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# 2014 SUMMARY OF PROFESSIONALS IN VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS

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





## 2014 Executive Summary of Need for VI Professionals

Since 1996, the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired has conducted an annual survey of the VI consultants at the Education Service Centers, university VI programs, and TSBVI 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 (COMSs or O&Ms). Individuals with both certifications are referred to as “dually certified.” This summary provides information about the results of the survey conducted in September 2014.

The most striking findings include:

- After a slow post-recession recovery, the number of VI professionals increased 5% in 2014. The **total number** of full- and part-time VI professionals rose from 915 to 960 individuals.
  - The number of full- and part-time VI teachers (TVIs) reported was 708 (629.5 full-time equivalents [FTEs]); 11 more than the 2013 level. This is also 7 more than the 2009 pre-recession total of 701 TVIs. While the increase is encouraging, it must also be noted that this is only a net increase of 7 TVIs statewide in 6 years and that 932 additional students have been identified statewide during that same period.
  - In 2014, 259 O&M specialists (210.5 FTEs) were identified, a 10% increase.
- 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 fifth year in a row, VI consultants reported increasing overall caseloads. Eleven of 20 education service centers (ESCs) reported increased caseloads for both TVIs and COMS. Six regions reported no appreciable change. Three regions were unsure if any changes had occurred.
- The **attrition from the previous year** increased slightly in 2014.
  - In 2014, 49 VI professionals were reported to have left the field in the previous year. This is an increase from 2013’s 42 VI professionals leaving and less than 2012’s total of 54 individuals.
  - In 2012, it was projected that 98 VI professionals would leave the field by 2014. In actuality, 145 left, mostly due to retirement. This is 48% more loss than projected.
  - The projected attrition over the next 3 years increased, from 113 to 119, or 12% of all VI professionals.
- Ensuring **cultural diversity of VI professionals continues to be a challenge**. While the diversity for VI professionals is similar to that of other educators in Texas, it is not keeping pace with the diversity of the student population.
  - The number of Hispanic VI professionals increased in 2014, from 81 to 98.
  - In 2014, there were 40 African-American VI professionals, a decrease from 2013’s 45 African-American VI professionals.

- **Universities are training as many VI professionals as funds allow.** There are a total of 148 future VI professionals enrolled in programs leading to certification as either TVIs or COMS. Seventy-eight percent of these students are receiving financial support for their training.
- **The number of visually impaired students increases each year** by an average of 2.4%. While the increase in TVIs in 2014 is encouraging, it follows 5 years of stagnated growth, even as the number of students continued to increase. Clearly, the need for recruiting more VI professionals continues.

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## Introduction

Since 1996, the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired has conducted an annual survey to assess supply and demand for VI professionals in Texas. The term “VI professionals” includes teachers certified in visual impairments (TVIs) and certified orientation and mobility (O&M) specialists (or COMSs). Individuals with both certifications are referred to as “dually certified.” This report provides information about the results of the survey conducted in September 2014.

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. (Note: 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 either a teacher certified in visual impairment (TVI or VI teacher) or as an orientation and mobility specialist (COMS or O&M specialist). This report summarizes data on those with a *current job assignment* with students with 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 professionals 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 a 19-year span, the number of VI professionals has increased with only occasional dips. This year, the number of VI professionals in Texas is 960 individuals, or 884.6 full-time equivalents (FTEs), a 5% increase in individuals over the previous year.

The increase comes after minor variations since the start of the recession in 2009. No overall, sustained growth was demonstrated between 2009 and 2013. During that same period, the *Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments* indicated an increase of 932 students, an 11% increase (TSBVI, 2014).

While other areas of education have started to recover from recession-era cutbacks, it appears that the VI fields are just beginning to make an equivalent comeback.

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

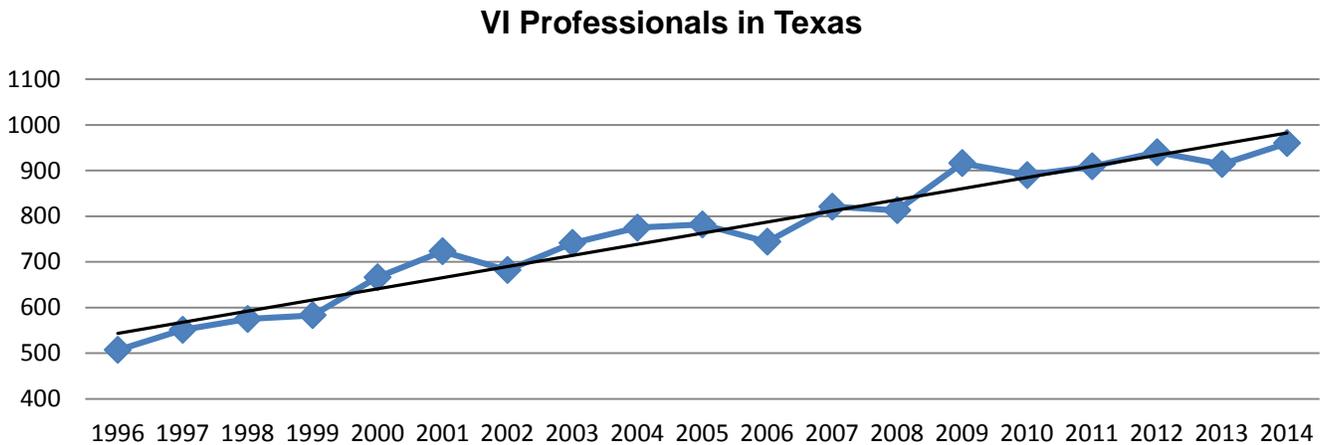


Table 1 that follows provides further details about VI professionals in Texas. The term “individuals” includes both full- and part-time VI professionals. The total number of individuals who are VI professionals increased by 5%. The full-time equivalent (FTE) data adjusts for the part-time VI professionals, including those who are dually certified.

**Table 1: Total VI Professionals Statewide**

	2012		2013		2014	
	Individuals	FTE <sup>2</sup>	Individuals	FTE <sup>2</sup>	Individuals	FTE <sup>2</sup>
ESC leadership <sup>1</sup>	30	19.7	28	20.7	29	18.4
TSBVI statewide <sup>1</sup>	27	25.5	28	25.6	29	26.2
VI and O&M service providers (adjusted for dually certified professionals)	883	803.5	858	797	902	840
<b>Total VI professionals</b>	<b>940</b>	<b>848.7</b>	<b>914</b>	<b>843.3</b>	<b>960</b>	<b>884.6</b>

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

<sup>2</sup> FTE = (part time x .5) + full time for all charts

### Direct-service providers

Below are data about direct-service providers. The term “direct-service providers” includes teachers certified in visual impairments (TVIs), certified orientation and mobility specialists (COMSs), and dually certified personnel who:

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

The term 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.

With only 7 additional TVIs in 6 years to meet the needs of 932 more students, it isn't surprising that caseloads seem to have increased.

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.

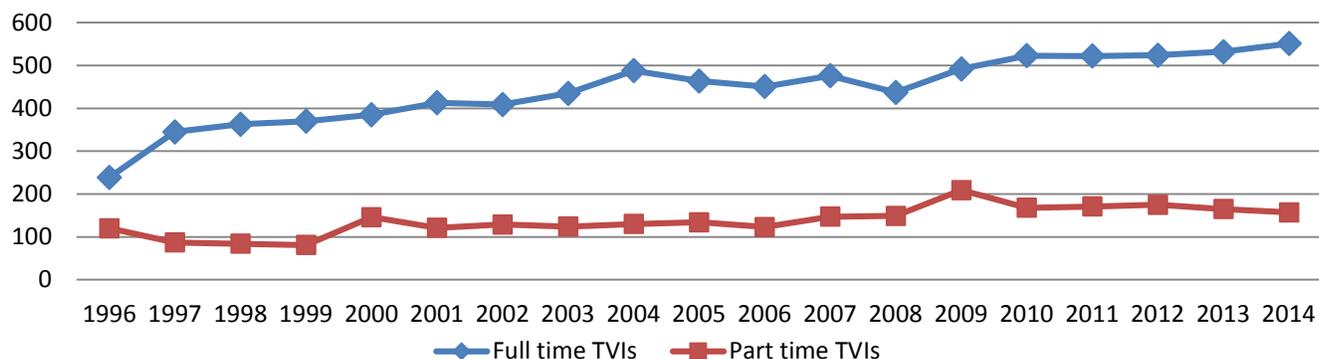
For the purposes of this survey, professionals who are certified *and* employed in both visual impairments and orientation and mobility (dually certified) are counted as a part-time teacher certified in visual impairments (TVI) and a part-time orientation and mobility specialist (COMS). These specialists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

**Table 2: Direct-Service Providers: Teachers Certified in Visual Impairments (TVIs)**

	2012		2013		2014	
	Individuals	FTE <sup>1</sup>	Individuals	FTE <sup>1</sup>	Individuals	FTE <sup>1</sup>
<b>Full-time TVIs</b>	524		532		551	
<b>Part-time TVIs</b>	175		165		157	
<b>Total VI staff</b>	<b>699</b>	<b>611.5</b>	<b>697</b>	<b>614.5</b>	<b>708</b>	<b>692.5</b>

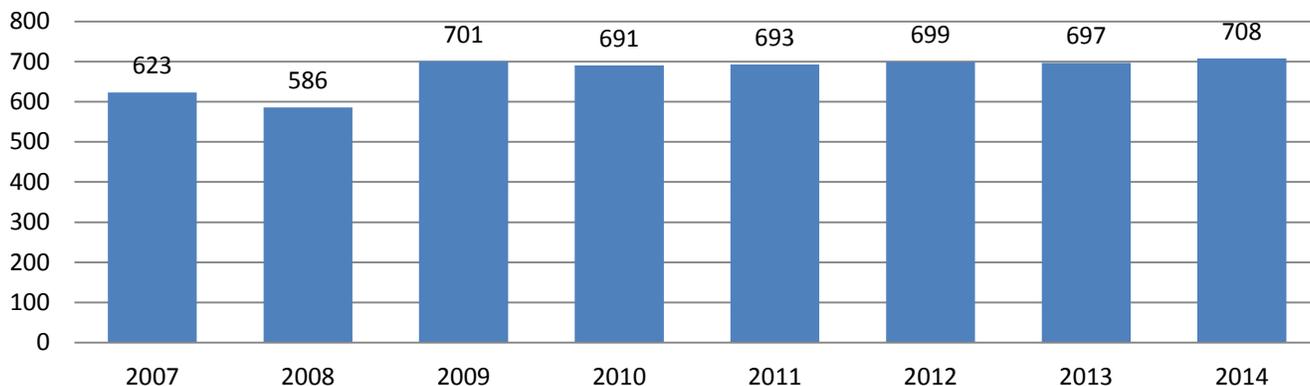
1. FTE = part time x .5 + full time for all charts

### Full- and Part-time TVIs



The total number of *individuals* (full and part time) who work as a TVI has increased by 11 individuals since 2013, a 4% increase. This is the first time that the total number of TVIs has increased above the 2009 level of 701 TVIs. This growth of seven TVIs over the past 6 years represents a 1% post-recession increase in TVIs.

### Full- and Part-time Teachers Certified in Visual Impairments



Even with the growth in 2014, the limited change since 2009 is of concern given that 932 additional students have been added to the *Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments* since 2009. It is projected that an additional 668 students will be enrolled in the next 3 years (TSBVI, 2014).

**Table 3: Direct-Service Providers: Orientation and Mobility Specialists (COMSs)**

	2012		2013		2014	
	Individuals	FTE <sup>1</sup>	Individuals	FTE <sup>1</sup>	Individuals	FTE <sup>1</sup>
<b>Full-time COMSs</b>	131		130		162	
<b>Part-time COMSs</b>	122		106		97	
<b>Total O&amp;M staff</b>	<b>253</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>182.5</b>	<b>259</b>	<b>210.5</b>

<sup>1</sup> FTE = part time x .5 + full time for all charts

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 95%, from 1,684 to 3,285. The rate of growth in O&M services exponentially exceeds that of VI services overall during that same period.

With 23 new individuals, O&M specialists (or COMSs) account for the majority of the increase seen in 2014. The number of O&M specialists (full-time individuals and FTEs) increased by 10% in 2014.

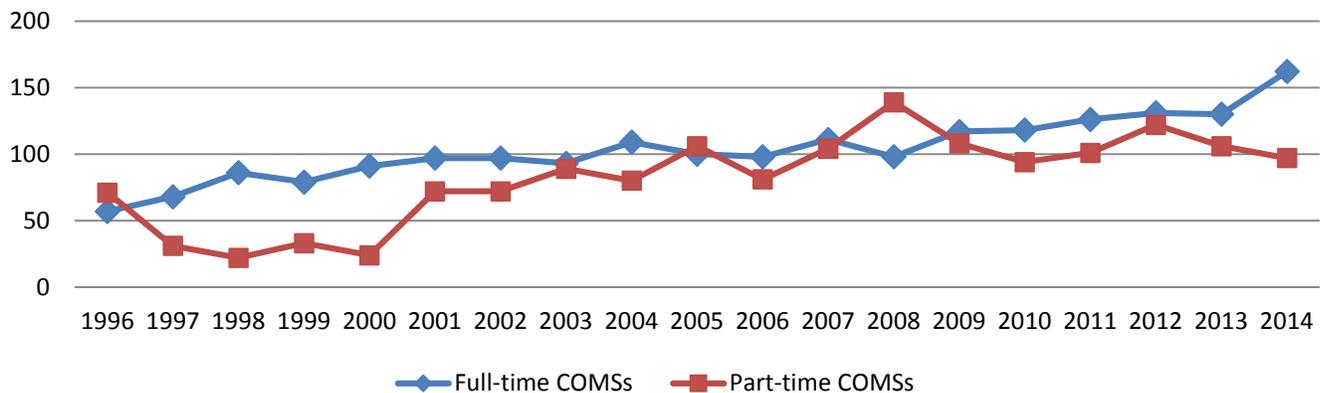
The 2014 increase may be due, in part, to the 2013 language in TEC 30.002, which requires that all *initial* evaluations of students with visual impairments include an O&M evaluation by a certified O&M specialist. Final rules weren't posted in the Texas Register in December, 2014. O&M professionals report that their districts started evaluating new students as of the 2014–2015 school year. The evaluation is required to include functional skills in the home, school, and community.

An additional factor for the increase may be the number of individuals who completed their O&M training in 2014. Thirty-four students were eligible for certification compared to 20 students in the previous year. Although this pattern was broken during the recent recession, historically, hiring follows availability.

There are indications that access to evaluations is also affected by availability of adequate staff. It would appear that the passage of HB 590 and an increase in staff have helped increase the number of students who have been evaluated by an O&M specialist, and therefore the number of students who are receiving needed services.

The number of orientation and mobility specialists (COMSs) increased in 2014, as has the number of students needing services.

**Full- and Part-time COMSs**



## 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. Since 2001, the number has fluctuated between 72 and 62, with an average of 67. This year's 65 falls well within that established pattern. Changes in dually certified personnel likely reflect a shift in staffing needs within districts.

**Table 4: Dually Certified Professionals**

	2012	2013	2014
<b>Dually certified</b>	69	74	65

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.

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 2013 and 2014 likely reflect changes in staffing needs statewide.

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

This survey collects information about the number of, characteristics of, 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.

- 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.

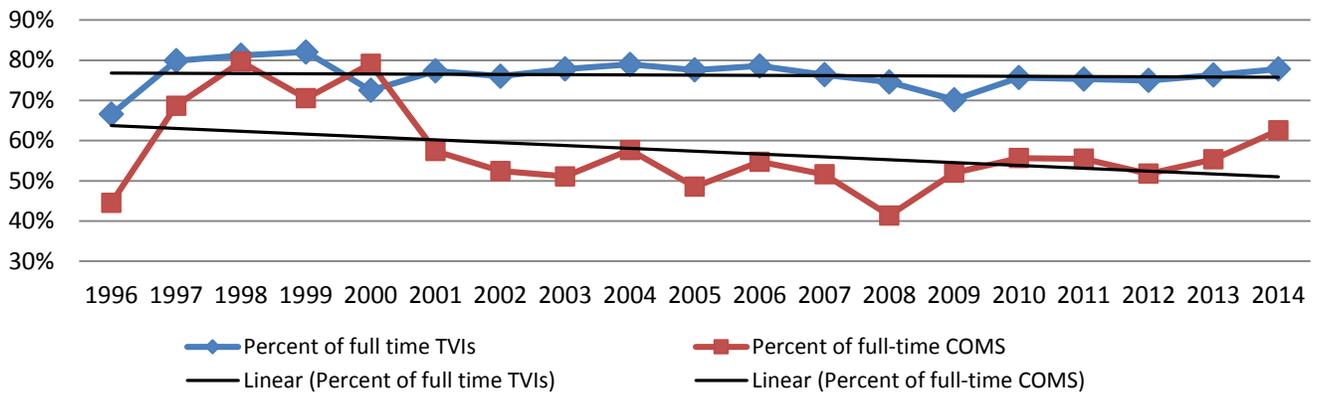
Part-time VI professionals may either be employed by the district on a part-time, contractual basis for VI-only purposes, or may be hired full time with duties unrelated to visual impairments as a portion of their job responsibilities within the district.

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 language in TEC 30.002 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 being the teacher responsible for providing the comprehensive needs of an array of other students, including those who do not have a sensory impairment.
- Students with visual impairments require specialized instruction in skills necessary to access the general core curriculum and expanded core curriculum (ECC). Those areas have now been legally defined in TEC 30.002. 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 with their student 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 other non-sensory 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 to 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

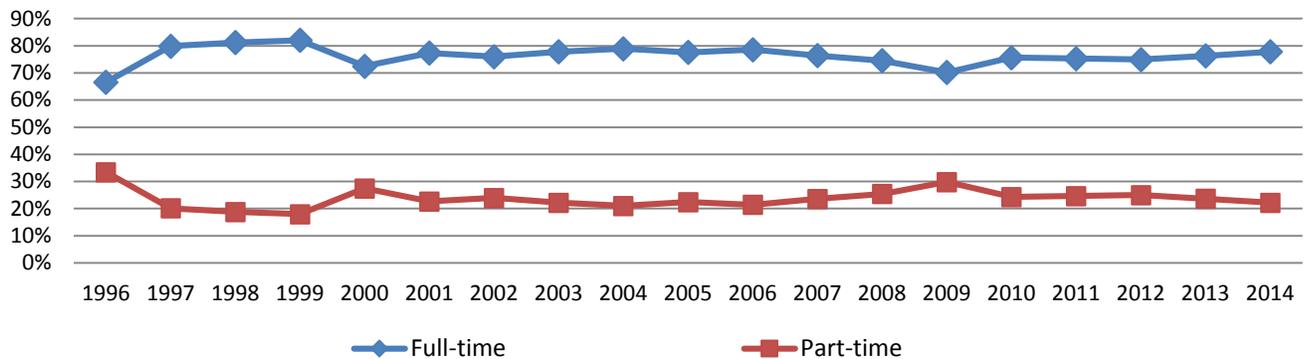


### Teachers certified in visual impairments (TVIs)

In 2014, there was a nearly 2% increase in the number of full-time TVIs. Currently, 78% of TVIs are full time. The percentage has been fairly stable since 2010. In 1999, 82% were full time. Statistically, the prevalence of a full-time teachers certified in visual impairments has been inching downwards since 1999.

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 positive changes in local fiscal resources. This survey counts individuals, not the number of districts for whom they work. It is also possible, as frequent informal reports indicate, that more individuals are working full time, but in multiple districts.

### Percentage of Full- and Part-time TVIs



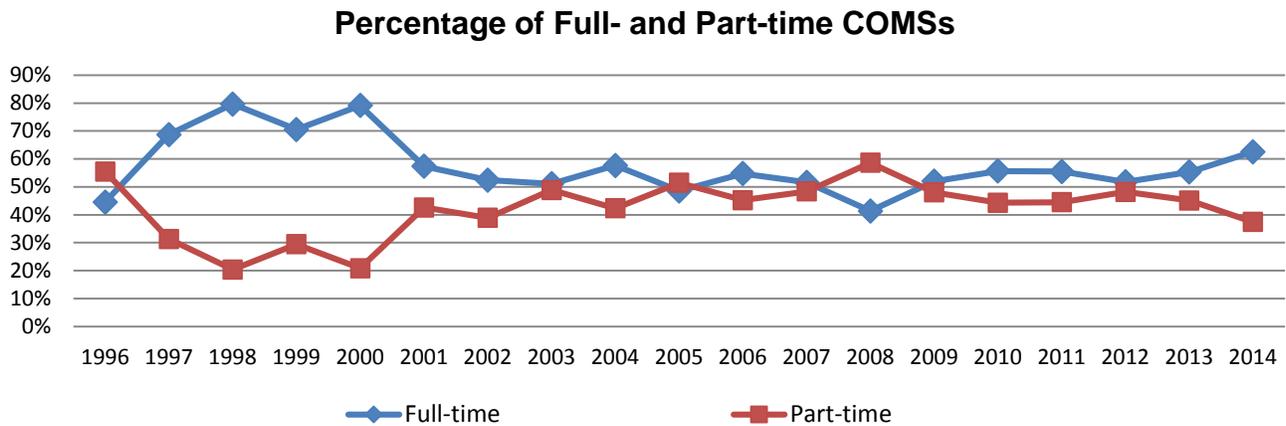
### Orientation and mobility specialists (COMS)

Overall, the percent of full-time O&M specialists increased in 2014. Sixty-one percent work full time as an O&M specialist. This is a substantial increase since the 51% noted in 2012.

Many of those individuals considered to be full time are fully employed, but contracting part time with various districts and not full time within a single district. The need for a full-time O&M

specialist may not exist within a 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 COMSs has varied from a high of 80% (1998) to a low of 41% (2008). Currently, it is at 61%. It is strongly hoped that the percentage of full- and part-time COMSs will continue to increase so that students statewide can receive adequate access to orientation and mobility services.



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.

The number of *full-time* orientation and mobility specialists (COMSs) increased in 2014. This is good news given the expected impact of the 2013 changes to TEC 30.002, which requires all new students to be evaluated by a COMS.

**Direct services provided by ESCs**

Each regional education service center (ESC) provides an array of services to districts. ESCs 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 education service centers.

Reliance on the ESC for direct services is based on multiple factors, including a district's ability to provide services locally.

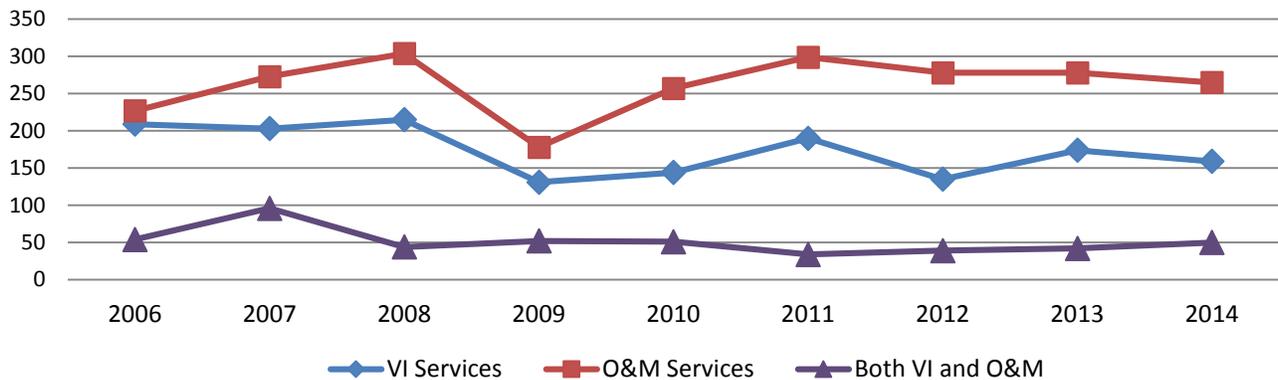
Some ESC services include direct services to students with visual impairments. In these regions, the ESC staff members are listed on the student's individualized education plan (IEP). Eight regions provide no direct services. Of the 12 regions that provide *any type* of direct services, four provide VI services to 159 students, 11 provide O&M services to 265 students, and an additional 50 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**

	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>
<b>VI-only services (4 regions)</b>	135	173	159
<b>O&amp;M-only services (11 regions)</b>	278	280	265
<b>Both VI and O&amp;M services (3 regions)</b>	39	42	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>452</b>	<b>495</b>	<b>474</b>

The number of students who receive O&M services from an ESC has decreased slightly, from 322 to 315. The bulk of the 10% overall decrease was from a single region that went from serving 104 students in 2013 to 65 in 2014. That region reported that two of the largest districts have hired full-time O&M specialists and that the number of full- and part-time O&M specialists in that region increased from six to 13. The reductions in VI services from the ESCs were due to various smaller changes throughout the state.

## Students Receiving Services from ESCs



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 COMSs 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 are 1, 2, 5, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19. Five regional O&M specialists have caseloads of 20 or more students. Four regions report caseloads of more than 24 students per O&M specialist at the ESC. 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 can be 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.

The provision of direct 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, the local districts' capacity to meet the needs of their students is a primary one.

### Overall perceptions of caseloads

Since 2010, this survey also asked about perceptions of overall changes in caseloads regionally. 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 estimates.

**Table 6: Regional Overall Changes in Caseloads**

	<b>TVIs</b>	<b>COMS</b>
<b>Increases</b>	11	11
<b>Decreases</b>	0	0
<b>No significant change</b>	6	6
<b>Unknown</b>	3	3

For the fifth year in a row, the majority of ESCs (11) reported overall increases in caseloads for both TVIs and O&M specialists. Each time, the overall impression in most ESCs was that caseloads had increased in the previous year for both O&M specialists and TVIs. However, this is an improvement over 2013, when 14 regions reported increases. It is possible that the increased number of VI professionals is having a positive impact. It is also possible that the increased caseloads reported since 2009 have become “normalized,” or what people have come to expect. When caseloads increase, the concern is that VI professionals become so overwhelmed with large caseloads that they no longer are able to meet the vision-oriented instructional needs of their students.

### **Ethnic diversity**

Texas is a diverse state and requires a diverse workforce to serve its citizens. This survey asks about African-American, Hispanic, and Asian VI professionals in relation to services provided. 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**

	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>
<b>TVIs</b>	75	68	75
<b>COMSs</b>	13	7	13
<b>Dually certified</b>	6	6	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>98</b>

## Spanish-Speaking VI Professionals

	2012	2013	2014
<b>TVIs</b>	81	76	73
<b>COMSs</b>	16	10	14
<b>Dually certified</b>	6	4	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>101</b>

## African-American VI Professionals

	2012	2013	2014
<b>TVIs</b>	20	25	25
<b>COMSs</b>	16	19	15
<b>Dually certified</b>	0	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>40</b>

## Asian VI Professionals

	2012	2013	2014
<b>TVIs</b>	9	5	10
<b>COMSs</b>	2	2	3
<b>Dually certified</b>	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>13</b>

This was a year with varied results in assessing diversity of VI professionals in Texas. Looking at specific categories, the number of Hispanic, Spanish-speaking, and Asian VI professionals increased. The number of African-American VI professionals decreased.

In September 2014, there were 25 teachers certified in visual impairments (TVIs), 15 O&M specialists, and no dually certified VI professionals who are African American. Overall, this is an 11% decrease. The Hispanic VI professionals included 75 TVIs, 13 O&M specialists, and 10 dually certified professionals, for an overall increase of 21% in a single year. Seventy-three TVIs, 14 O&M specialists, and 14 dually certified professionals speak Spanish. This is a 12% increase from last year. As of 2014, there were 10 TVIs and three O&M specialists who are Asian. This is an 86% increase from 2013. However, the numbers are very small.

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

Overall, levels of ethnic and cultural diversity improved for Hispanic, Spanish-speaking, and Asian VI professionals. Totals for African-Americans declined.

## **Growth in Population of Students with Visual Impairments and Impact on VI Professionals**

Student population growth is inextricably connected to attrition and need. It should be examined prior to analyzing either of those variables.

In January, 2014 there were 9,127 students with visual impairments in Texas. Data collected since 2000 project that the student population will increase by 2.4% per year over the next 3 years (an additional 668 students) for a total of 9,795 by 2017.

### **Impact on VI teachers**

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 45 FTEs to accommodate student growth. However, given that 78% of TVIs are full time, it will take more individuals to meet the goal of 45 FTEs to meet growth demand. If the current ratio of full- to part-time teachers continues, the number of TVIs needed to total 45 FTEs will be closer to 55 individuals.

Using data from the past 14 years to project growth, in the next 3 years, Texas will need 45–55 additional TVIs solely for new students.

### **Impact on O&M specialists**

Since 2001, the percentage of the total number of students who receive O&M services has grown by an average 1.3% per year.

Information about students with visual impairments is collected each January. The 2014 *Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments* indicated that the percentage of students who were receiving O&M services increased from 34% to 36%. The percent of students had been stuck at 34% since 2010. This small growth after 4 years of stagnation was welcome news.

The increase in the number of students who receive services rose by a smaller rate, only 0.8%. It is anticipated that by 2017, 3,836 students will be receiving O&M services, or 551 new students.

Statewide, the average student-to-COMS caseload is up in 2014, from 14 to 16 students per FTE. Using this as a means to predict need, Texas will need an additional 34 full-time equivalent (FTE) orientation and mobility specialists (COMSs) 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 2014, 63% of COMSs 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 34 FTEs is likely to be closer to 47 individuals.

Texas Education Code (TEC) 30.002 requires that all *initial* evaluations of students with visual impairments include an O&M evaluation by a certified O&M specialist. This language was amended in 2013 and became effective immediately. Final rules were just posted in December, 2014.

Given that the full impact of the new language in TEC 30.002 has yet to be experienced, it is impossible to estimate accurately the projected growth of students receiving O&M evaluations and services. It is quite likely that the actual growth may be greater than discussed here.

### **Variance in growth of students with visual impairments and O&M services**

An additional concern is the gap in the growth rate of students (2.4% per yr.), and the increase in students receiving O&M services (0.8% per yr.). It is unknown how many of the projected 9,795 students with visual impairments may actually need O&M services, since the level of evaluation has not kept pace with the student population increase, as illustrated in the chart below. As of January 2014, 44% of current students had not been evaluated by an O&M specialist.

### **Attrition**

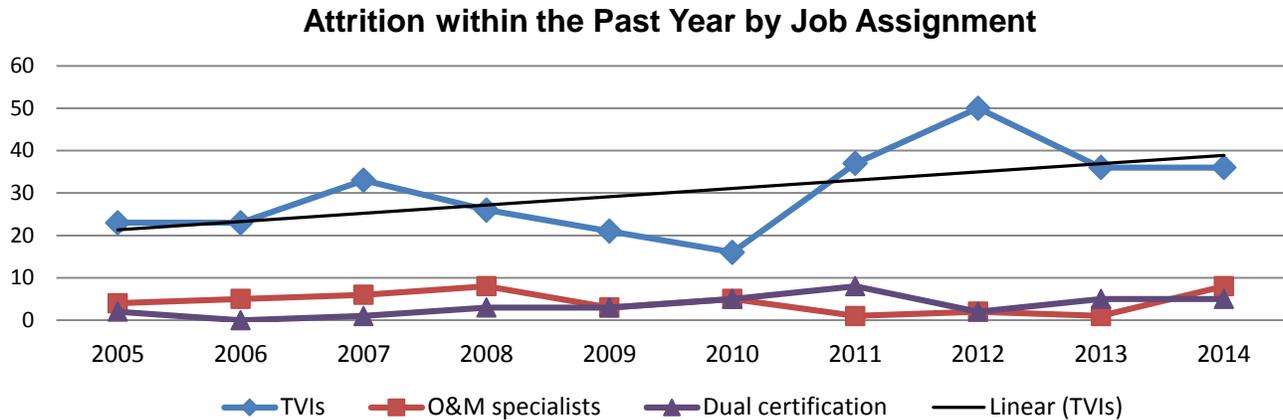
Attrition for VI professionals increased in 2014, while still under the 2012 totals.



Data from the past 13 years predicts that in the next 3 years, Texas will need 34–47 additional O&M specialists solely for new students.

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

	2012	2013	2014
<b>TVIs</b>	50	36	36
<b>COMSs</b>	2	1	8
<b>Dually certified</b>	2	5	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>49</b>



In general, VI professionals are a very stable group. As a class, they move to visual impairments mid-career from other educational disciplines. With few exceptions, the attrition is due to retirement. As a result, the discussion on attrition for VI professionals is strongly linked with those factors that affect retirement.

**Critical factors related to attrition of VI professionals**

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 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 (U.S. Department of Education, 2010) of VI professionals:

Projecting attrition by discipline is difficult. Using 10-year averages, TVIs are under-projected by 15%.

- 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.
- 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.
- 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 that must be invested and the likelihood that there will be no increase in salary.
- Because VI professionals are so critical to student learning, a change of even one VI professional, in any single district, can have dramatic effects on the annual yearly progress of students.
- Economic factors drive attrition and hiring. Many districts have had to look at serious cost-cutting factors, including reducing their workforce.
- 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.

Overall, attrition increased in 2014. It remained the same for TVIs, but increased substantially for O&M specialists.

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 and/or increases in caseloads may be the factor that tips the scales for VI professionals.

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. It is possible that the unanticipated increase in attrition in 2012 contributed to the personnel shortages of 2013.

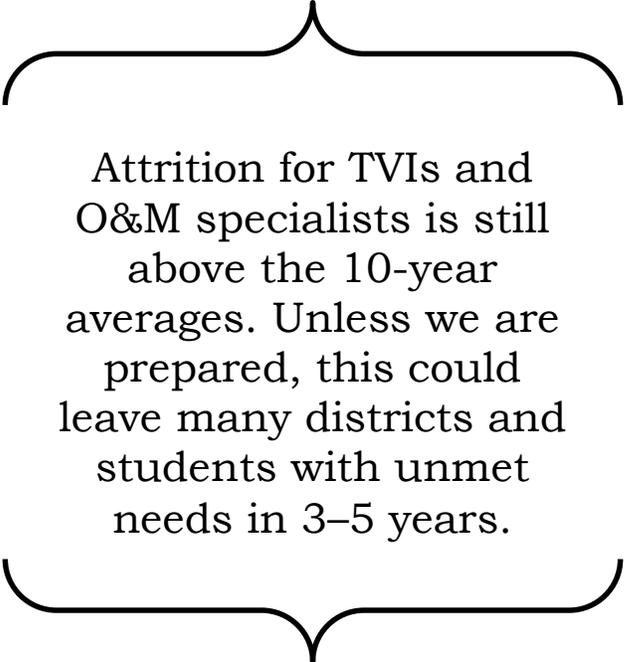
In 2014, the number of professionals who left the field was above the 10-year averages. On average, 30 TVIs, four O&M specialists, and three dually certified specialists leave each year. Informal conversations with HR specialists from all over the state indicate that they expect retirements to peak by the end of the 2014/15 or 2015/16 school years.

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 3 to 5 years?
- 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? Currently the 3-year average is 47 VI professionals.

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.

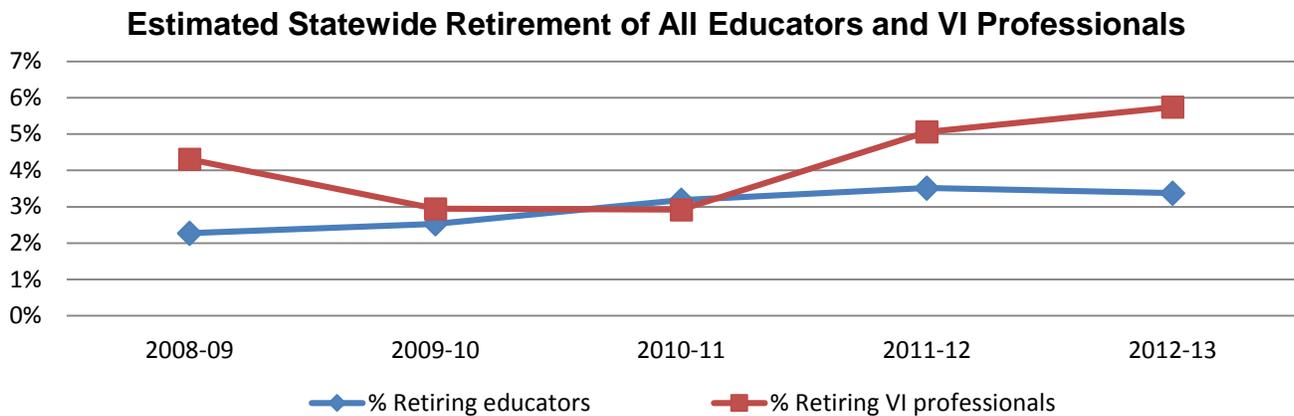
Information from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Association of Texas Professional Educators about educators and the levels of retirements between the 2008–09 and 2012–13 school years was analyzed. Additionally, official data from 2013–2014, which has not yet been finalized but appeared valid, was also included (personal conversation, Josh Sanderson, Governmental Liaison, Association of Texas Professional Educators-ATPE, 2014). The ATPE information was compared with the information from the TEA about the percentage of school



Attrition for TVIs and O&M specialists is still above the 10-year averages. Unless we are prepared, this could leave many districts and students with unmet needs in 3–5 years.

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 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 professionals exceeds that of educators in general. VI professionals are mature educators before they start training. Informal evidence suggests that very little of the attrition is due to job dissatisfaction. The vast majority of attrition is due to retirement, with the rare situation of relocation outside of Texas.



### Projected 3-year attrition

Projected attrition data is valuable for predicting and preparing for the VI professionals needed in the near future. Two reporting options exist: reporting based on job assignment (TVI, O&M, or dually certified) or based on professional expertise (visual impairments or orientation and mobility). Individuals who function as dually certified have both VI and O&M expertise. Projecting the attrition of dually certified personnel appears to be especially difficult with a reliable degree of accuracy. This is a fluid group. Based on district need, an individual may function as dually certified one year but not the next.

Projected attrition may have peaked for TVIs, but seems to be increasing for O&M specialists.

This report focuses on data based on expertise. Historically, projections based on expertise, not job assignment, are more accurate and valuable for planning future training and hiring needs. As a result, the information below includes individuals who are dually certified in both categories (and cannot be added). The “Overall” data reflects all VI professionals and has been adjusted for dually certified VI professionals.

Gathering accurate data regarding retirement plans is challenging. In general, VI consultants at the ESCs 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. Others may retire from their job, but take another contractual job in another district. Even with these challenges, VI consultants at the ESCs are the best and *only* source for this information.

Historically, expertise-based projections are below actual attrition by a noteworthy margin, particularly for TVIs. Nonetheless, VI consultants are the best and only source for information on attrition for VI professionals.

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

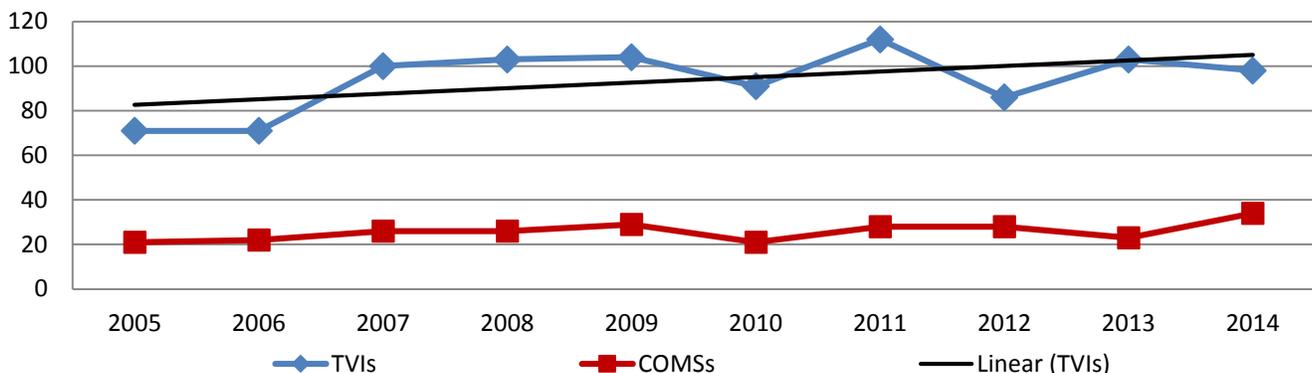
**Table 9: Projected 3-Year Attrition by Expertise**

Projections made in:	2012	2013	2014
<b>TVIs<sup>1</sup></b>	86	103	98
<b>COMSs<sup>1</sup></b>	28	23	34
<b>Overall<sup>1</sup></b>	98	113	119

<sup>1</sup> Projections by ESC consultants reflect job expertise, not assignment. As a result, TVIs and COMSs include data for dually certified staff and cannot be totaled. "Overall" includes all VI professionals and is adjusted for dually certified VI professionals.

In 2014, the VI consultants at the ESCs projected that, overall, 119 VI professionals will leave the field within the next 3 years. This is a 5% increase from 2013. Historically, the projections are more conservative, with more people leaving than projected. Yet, if this projection is accurate, at least 12% of *existing* VI professionals are projected to retire or otherwise leave the field prior to 2017.

**Projected Attrition by Professional Expertise**



## Projected vs. actual attrition

As has been well documented elsewhere, throughout the recession many eligible workers delayed their retirement. However, since 2012, eligible retirees have felt comfortable with retiring. So the retirement rate appears to have increased since the recession.

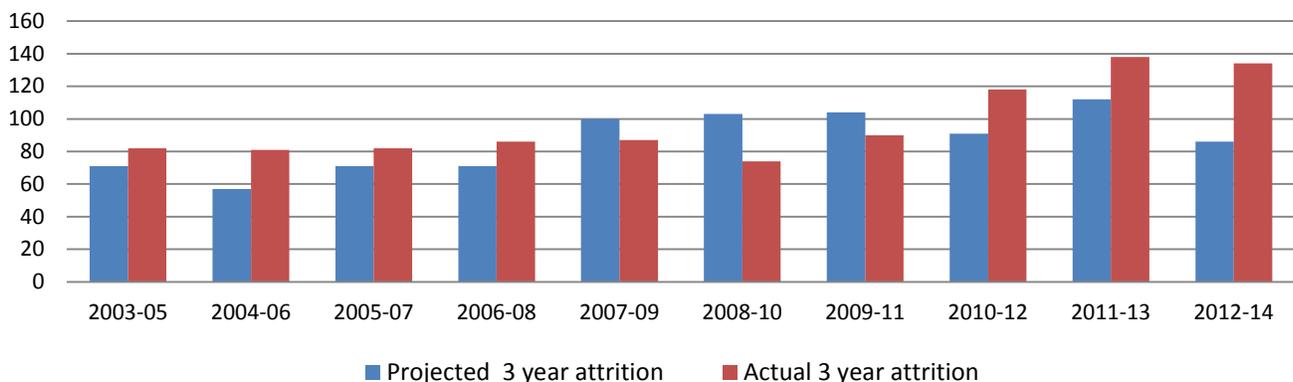
VI professionals seem to have followed the national pattern. Attrition dipped in 2009 and 2010 as people delayed their retirement. VI professionals now appear to feel confident enough to retire as the attrition has increased since 2012. As the chart shows, in the 2012–2014 period, or the first post-recession period, the gap between projected attrition and actual attrition grew significantly.

This year, the number of professionals who left the field was 48% more than projected.

The most recent 3-year time frame is 2012 to 2014. In 2012, it was projected that 98 people would leave the field by 2014. For that same 2012–2014 time period, the field actually lost 141 VI professionals. This loss of 43 additional individuals is 48% more than projected.

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

### Projected versus Actual Attrition



\* 2012–2014 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 over the past year and projected attrition. Even so, projection remains a challenging task. During the economic downturn, the projections exceeded the actual attrition. However, this trend has been reversed and the gap appears to be growing. In 2014, 48% more VI professionals left the field than were projected in 2012.

## 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 (Table 11 and the graph that follows) are data from each of these areas.

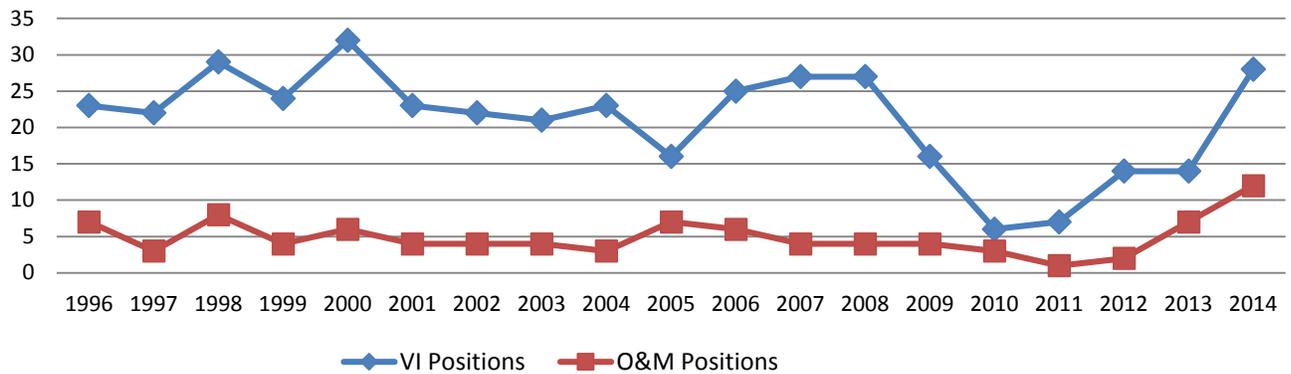
### Posted positions

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 2014. These data were collected in September and reflect 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 10: Posted Positions**

	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>
<b>TVIs</b>	14	14	28
<b>COMSs</b>	2	7	12
<b>Dually certified</b>	0	0	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>43</b>

## Posted Vacancies for VI Professionals



The graph above shows the posted level of need between 1996 and 2014. This year the number existing vacancies, even after all typical hiring has been completed, increased from 21 to 43, or slightly more than doubled.

Statistically, the trend of having unfilled posted positions in September is decreasing over time.

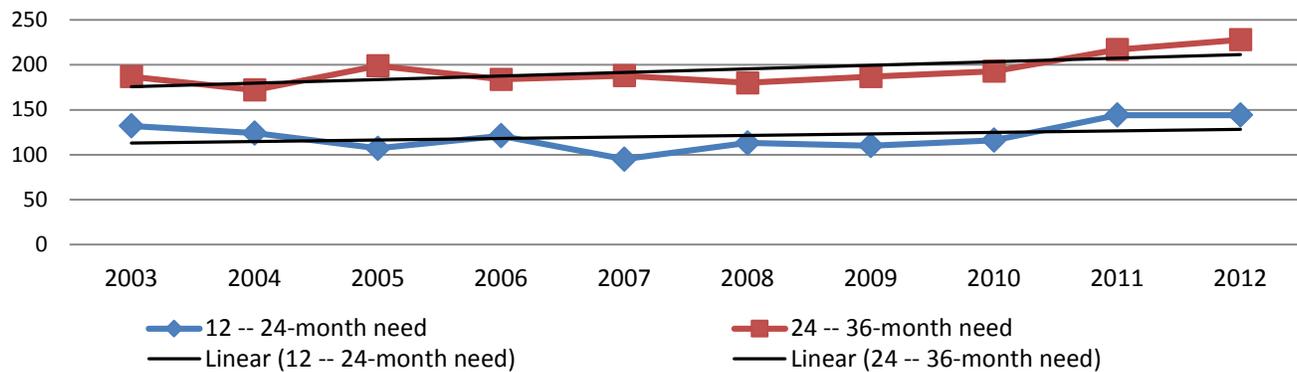
Previous formal and informal data indicates that vacancies are a poor indicator of need. The reasons vary. Many administrators will identify a need and encourage an existing educator to get VI certification rather than post a vacancy. Regardless of the reason, data collected since 1996 indicates a very poor correlation between vacancies in October and the need for VI professionals.

### 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 Tables 12 and 13 below.

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).

## Projected Shorter- and Longer-term Need for VI Professionals



While the projected need does 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 second year that the longer-term need has risen above 200.

There are two ways to assess the shorter- and longer-term projected needs: either by job assignment or by professional expertise. 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. Dually certified assignments are also very fluid and vary from year to year. Understanding need by expertise informs the future training and funding needs. For the purposes of this section of the report, the data reported will be by professional expertise, not by job assignment. Dually certified VI professionals function as part-time TVIs and part-time COMSs. As such they will be added to both areas as part-time TVIs and O&M specialists.

Projecting need based on expertise, rather than job assignment, provided a more accurate predictor of training and hiring needs.

**Table 11: Projected Short-Term Need: 12–24 Months**

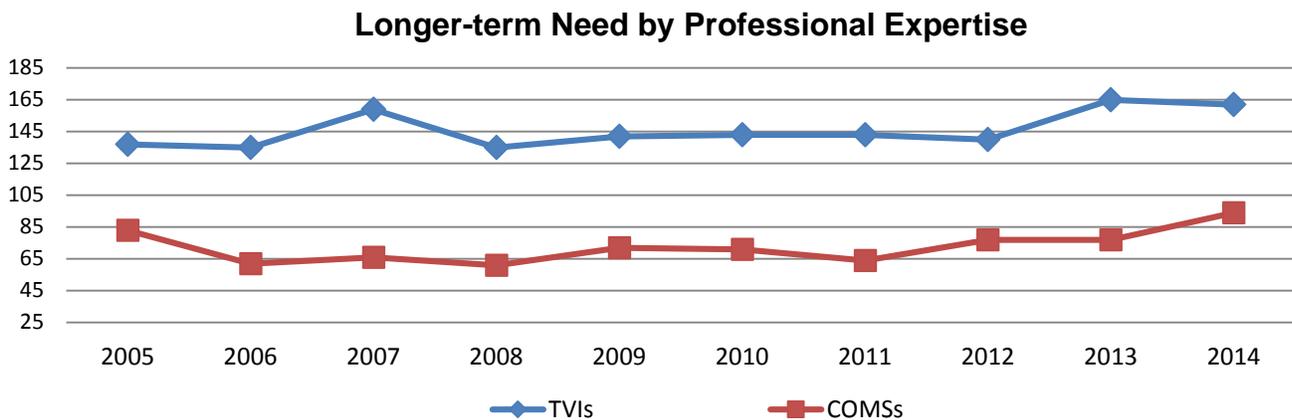
	2012	2013	2014
<b>TVIs<sup>1</sup></b>	84	100	95
<b>COMSS<sup>1</sup></b>	43	61	66
<b>Overall<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>116</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>144</b>

<sup>1</sup> Projections reflect job expertise, not assignment. As a result, “TVIs” and “COMSS” include data for dually certified staff in both categories and cannot be totaled. “Overall” includes all VI professionals and is adjusted for dually certified VI professionals.

**Table 12: Projected Longer-Term Need: 24–36 Months**

	2012	2013	2014
<b>TVIs<sup>1</sup></b>	140	165	162
<b>COMS<sup>1</sup></b>	77	77	94
<b>Overall<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>193</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>228</b>

<sup>1</sup> Projections reflect job expertise, not assignment. As a result, “TVIs” and “COMSS” include data for dually certified staff in both categories and cannot be totaled. “Overall” includes all VI professionals and is adjusted for dually certified VI professionals.



As indicated above, most of the growth based on expertise was for O&M specialists. With the updated requirements for initial O&M evaluations in TEC 30.002, it appears that ESCs are anticipating growth in this discipline.

According to the most recent national data available (2014), districts have been able to increase their hiring and demand has been increasing. This report specifically cites visual impairments as high-need areas (American Association for Employment in Education, 2014). Multiple informal conversations with district and regional HR specialists confirm that the trend continues. Hopefully, the hiring for VI professionals will follow the trends for other educational areas. However, as discussed earlier in this document, the increases in VI professionals follow 5 years of stagnant growth, even as the number of students increased.

## Discussion of projected need and VI teachers (TVIs)

The projected need for teachers certified in visual impairments (TVIs) increased in both the shorter- and longer-term categories. This growth is likely due to a combination of factors: student population growth, attrition, and increased ability to hire VI professionals to meet the needs of underserved students.

As discussed in the Growth of Students with Visual Impairments and Impact on VI Professionals (page 15), Texas will need between 45 and 55 TVIs to meet the anticipated growth in the number of students with visual impairments.

In addition to meeting the needs related expected demographic increases, Texas will need to replace TVIs who leave the field, mostly for retirement. It is projected that 98 individuals with VI expertise (TVIs and dually certified professionals) will leave the field prior to 2017. As documented previously, this is likely a low projection. Historically, the 3-year attrition ratios for those with VI expertise exceed projections by 15%. The attrition could be closer to 113 full- and part-time individuals certified in visual impairments.

Combining projected growth and attrition, Texas will need between 143 and 168 individuals with certification in visual impairments in the next 3 years to replace those who are likely to leave and respond to anticipated growth. The ESCs' projection of 162 new TVIs falls within that range.

Universities are maximizing their existing resources to produce TVIs. In 2014, 102 people were seeking VI certification. Forty-seven are working with either a probationary certificate or emergency permit. These TVIs are already working with students and included in this count as TVIs. They will not contribute to closing the gap.

The ability to hire these needed VI professionals will depend on the availability of eligible candidates for the job and the administrator's confidence in his or her ability to hire VI professionals.

## Discussion of projected need and O&M specialists

The projected need for orientation and mobility specialists (COMSs), which increased in both the shorter- and longer-term categories, is likely due to a combination of factors: student



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



population growth, attrition, and increased ability to hire VI professionals. Projecting need for O&M specialists included consideration of the following additional factors:

- 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, 44% of current students with visual impairments have not had an O&M evaluation to determine whether they need O&M services.
- TEC 30.002 requires that *initial* evaluations of students with visual impairments include an O&M evaluation. This legislation took effect in the 2014-15 school year.

As discussed in the Growth of Students with Visual Impairments and Impact on VI Professionals (page 15), Texas will need between 34 and 47 O&M specialists to meet the anticipated growth in the number of students with visual impairments.

Regional VI consultants project that 34 people with O&M expertise (O&M specialists and dually certified professionals) will be leaving the field by 2017. Using data from the past 10 years to assess the accuracy of the projections, there is a 1% difference (i.e., nearly accurate). If the expected student growth is combined with the 3-year projected attrition and based on statewide average student-to-teacher ratios, it is likely that Texas will need between 68 and 81 additional full- and part-time O&M specialists over the next 3 years. The projection made by the ESC consultants, who know their regions best, is slightly above these figures. The variance is likely due to the anticipated impact of changes in TEC 30.002.

Universities are maximizing their existing resources to produce COMS. An average of 27 individuals completes the certification process each 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.



Universities and districts need to work together to ensure that students have adequate access to VI professionals to meet their unique educational needs.



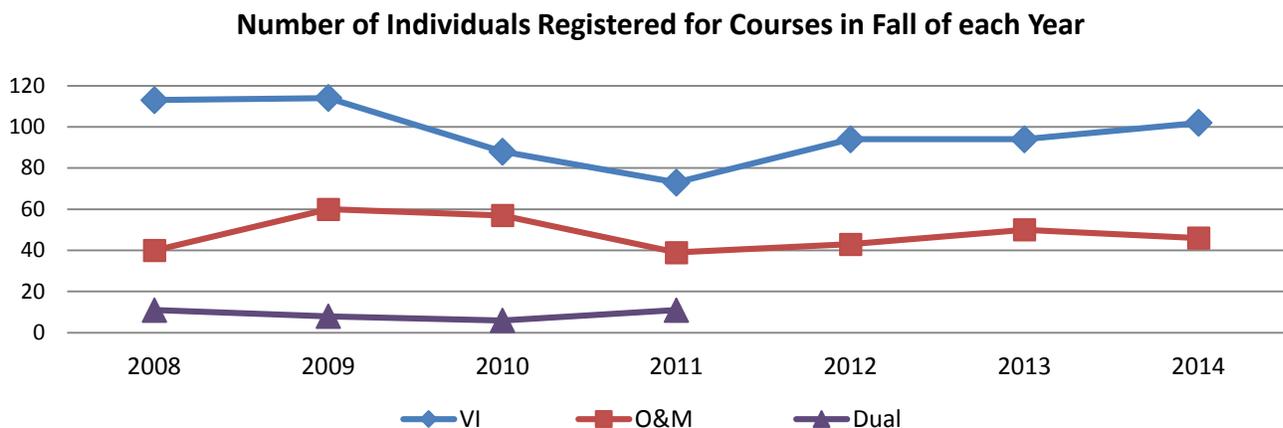
## Enrollment to Prepare VI Professionals

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 (COMSs) funded by the Rehabilitation Services Administration. Both schools serve students throughout the state with a combination of face-to-face, voice-over-the-internet, 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. Increases in the number of VI professionals appear to be directly affected by tuition support.

**Table 13: Number of Students in Training Programs**

	2012	2013	2014
<b>Visual impairments</b>	94	94	102
<b>Orientation and mobility</b> (incl. undergraduates)	43	50	46
<b>Total</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>148</b>



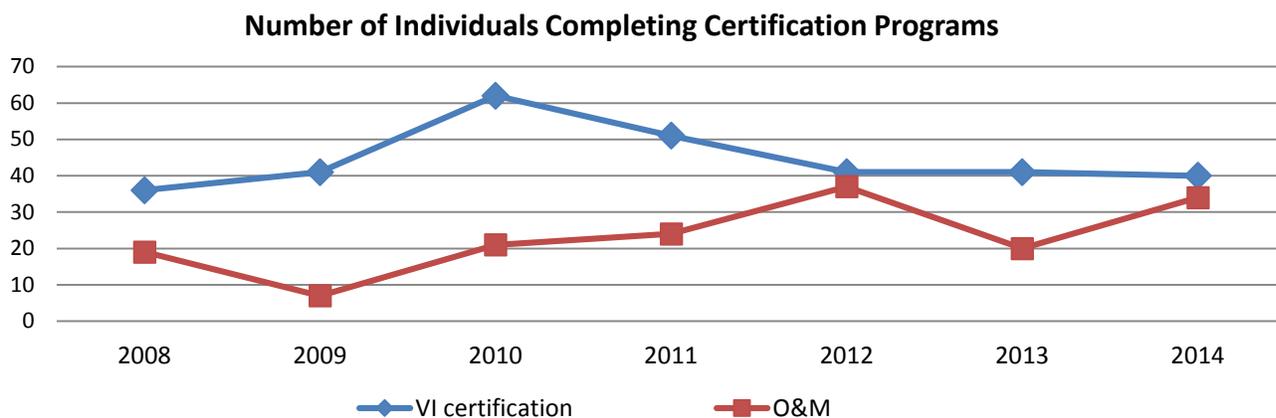
- The data collection definitions changed in 2012. Since students must complete one certification before the other, they are now counted in either the VI or O&M category.

In October 2014, a total of 148 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). Eleven of the pre-service O&M specialists are undergraduates. One-hundred-four individuals were seeking VI certification and 46 are en route to O&M certification.

This is a 3% improvement over the 2013 totals. There were 50 undergraduate and graduate students seeking O&M certification. In 2014, the 5-year average for program completion increased from 22 to 27 students, a 27% increase.

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 jobs in education and be able to help fill the expected gap.

In the past year, a total of 74 people completed their certification programs. Forty individuals completed VI training and 34 completed O&M training. This is slightly below the 5-year average of 47 for TVIs and higher than average for COMSs.



In 2009, the state funds were increased and enrollment jumped. 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 between 2009 and 2013 is related to availability of funds to address the increases in the costs of tuition since 2009. In 2014, the number of people receiving financial assistance, a strong incentive for enrollment, declined from a high of 84% just after the funding increase in 2008 to 55% for TVIs. Despite the significant cost for acquiring the expertise needed to meet the needs of students with visual impairments, VI professionals typically do not see a salary increase.

**Table 14: Percentage of Students Receiving Support through Texas Grants**

	2012	2013	2014
<b>TVIs</b>	61%	51%	55%
<b>COMSs</b>	56%	46%	57%

Existing scholarships are not sufficient to address the needs of the applicants. Tuition continues to increase at a steady rate. Currently, a single class is more than \$1,250, not including 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 2014, Texas had 960 individuals (884.6 FTEs) providing vision-related services, either directly to students or in a leadership and/or technical-assistance capacity. After adjusting for dually certified professionals (65), there are 902 individuals providing direct service either on a full- or part-time basis. The total includes the following full- or part-time individuals:

- 708 teachers certified in visual impairments (TVIs) or 629.5 FTEs
- 259 orientation and mobility specialists (COMSs) or 210.5 FTEs
- 65 dually certified professionals

In addition, there are:

- 58 regional or statewide leadership or technical-assistance specialists (44.6 FTEs)
- 29 individuals or 18.4 FTEs are at the regional education service centers (ESC)
- 29 individuals or 26.2 FTEs are at the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired either in Outreach or Short-Term Programs

The number of individuals providing leadership and technical assistance at the ESCs showed an increase in 2014. However, the actual amount of time available to assist districts and families decreased by more than two FTEs. It dipped from 20.7 in 2013 to a new low of 18.4 FTEs. This is the lowest since this data has been collected.

The total number of VI professionals increased by 5% in the last year. This change appears to break the holding pattern that has been prevalent since 2009. The TVI category showed improvement, increasing by 11 individuals. In 2009, there were 701 VI professionals; in 2014 there are 708—a gain of seven TVIs over 6 years.

The COMSs increased from 236 to 259 individuals, or a 10% increase. New legislation required that a student suspected of having a visual impairment be evaluated by a certified orientation and mobility specialist (COMS). This language and an increase in the number of individuals who have completed their O&M programs in the past year, are likely contributors to the growth seen in 2014.

In September 2014, there were 25 TVIs and 15 O&M specialists who are African-American. The Hispanic VI professionals included 75 TVIs, 13 COMSs, and 10 dually certified professionals. Seventy-three TVIs, 14 COMSs, and 14 dually certified professionals speak Spanish. There are 10 TVIs and three COMSs who are Asian. Overall, this reflects a decrease in the African-American VI professionals and an increase in the other categories.

An examination of the attrition, projected attrition, student population growth, and need indicates challenges ahead. The attrition rate increased from 42 to 49 VI professionals. In the past year, O&M specialists had the biggest change, increasing from one to eight. TVIs and dually certified professionals remained the same at 36 and five individuals, respectively. These figures remain above the 10-year average attrition rate of 30 TVIs, four O&M specialists, and three dually certified VI professionals.

The projected 3-year attrition rate was estimated at 119, or 12% of all VI professionals. Further analysis of the data over the past decade indicates that although the regional VI consultants are the best predictors for attrition, even they underestimate attrition for TVIs by 15% and COMS by 1%. Therefore, it is likely that as 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.

Over the past 3 years, 145 VI professionals have left the field. It was projected that 98 individuals would leave. This actual attrition is 48% more than the projected attrition. This gap has been increasing since the end of the recession.

A long-term examination of growth patterns predicts that the number of students with visual impairments needing services will increase by 2.4% each year, or by 668 additional students from 2014 to 2017. It is expected that Texas will have 9,795 students with visual impairments by 2017.

This report assessed need based on two methods:

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

Job-vacancy-posting data gathered since 1996 have proven to be a poor predictor of need. Even so, the number of vacancies in September 2014 was up substantially. The total numbers of vacancies jumped from 20 in 2013 to 43 in 2014, or more than double that of the previous year.

This report uses a knowledgeable informant model to project need. It considers the recommendations of the VI specialists at the regional education 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.

**Table 15: Summary of Need by Expertise**

	<b>TVIs</b>	<b>O&amp;M specialists</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>12–24-month-need projections</b>	95	66	144
<b>24–36-month-need projections</b>	162	94	228

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.

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 needed to succeed.

## 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 education 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 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 TVI 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 TVI and O&M tables as part-time professionals. This results in a variance between the data listed in the Statewide Totals table (Table 1) and the combined totals of the Direct-Service Provider tables (Tables 2 and 3). 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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