questions:

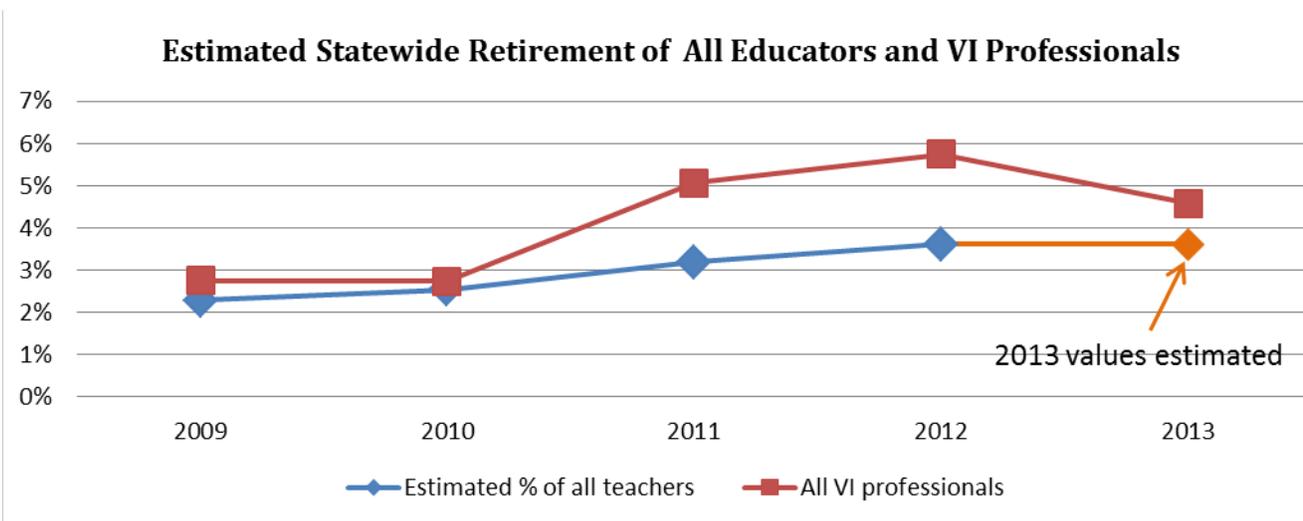
- Will districts be able to adequately meet the needs of their students with visual impairments in the next 2 to 4 years, especially given the passage of SB 39 and HB 590?
- Will the level of attrition witnessed between 2010 and 2012 (an average of 42 individuals) decline to the pre-recession averages of 31 per year?

The other question is how does the attrition for this very small group of professionals compare with other Texas educators? As it turns out this is a very difficult question to answer. The Texas Retirement System (TRS) does not collect data on the number of educators who retire, only the number of TRS *enrollees* who retire. This includes various support staff, such as bus drivers and cafeteria workers. It *could* also include up to 20% of employees at institutes of higher education (IHEs). Nevertheless, comparative information could be valuable for planning.

Attrition for TVIs and O&M specialists declined in 2013, but is still well above 2010 levels. Experts are expecting an increase in retirements as the economy recovers. Unless we are prepared, this could leave many districts and students with unmet needs in 3–5 years.

Seeking that data, information was received from TRS about the levels of retirements in the previous 4 years; between 2009 and 2012. Additionally, official data from 2013 that is not yet finalized but appeared valid was also included (personal conversation, Josh Sanderson, Governmental Liaison, Teachers Retirement System). The TRS information was compared with the information from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) about the percentage of school employees who are educators. That percentage was used to determine the *estimated* number of educators who retired in the target year. So while the results can only be considered tentative (and is likely inflated by staff from IHEs), it is the only source for statewide information.

As the table below indicates, the rate of attrition for VI professional exceeds that of educators in general. VI professionals are mature educators before they start training. Very little, if any, of the attrition is due to job dissatisfaction. People may change positions, but they don't leave the field. The vast majority of attrition is due to retirement, with the rare situation of a family needing to relocate outside of Texas.



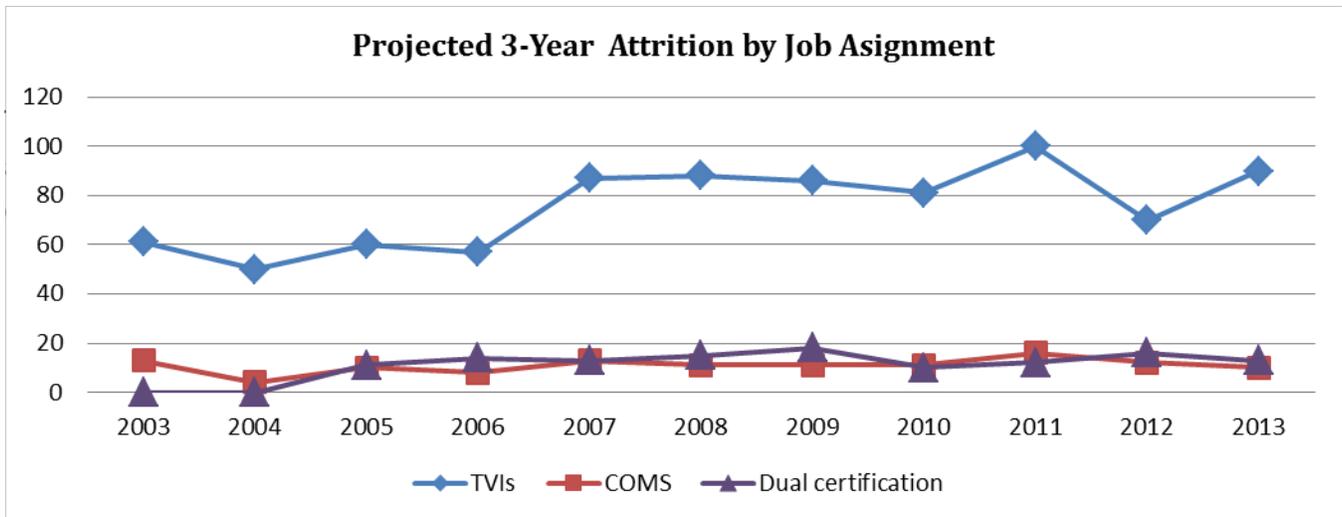
Projected 3-year attrition

The VI consultants at the ESCs are the best and *only* source for this information. However, historically (since 2000) expertise-based projections are well below actual attrition by a significant margin, particularly for TVIs (15% for TVIs, 2% for O&M specialists). In general, VI consultants must rely on others for the information. Some people may be reluctant to share their plans or their plans may change in the interim period. Nonetheless, this is the best source for information on attrition for VI professionals.

The data specifically address those who will leave the field, not move from school-employment to private contractual work, change districts, or retire and re-hire in the same or a different district.

Table 9: Projected 3-Year Attrition by Job Assignment

Projections made in:	2011	2012	2013
TVIs	100	70	90
COMS	16	12	10
Dually certified	12	16	13
Total	128	98	113



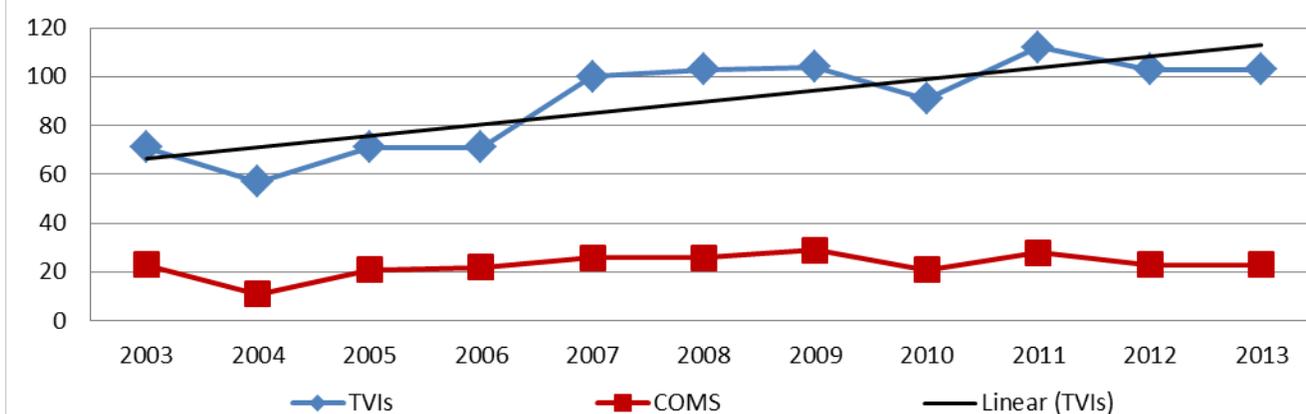
In 2013, the VI consultants at the ESCs projected that 113 VI professionals will leave the field within the next 3 years. This is a 27% increase from 2012. Historically, the projections are more conservative, with more people leaving than projected. Yet, if proven accurate, at least 12% of *existing* VI professionals are projected to retire or otherwise leave the field by 2016.

Considering projected attrition by job assignment (as above) helps to prepare for the type of hiring that may be necessary. Reflecting on the projected attrition by area of expertise helps to prepare for the type of training that may be needed. Projections based on expertise describes future training needs and appears to be more accurate. Below is the projected need based on expertise. In these data, since dually certified professionals have both certifications, they are reflected in both groups below.

Table 10: Projected 3-Year Attrition by Expertise

Projections made in:	2011	2012	2013
TVIs	112	86	103
COMS	28	28	23

Projected Attrition by Professional Discipline



The historical trends show that actual attrition usually surpasses projected attrition. It is possible that the ESC projection is overly optimistic and that many more VI professionals will leave the field within the next 3 years.

Projected vs. actual attrition

Since the start of the economic downturn in 2008, the number of eligible retirees who delayed retirement due to economic reasons increased (Pew Research Center, 2010). Data from a 2011 survey by the Pew Charitable Trust indicated that 33% plan to delay retirement for economic reasons (Fleck, 2011). The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) states one third of eligible retirees are delaying retirement (Rix, 2011). An annual study by the Insured Retirement Institute also found that Americans are delaying retirement and have limited confidence in their financial security over the next 5 years and are delaying retirement as a result (Insured Retirement Institute, 2012).

Attrition dipped in 2009 and 2010 as people delayed their retirement. However, it appears that VI professionals now feel confident enough to retire as the attrition significantly increased between 2010 and 2012.

The most recent 3-year time frame is 2011 to 2013. In 2011, it was projected that 128 people would leave the field by 2013. The actual loss between 2011 and 2013 indicated that 143 VI

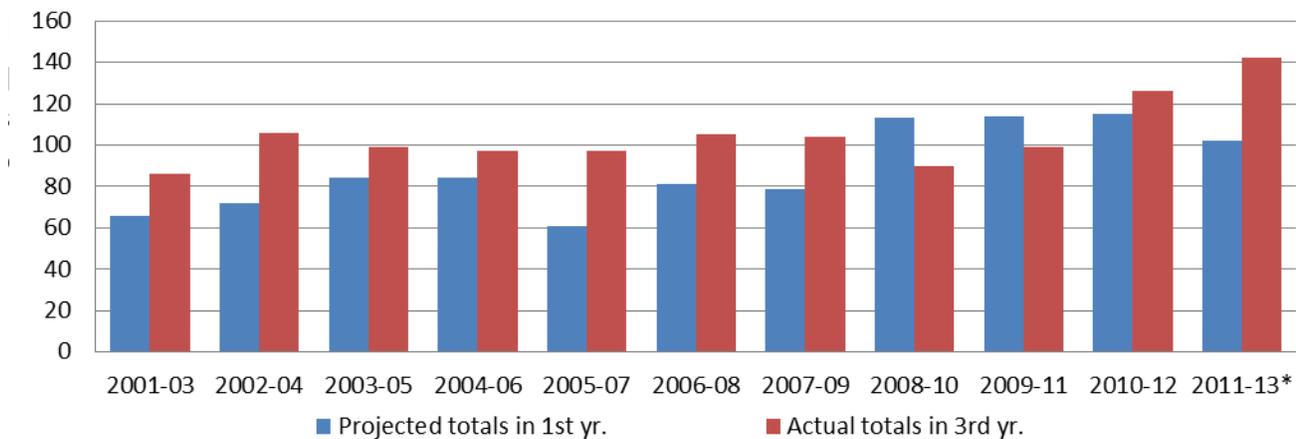
VI professionals have an average of 7 years of experience prior to becoming certified. As a result, they are mid-career professionals on their first day. Therefore, they are closer to retirement when they start as VI professionals.

professionals left the field. This is 11% above the projection.

During the 2008-2010 and 2009-2011 cycles the actual attrition was less than the projections. This was reversed in the cycle ending in 2012. Between 2010 and 2012 the number of retiring VI professionals rose above the projections. In 2013, the gap continued to increase.

The questions remain: Has the growth in retirements for VI professionals peaked? Or will it continue for up to 2 years? Do districts realize that it may take additional time to recruit (and train) new VI professionals?

Projected versus Actual Attrition



* 2011–2013 is the last year for which a complete set of data is available.

In summary, VI professionals at the ESCs are the best and only source for statewide information on attrition, and the best source to make projections for VI professions who are likely to leave the field over the next 3 years. Even so, it remains a challenging task. During the economic downturn, the projections exceeded the actual attrition. However, this trend has been reversed. Projected versus actual attrition data have been available since 2000. In only 2 of those years (during the recession of 2009 and 2010) was the actual attrition less than was projected.

Impact of Student Growth and Attrition on Anticipated Need

An analysis of the need for VI professionals would be incomplete without information on the critical factors which contribute to need: the increasing number of students and the attrition of existing VI professionals. Student growth and attrition are inextricably connected and should be examined prior to analyzing anticipated need for VI professionals.

Growth, attrition and teachers certified in visual impairments (TVI)

Data collected since 2000 project that the student population will increase by 2.6% per year over the next 3 years, or an additional 718 more students will be identified, for a total of 9,850 by 2016. Statewide, the average student-to-teacher ratio is 15 students per TVI full-time equivalent (FTE) position. If this ratio is applied to the number of expected new students, it is projected that Texas will need 48 FTEs to accommodate student growth. However, given that 76% of TVIs are full time, it will take more individuals to meet the goal of 48 FTEs to meet growth demand. If the current ratio of full- to part-time teachers continues, the number of TVIs needed to total 48 FTEs will be closer to 60 individuals.

In addition to serving the expected growth, Texas will need to replace TVIs who leave the field, mostly for retirement. It is projected that 103 individuals with VI certificates (TVIs and dually certified professionals) will leave the field by 2016. As documented previously, this is likely a low projection, as historically the 3-year attrition ratios for those with VI certification (TVI and dually certified) exceed projections by 15%. The attrition could be closer to 118 full- and part-time individuals certified in visual impairments.

Combining projected growth and attrition, Texas will need between 151 and 178 individuals with certification in visual impairments in the next 3 years to replace those who are likely to leave and respond to anticipated growth.

An average of 42 individuals complete their VI program each year. Assuming this rate continues, 126 people will complete their certification program over the next 3 years. It is expected that 141 to 178 teachers will be needed over the next 3 years. However, approximately 52% of VI candidates get an emergency permit or probationary certificate and are already employed in the TVI role. These TVI are counted as existing VI professionals. Therefore they don't contribute to closing the need gap. This indicates a considerable shortfall, especially after this year's unexpected decreases. Texas demonstrates a continued need for teachers certified in visual impairments.



Growth = 60 new TVIs
+
Attrition = 118 to be replaced

Total needed = 178 TVIs

An average of 47 TVIs receive a probationary certificate or emergency permit. Those TVIs do not contribute to closing the “gap.”



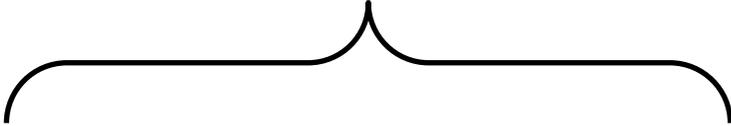
Growth, attrition and orientation and mobility specialists (COMS)

Information about the number of students who receive O&M services has been collected since 2001. Information about the number of students who have had an O&M evaluation has been available since 2006. Since 2001, the percentage of the total number of students who receive O&M services has grown by an average 0.8% per year.

The 2013 *Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments* indicated that the percentage of students who were either evaluated or were receiving O&M services decreased slightly for the first time since the data have been collected (TSBVI, 2013). In January 2010 and 2013, 34% of all students were receiving O&M services. The intervening years only saw a .5% increase. Overall, the pattern of growth exhibited since 2001 seems to have stalled since 2010. With the recovery from the recession it was expected that these numbers would also improve; that a sufficient number of people would have completed their O&M programs; that districts would hire them and that this year's data would continue last year's growth.

Using the data from the past 10 years to predict the upcoming changes, it is projected that by 2016, 9,850 students will be identified as visually impaired. It is also projected that by 2016, 3,596 students will be receiving O&M services, or 508 new students.

Data collected since 2000 shows that number of students with visual impairments increases at an average rate of 2.6% while the increase in the number of students who receive evaluations or services increases by a smaller rate. The result is a gap in the growth rate, which compounds every year. The chart below illustrates how the percentage of students getting services is not keeping up with student growth. It is impossible to know what impact HB 590 will have on future services. Final administrative rules have yet to be released. If no change happens, it is projected that 3,596 students will be receiving O&M services by 2016. This is an



Growth = 52 new COMS

+

Attrition = 28 to be replaced

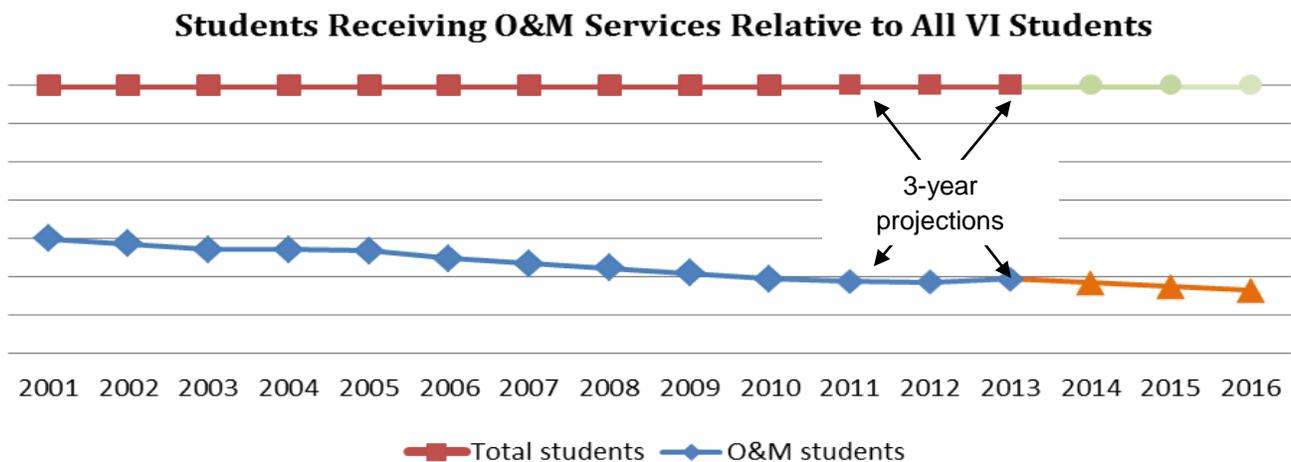
Total needed = 80 O&M specialists

An average of 21 students complete their program each year. It is important to maintain efforts to keep an adequate number in training for future needs.



increase of 508 students. It is unknown how many of the projected 9,850 students with visual impairments may actually need O&M services, since the level of evaluation has not kept pace with the student population increase.

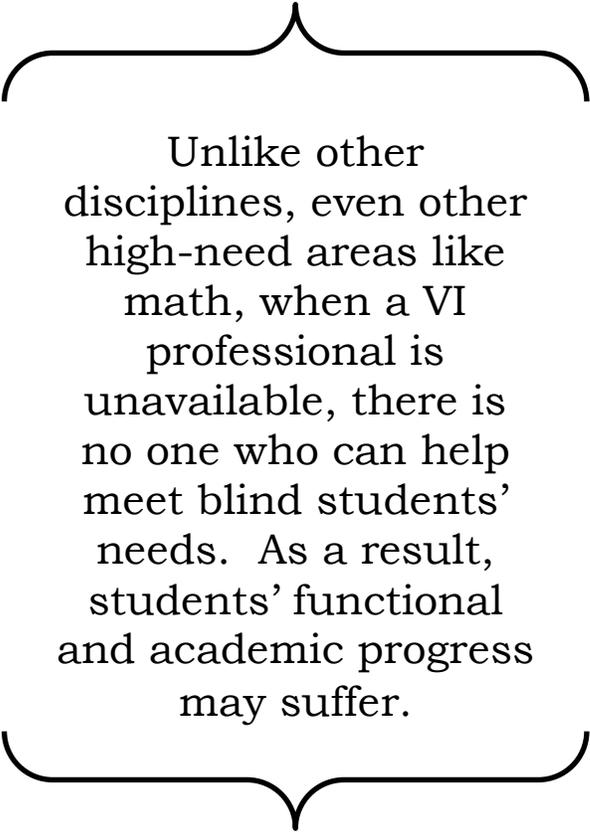
In the chart, the increasing number of students with visual impairments is kept as a constant. The number of students who are receiving services is shown relative to the entire population of students with visual impairments. Included in the chart below are projections based on historical data (the green circles and orange triangle). It is clear that the gap is increasing. Hopefully, over time the impact of HB 590 will decrease this gap. This new law may help to mitigate informal reports from recent newly qualified O&M specialists that many have trouble finding jobs working in education. As a result, they have to look to adult rehabilitation agencies for work.



Statewide, the average student-to-COMS caseload is 14 students per FTE. Using this as a means to predict need, Texas will need an additional 36 full-time equivalent (FTE) orientation and mobility specialists (COMS) to meet expected student growth.

In Texas, full-time equivalent positions can be quite different from the number of individuals needed to equal the FTEs, especially with O&M specialists. In 2013, 55% of COMS were employed full time. These O&M specialists work full time in a single district or contract with several districts. If the current ratio of full- to part-time individuals is applied, the number of O&M specialists needed to result in 36 FTEs is likely to be closer to 52 individuals.

Regional VI consultants project that 28 people with O&M expertise (O&M specialists and dually certified professionals) will be leaving the field by 2016. Projecting attrition for those with O&M expertise seems to be particularly challenging. (The error ranges from *under* projecting by 32% to *over* projecting by 82%.) Even less reliable are those with only O&M certifications, which have been significantly under projected. Those who are dually certified have been over projected. When both job assignments are combined to reflect professional expertise, it is likely that the projections will fall short by 2%. If the expected student growth is combined with the 3-year adjusted projected attrition and based on statewide average student-to-teacher ratios, it is likely Texas will need between 64 and 80 additional full- and part-time O&M specialists over the next 3 years.



Unlike other disciplines, even other high-need areas like math, when a VI professional is unavailable, there is no one who can help meet blind students' needs. As a result, students' functional and academic progress may suffer.

In October 2013, there were 50 undergraduate and graduate students seeking O&M certification. Thirty-nine were new students and will likely take 2 years to complete. On average, 21 students complete their program each year. Candidates must complete their entire program before they can start working as an O&M. O&M certification is a national certification and valid in any state. It is also applicable for all age groups, not just for school-age students. Unless school districts are able to hire an adequate amount of O&M specialists, many new O&M specialists will take positions in adult agencies, not schools. It is hoped that over the next 3 years, all new O&M specialists will find educational jobs and be able to help fill the expected gap.

Anticipated Need

A basic principle in assessing need is to realize that most VI professionals are not classroom teachers; they are primarily itinerant specialists in visual impairments who work in a variety of schools, community settings, and homes. In addition to direct services, they also provide critical consultations on the functional impact of a specific visual impairment on a student in specific settings and ensure that appropriately modified materials are available. Additionally, they must travel to the student and provide instruction in the home, school, and community environments, not in a single classroom. Understanding the difference between classroom

teachers and VI professionals is crucial when assessing the current and future need for specialists in visual impairments (Correa-Torres & Johnson Howell, 2004).

Interpreting and understanding the need for educational professionals traditionally relies on several factors, including the number of posted positions and recommendations from knowledgeable professionals. Below are data from each of these areas.

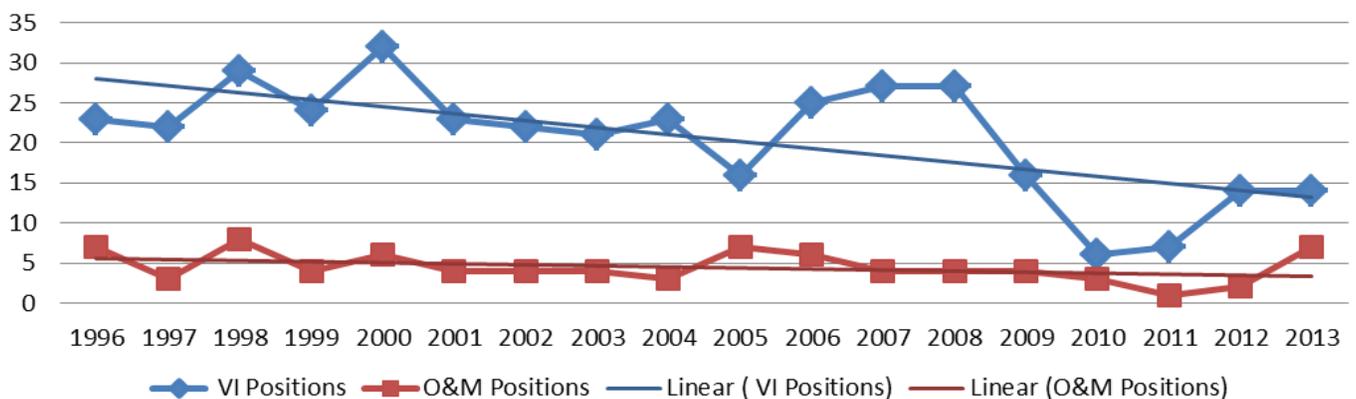
Posted positions

The respondents at each ESC and at TSBVI were asked how many part- or full-time positions were posted in their regions or at TSBVI in September 2012. This data is collected in October and reflects numbers after all regular hiring for the academic year had been completed. These positions remained unfilled and active because districts were unable to find a VI professional or the positions were opened after the start of the school year.

Table 11: Posted Positions

	2011	2012	2013
TVIs	7	14	14
COMS	1	2	7
Dually certified	0	0	0
TOTAL	8	16	21

Posted Vacancies for VI Professionals



The graph above shows the posted level of need between 1996 and 2013. Even with the increase over the past 3 years the number of posted positions is below average for TVIs and about average for COMS. Statistically, the trend of having unfilled posted positions in September is decreasing over time. This may be due to various factors, such as the following:

- Administrators may have an incomplete understanding of the scope of responsibilities of VI professionals and no reliable caseload data to demonstrate need. As a result there may be limitations in acknowledging need for new or additional VI professionals.
- Administrators are better able to recruit from within the district and enroll the candidate in a training program, thus avoiding the need to post a position.
- Administrators are able to recruit candidates prior to the start of the school year.
- Administrators are not confident they will be able to fill a position, so they are reluctant to advocate for or post a new position.
- Due to economic factors, administrators are reluctant or unable to seek additional VI professionals. As a result, interested local future VI professionals are not able to start training and districts may have difficulty filling a vacancy.

For all of these reasons, reviewing posted positions has not been a good indicator of true need for VI professionals, even with the increase of posted levels of need in 2013.

Recommendations by knowledgeable professionals

Regional VI consultants are the experts in visual impairments for their region. VI consultants and TSBVI staff were asked how many TVIs, O&M specialists, and dually certified personnel were needed in their area. The survey asked about projected need, not about positions available. However, historically, positions follow the availability of VI professionals. The results are indicated in the table below.

Table 12: Projected Shorter-term Need by Job Assignment: 12-24 Months

	2011	2012	2013
TVIs	68	73	83
COMS	25	32	44
Dually certified	17	11	17
Total need	110	116	144

Table 13: Projected Longer-term Need by Job Assignment: 24–36 months

	2011	2012	2013
TVIs	123	116	140
COMS	44	53	52
Dually certified	20	24	25
Total need	187	193	217

Projected Need for VI Professionals

The trendline is essentially flat for the longer-term need. It has shown only a 9% increase since 2007. The shorter-term need has shown more variance, with a 35% increase since 2007.

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
12 - 24-month Need	102	113	132	124	107	121	95	113	110	116	144
24 - 36 month Need	97	164	187	172	199	184	188	180	187	193	217

It is helpful to review the projected longer-term need (24–36 months) in conjunction with the 3-year actual and the projected attrition. While the numbers do vary from year to year and in each professional area, adding a statistical trend line can assist in evaluating the changes over time. In the past 5 years, the projected need for VI professionals has remained fairly stable, at an average of 193 VI professionals. This is the first year that the longer-term need has risen above 200.

When considering the needs, VI consultants are advised to reflect on real attrition over the past year and anticipated or projected growth and attrition (those who are expected to permanently leave the field).

There are two ways to assess the short- and longer-term projected needs, either by professional expertise or by job assignment. The terms “TVI” or “COMS” indicate a type of expertise as expressed through the certification in a professional discipline. Those in the “dually certified” category hold both certifications and function in both professional disciplines.

Functioning as a dually certified VI professional primarily reflects district need and therefore is a job assignment and not a unique discipline. For the purposes of this section of the report, the data reported will be by professional discipline or area of expertise and certification, not by job

assignment. Dually certified VI professionals function as part-time TVI and part-time COMS. As such they will be added to both areas as part-time TVIs and O&M specialists.

Table 14: Projected Short-Term Need by Area of Expertise: 12 – 24 Months

	2011	2012	2013
TVIs	85	84	100
COMS	42	43	61

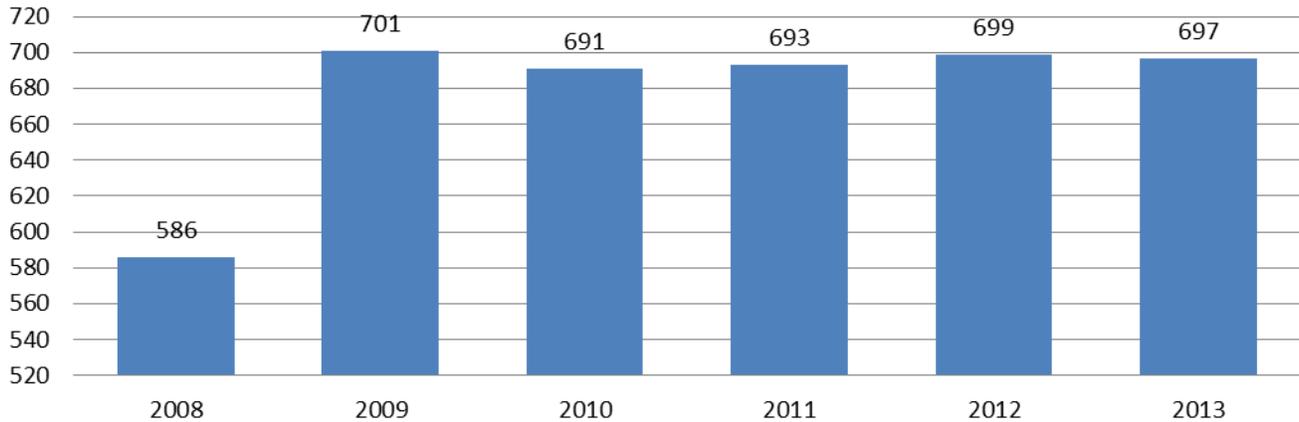
Table 15: Projected Longer-Term Need by Area of Expertise: 24 – 36 Months

	2011	2012	2013
TVIs	143	140	165
COMS	64	77	77

2013 saw jumps in need for both fields for both shorter- and longer-term needs. The shorter-term need for COMS increased by 42%. The shorter- and longer-term need for TVIs increased by 19% and 18%, respectively. Only the longer-term need for O&M specialists remained unchanged.

According to the most recent national data available (data for 2011), districts have been able to increase their hiring and demand has been increasing. This report cites special education and visual impairments as high-need areas (American Association for Employment in Education, 2011). Multiple informal conversations with district and regional HR specialists confirm that the trend continues. HR specialists expect to hire the same or more educators for the 2014–2015 school year. Hopefully, the hiring for VI professionals will follow the trends for other educational areas. However, as discussed earlier in this document, the number of VI professionals has remained essentially static since 2009.

Full- and Part-time Teachers Certified in Visual Impairments



This lack of change is surprising given that 937 additional students have been added to the *Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments* during that time frame, and an additional 718 students are projected to be enrolled in the next 3 years (TSBVI, 2013).

Of the 165 new TVIs needed over the next 3 years, it is expected that 103 will be replacing those lost due to attrition. This leaves a remainder of 47 full- and part-time VI educators to meet the needs of the expected 718 new students.

The number of TVIs has essentially “flat lined” since 2009

Projected need, accuracy, and impact

To assess the projected need, whether it is for teachers certified in visual impairments or O&M specialists, it is necessary to analyze data on student growth and projected attrition. These three constructs have an important effect on each other.

Teachers certified in visual impairments (TVIs)

The VI consultants at the ESCs have identified the need for 165 individuals with VI certification (TVIs and dually certified specialists) within the next 3 years. While it will still be short of the expected 178 TVIs who may be needed, it would be significant progress. Assuming that number of individuals is able to access training and find employment much progress will be made towards meeting the expanded core curriculum needs of students with visual impairments.

Orientation and mobility specialists (COMS)

The ESCs projected that within the next 3 years Texas will need 77 individuals with O&M certification. The data from the projected growth and attrition predicts that Texas will need 80 individuals; very close to the projected need.

As of January 2013, there were 3,088 students receiving O&M services, or 34% of the students with visual impairments. The total percent of students getting O&M services increases by close to 1% per year. The total percentage of students who have had an O&M evaluation also increases an average 1% per year. Currently, 54% have had an evaluation, a slight decrease from the previous year. If statistical forecasts are accurate, it is projected that 36% will be receiving services by 2015. Each student will need adequate access to a fully qualified O&M specialist.

Universities are maximizing their existing resources to produce COMS. An average of 21 individuals completes the certification per year. The next step is for districts to ensure that all students with visual impairments receive an O&M evaluation. Only then can the educational team members be assured that those who need O&M instruction are receiving it.

Summary of projected need, growth and attrition

The need for VI professionals, attrition, and student growth are inextricably connected. Need is based on factors related to student growth and attrition.

Below are tables summarizing attrition within the past year, projected attrition over the next 3 years, and longer-term (36 months) need by professional discipline as reported by ESC consultants. The O&M and dually certified data remain essentially the same, showing little significant change from year to year, even though students needing services continues to increase. However, the VI teacher data show changes. Notice the slope of the trend lines. The slope of the projected attrition and projected need are nearly identical.

As VI professionals retire, districts will need to replace and even increase their hiring since the numbers of students are increasing. There was an increase in TVIs in 2012, albeit a slight one. While there are a record number of new teachers on emergency permits or probationary



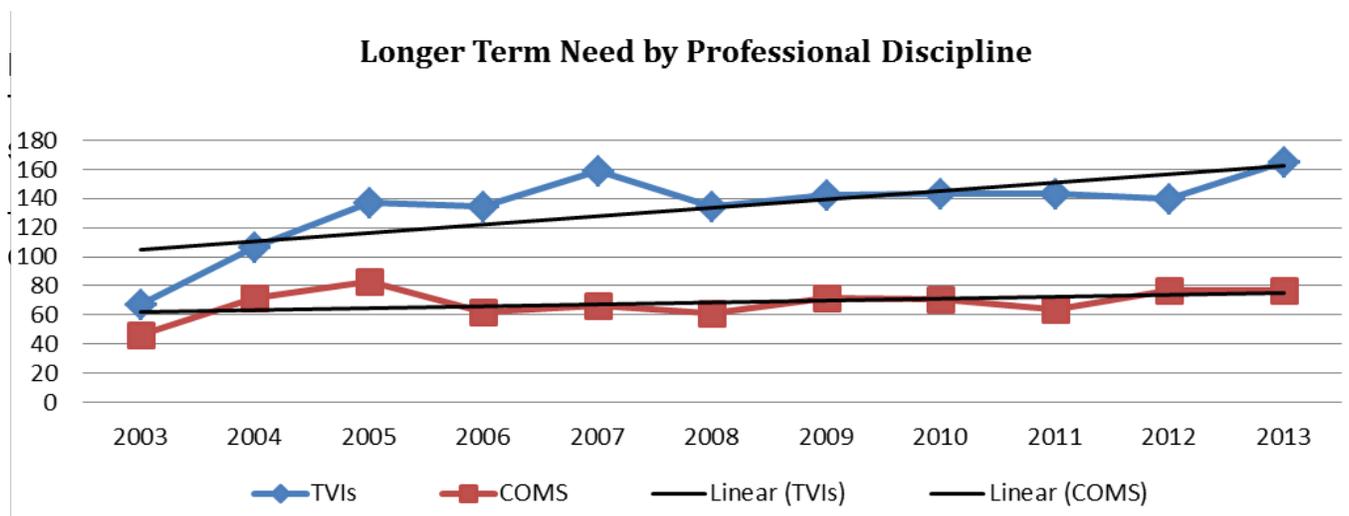
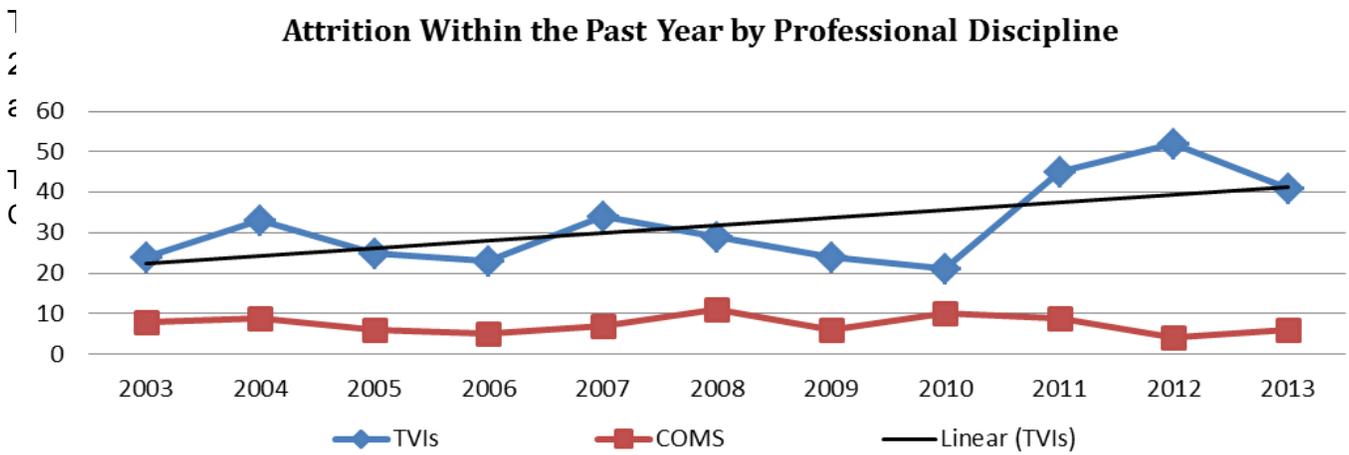
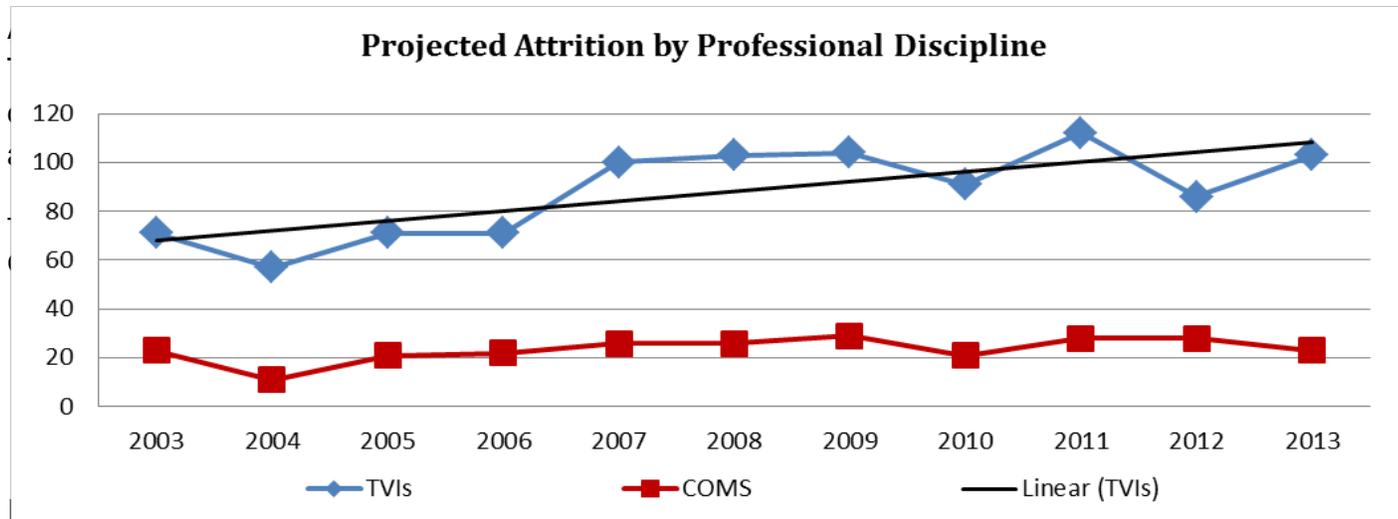
In 2009, Texas had 861 VI professionals who provided direct service.

In 2013, Texas had 858 VI professionals who provided direct service; *a loss of 3 individuals.*

During the same period Texas added 937 students with visual impairments. Clearly, changes need to be made.



certificates, it appears that most of them were replacing those who left the field. Only two full-time and four part-time TVIs were added to meet the needs of 180 additional students who have been added in the past year.



The relatively small change in the projected need of orientation and mobility specialists (COMS) is noteworthy. Not all students need O&M services at all times. At this point, there are no reliable statistical projections on the percentage of students with visual impairments who are at risk for needing O&M services *at any given time*. Further, not all students with visual impairments currently receive O&M evaluations. In fact, according to the *Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments*, only 54% of visually impaired students were evaluated for O&M skills within the previous 3 years (TSBVI, 2013). This has remained essentially unchanged since 2010. Additionally, when compared to actual attrition, the projected rate of attrition for O&M specialists (including dually certified professionals) is under-projected by 2%. Therefore, it is difficult to explain the lack of growth in reported need for O&M specialists (including dually certified professionals) by ESC specialists. The most obvious explanation seems to be capacity to meet the need.

Universities and districts need to work together to ensure that students who need O&M have access to it. The first step is to ensure that *all* students receive a rigorous O&M evaluation that takes place in the home, school, and community. The next step is to hire O&M specialists to adequately meet the needs of students.

Enrollment to Prepare VI Professionals

Texas is fortunate to have two collaborative partners who train VI professionals: Texas Tech University (TTU) and Stephen F. Austin State University (SFASU). Both schools have graduate programs for TVIs and O&M specialists. SFASU also has an undergraduate program for orientation and mobility specialists (COMS) funded by the Rehabilitation Services Administration. Both schools serve students throughout the state with a combination of face-to-face, interactive audio, and Internet courses.

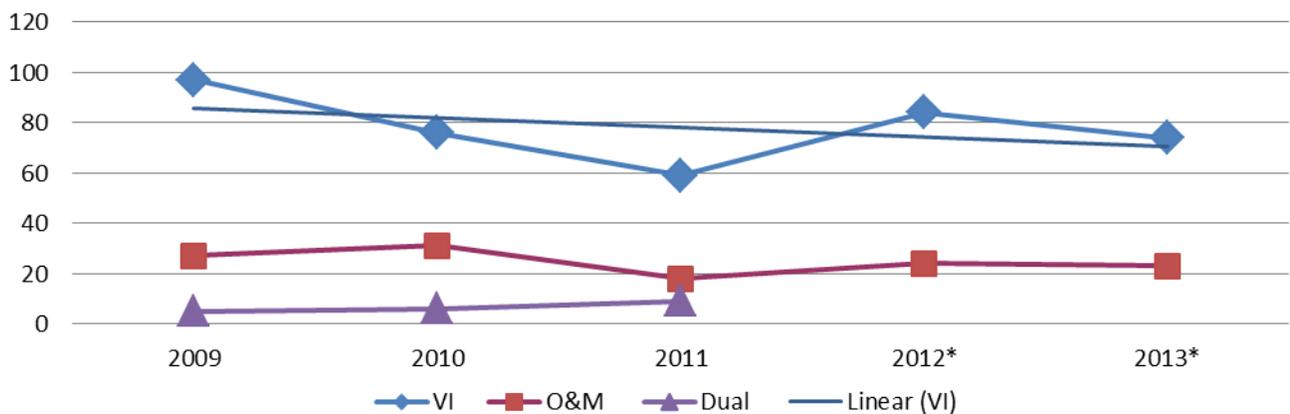
The combination of distance-learning options and supportive funding has had a major impact on the number of VI professionals in Texas. Enrollments increased substantially with the development of distance-learning options in 1998. Since then, the biggest factor affecting enrollment seems to be the availability of tuition support.

Table 16: Number of Students in Training Programs

	2011	2012*	2013*
TVIs	73	94	94
COMS	39	43	50
Dually certified	11		
Total	123	137	144

* The data collection definitions changed in 2012. Since students must complete one certification before the other, they are now counted in either VI or O&M.

Number of Individuals Registered for Classes in Fall of Each Year

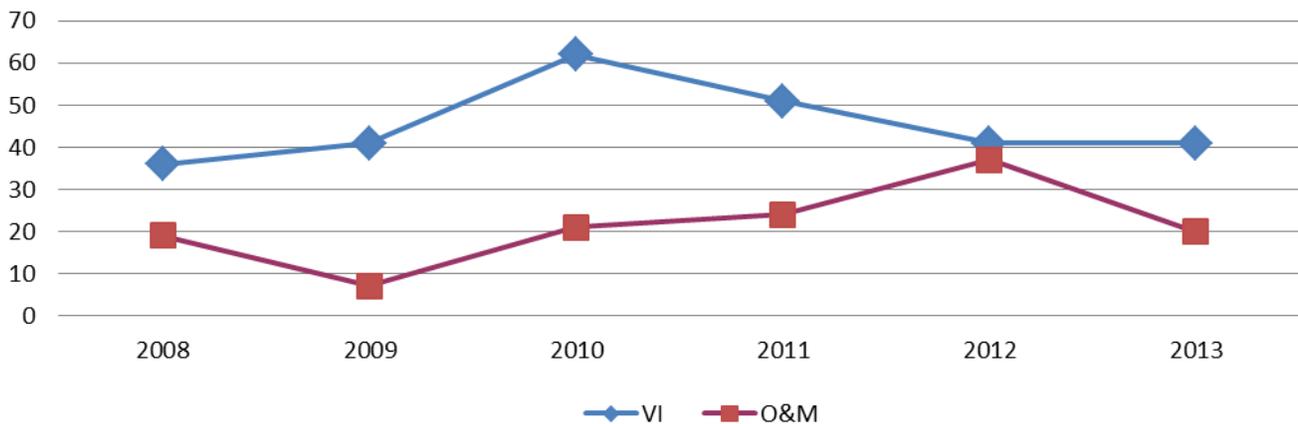


*The data collection definitions changed in 2012. Since students must complete one certification before the other, they are now counted in either VI or O&M.

In October 2013, a total of 144 students were registered for courses leading to certification either as a teacher of students with visual impairments (TVI) or an orientation and mobility specialist (COMS). Ninety-four were seeking VI certification and 50 were seeking O&M certification. This is a 5% improvement over the 2012 totals.

In the past year, 41 individuals completed VI training and 20 completed O&M training. This is slightly below the 5-year average of 47 for TVIs and for COMS.

Number of Individuals Completing VI Programs



In 2008, the state funds were increased. However, subsequent and significant increases in tuition and other required costs have negated those gains. Scholarships have declined since 2009. It is surmised that the “flatness” in growth of VI professionals is directly related to availability of funds to address the increases in the costs of tuition since 2009. In 2013, the number of people receiving financial assistance, a strong incentive for enrollment, declined from 81% to 51% for TVIs and from 56% to 46% for COMS.

Table 17: Percentage of Students Receiving Support through Texas Grants

	2011	2012	2013
TVIs	81%	61%	51%
COMS	50%	56%	46%

Existing scholarships are not sufficient to address the needs of the applicants. The tuition set for 2013 also reflected a significant increase. Currently, a single class is more than \$1,200, plus books and related expenses. As a result, existing funds are not having the same impact that they had even 2 years ago.

No alternative certification venues provide training in areas related to visual impairments.

Clearly, the tuition support available to recruit VI professionals is not sufficient to the need.

Summary

This report reviewed characteristics of and indicators of need for VI professionals. In September 2013, Texas had 917 individuals (848.7 FTEs) providing vision-related services, either directly to students or in a leadership and/or technical-assistance capacity. After adjusting for dually certified professionals (69), there are 883 individuals providing direct

service either on a full- or part-time basis. The total includes the following full- or part-time individuals:

- 697 teachers certified in visual impairments (TVIs) or 614.5 FTEs.
- 236 orientation and mobility specialists (COMS) or 183 FTEs.
- 74 dually certified professionals.

In addition, there are:

- 56 regional or statewide leadership or technical-assistance specialists (46.3 FTEs)

The number of individuals providing leadership and technical assistance showed a decrease of 1 person in the past year. Since 2008, the amount of time they spend providing VI-related services has eroded from 57 to 45.2 FTEs, or by 19% since 2008.

The total number of VI professionals decreased by 3% from last year, with virtually no change since 2009. The TVI category did not show significant improvement, decreasing by two individuals. The COMS decreased from 253 to 236 individuals, or a 7% increase.

In September 2013, there were 25 TVIs, 19 O&M specialists, and one dually certified professionals who are African-American. The Hispanic VI professionals included 68 TVIs, seven COMS, and six dually certified professionals. Seventy-six TVIs, 10 COMS, and four dually certified professionals speak Spanish. There are five TVIs and two COMS who are Asian. Overall, this was a decrease in the ethnic/cultural diversity of VI professionals, especially Hispanic and Asian TVIs.

An examination of the attrition, projected attrition, growth, and need indicates challenges ahead. The attrition rate decreased this year from 54 to 42 VI professionals. Teachers certified in visual impairments (TVIs) had the biggest change. In 2010, 16 left the field the previous year; in 2012, 50 left, or more than triple the amount from 2010. In 2013, the number of TVIs who left was reduced to 36, still well above the 2010 level.

The projected 3-year attrition rate was estimated at 113, or 12% of all VI professionals. Further analysis of the data over the past decade indicate that although the regional VI consultants are the best predictors for attrition, even they underestimate attrition for TVIs by 15% and COMS by 2%. Therefore, it is likely that as delayed retirements are realized, attrition over the next 3 years will continue to be a substantial factor in planning for an adequate supply of VI professionals.

A long-term examination of growth patterns predicts that students with visual impairments will increase by 2.6% each year, or by 718 additional students in 2016. It is expected that Texas will have 9,850 students with visual impairments by that year.

This report assessed need based on two methods:

- (a) including the number of posted available positions in September and
- (b) recommendations from VI consultants at the ESCs.

Job vacancy posting data gathered since 1996 has proven to be a poor predictor of need.

This report considers the recommendations of the VI specialists at the regional educational service centers to be the best indicators of real need in Texas. These professionals have extensive knowledge of their districts and region. Their estimates indicate a growing shortage of VI professionals. Without significant increases in enrollment in university programs, the difficulty in meeting the needs of students with visual impairments will increase.

Regardless of the strategy used to measure need, it is apparent that Texas has a clear and significant need for new and additional VI professionals, and that the need will continue to grow. These positions must be filled to ensure that students with visual impairments have the skills to succeed.

Table 18: Summary of Need by Job Category

	TVIs	O&M specialists	Dually certified	Total
12–24-month-need projections	83	44	17	144
24–36-month-need projections	140	52	25	217

Both types of indicators of need were reviewed in this document: posted vacancies and recommendations by regional consultants. While each source revealed a different set of

numbers, what is clear is that regardless of the method used, Texas has a clear and ongoing need for VI professionals.

Appendix

Methodology

The survey asked about the number of people *functioning* as VI professionals. These individuals may be TVIs, O&M specialists, or both. Those *functioning* in both roles are referred to as being dually certified. The VI professionals provide instruction to students in a direct or consultative capacity and/or provide leadership, or technical assistance from regional educational service centers (ESCs) or Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI). Those who provide leadership or technical assistance may have full- or part-time positions.

Texas employs both full- and part-time VI professionals. Full-time professionals are those who work at least .6 FTE or more. Part-time professionals are those who work .5 FTE or less. This method has been used by TEA and is considered to be an adequate estimate of the number of full-time equivalent VI professionals. Part-time VI professionals are a significant proportion of the Texas VI workforce (25% of the TVIs and 48% of the O&M specialists).

When relevant information about full-time equivalent (FTE) positions is also presented. The number of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff was determined by multiplying the number of people employed in part-time positions by .5 and adding the result to the number of people employed as full-time VI professionals (Part time X .5 + Full time = FTE).

The descriptive and need data reflect statewide totals of a combination of TVIs and O&M professionals. Data on each profession are also included separately. When appropriate, data on dually certified VI professionals are also presented.

People who provide both O&M and VI services (dually certified) are counted as part-time VI and part-time O&M. Although they may be full-time employees of a district or cooperative, dually certified professionals are considered part-time TVIs and part-time O&M specialists. As a result, dually certified individuals appear on both the VI and O&M tables as part-time professionals. This results in a variance between the data listed in the Statewide Totals table and the combined totals of the Direct-Service Provider tables. Simply adding together the discipline-specific totals would result in double counting some individuals. Statewide totals are adjusted for dually certified professionals.

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