

2006 Summary of Need for VI Professionals in Texas

Introduction

Since 1997 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” includes teachers certified in visual impairments (VI teachers) and certified orientation and mobility specialists (O&M). This report will provide information about the results of the survey conducted in September 2006.

The most striking findings include:

- A 13% reduction in O&M specialists since 2004, even though the number of students needing O&M has increased by 8%.
- A 7% reduction in teachers for students with visual impairments (VI teachers) since 2004, yet students with visual impairments have increased by 3%
- Long-term planning for personnel needs are hampered by under-projecting actual attrition levels.
- The supply of Hispanic VI teachers is increasing, yet still not keeping pace with the student population in Texas. Almost all other measures of cultural diversity among professionals are losing ground and are not representative of the student population.
- The number of VI professionals needed within the next 2-3 years has risen sharply (34%) since 2004, indicating a need for coordinated, systematic recruiting and robust training programs.
- Universities are training at financial capacity. 118 VI professionals, many of who are already working under a probationary certificate, are currently in training programs.

Data was collected from the 20 regional education service centers and the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI). Because TSBVI serves all of Texas, the concentration of students and VI professionals is such that TSBVI data are collected separately from that of regional education service centers (ESCs). Unless otherwise noted TSBVI data is included in the data presented in this report.

Characteristics of VI professionals in Texas

The survey asked about the number of people *functioning* as VI professionals.

Number of VI professionals in Texas

This data has been gathered annually since 1996. Overall there has been growth in the number of individuals certified to serve students with visual impairments. However, again this year there were declines in the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) direct-service VI professionals. Additionally, this year's data show a reduction in individuals employed full-time as VI teachers and full-time as O&M specialists, as well as overall FTE positions. Information about how this data was collected is included in the Appendix.

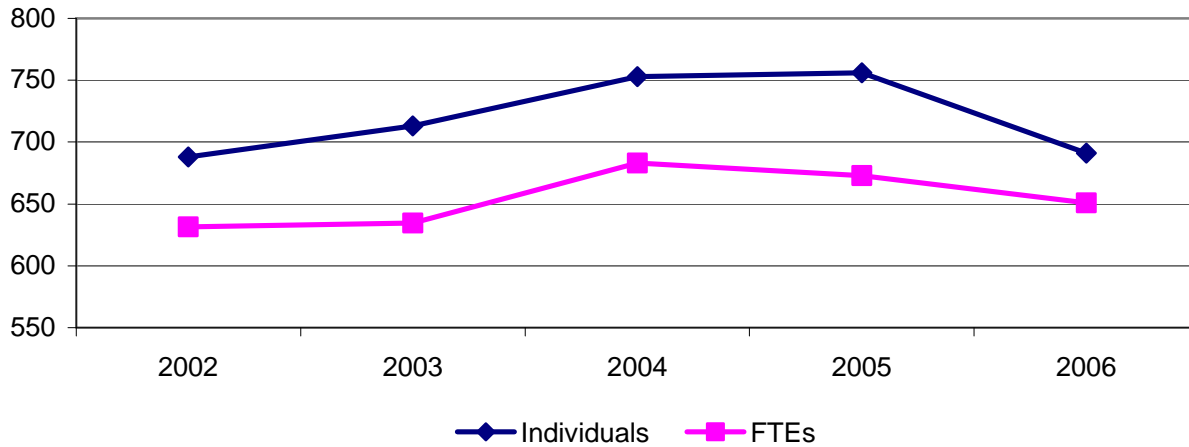
Total VI Professionals Statewide

	2004		2005		2006	
	Individuals	FTE ²	Individuals	FTE ²	Individuals	FTE ²
TSBVI Outreach ¹	21	20	21	19	21	19.5
ESC Leadership	24	18	29	21.2	32	22
VI and O&M service providers (adjusted for dually certified professionals)	753	683	756	673	691	651
Total VI Staff	798	721	806	713.2	744	692.5

¹ TSBVI outreach staff provide leadership technical assistance statewide. Educators at TSBVI 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

VI and O&M Service Providers Combined



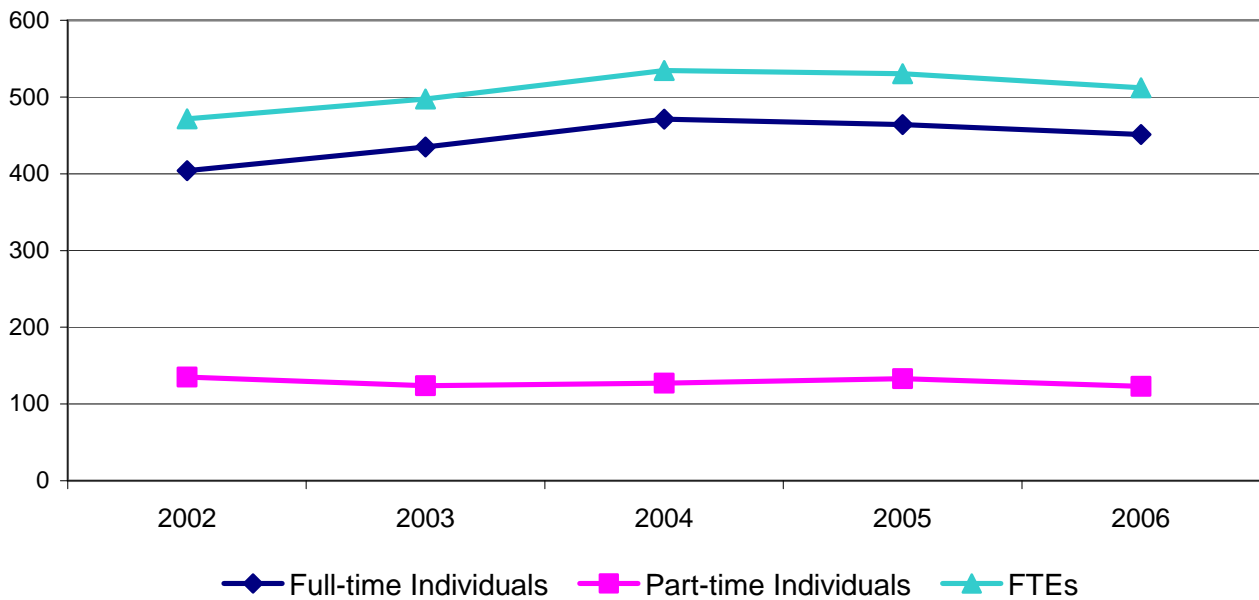
A 9% reduction in VI professionals since 2004, combined with a 6.1% increase in students with visual impairments limits students' access to skills critical for educational success.

Direct Service Providers: VI teachers (includes 62 dually certified VI professionals)

	2004		2005		2006	
	Individuals	FTE ¹	Individuals	FTE ¹	Individuals	FTE ¹
Full-time VI teachers	471		464		451	
Part-time VI teachers	127		133		123	
Total VI Staff	598	534.5	597	530.5	574	512.5

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

VI Teachers in Texas



A 4% overall reduction in VI teachers in conjunction with a 3% increase in students results larger caseloads and limits access to instruction and appropriate modifications. This will negatively affect:

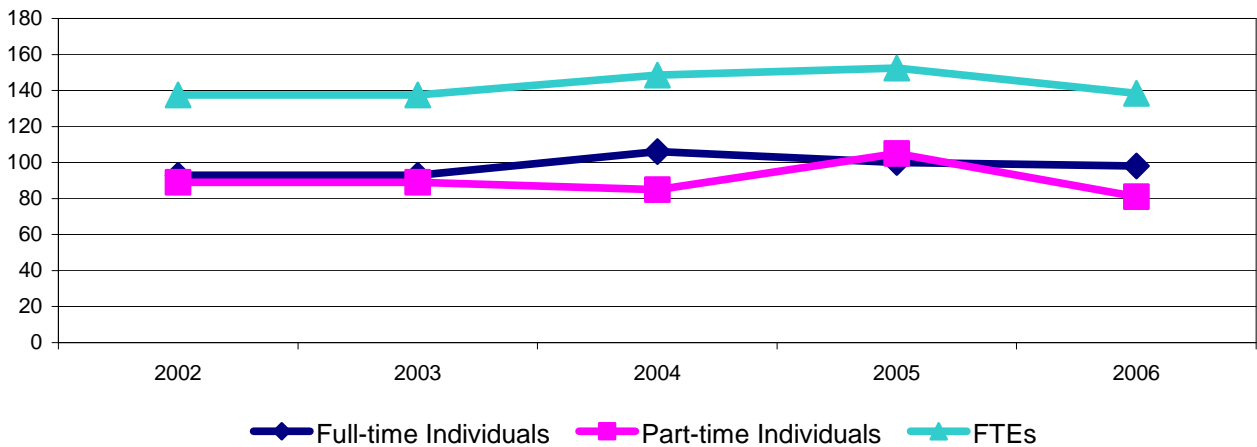
- TAKS participation,
- Passing rates, and
- Annual yearly progress.

Direct Service Providers: O&M specialists (includes 62 dually certified VI professionals)

	2004		2005		2006	
	Individuals	FTE ¹	Individuals	FTE ¹	Individuals	FTE ¹
Full-time O&M specialists	106		100		98	
Part-time O&M specialists	85		105		81	
Total O&M Staff	191	148.5	205	152.5	179	138.5

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

O&M Specialists in Texas



O&M skills are critical to independent functioning for all students. A 13% reduction in the availability of O&M specialists will take years to counteract. Students may graduate without appropriate transition skills.

This trend is very alarming. The training programs at Stephen F. Austin, Texas Tech University, and Region II Education Service Center are continuing to produce VI professionals. The programs are functioning at financial capacity. District administrators continue to report the need for and hiring of VI professionals. However, the number of full-time VI teachers and O&M specialists has been reduced. If people are desired, and more students are identified each year, why are fewer individuals employed as VI professionals, and fewer FTEs?

Dually certified VI professionals

Dually certified VI professionals are those who are certified both as an O&M specialist and as a VI teacher. While many professionals may hold both certifications, not all dually certified

professionals serve in both capacities. This survey gathers data only about those who *function* as a VI teacher and an O&M specialist. This year shows a reduction in the number of those who *function* as dually certified VI professionals. Dually certified professionals are unique and offer districts maximum flexibility. They also present challenges to administration and service provision. Since this survey only collects data about those who *function* as dually certified, the decline in the number of may reflect changes in function. It is too soon to know if it reflects an actual loss of dually certified VI professionals.

Dually Certified Professionals

	2004	2005	2006
Dually certified	72	72	62

New Positions and Attrition

New Positions

On average, the number of students increased by 3% a year, according to the Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments. In 2006 Texas experienced a significant growth in the number of new VI positions, nearly recovering from the 2005 decline. New positions for O&M and dually certified professionals remained the same. The increase in VI teachers resulted in a 36% increase in overall VI positions.

New Positions	2004	2005	2006
VI Teacher	28	17	26
O&M Specialist	12	5	5
Dual Certified	1	3	3
Total	41	25	34

Attrition Factors

Much has been written about the retiring and retention of educators. VI professionals are rare and difficult to find. Therefore retention is of critical concern. Unlike many disciplines, even other high-need areas like math, when a VI professional is unavailable there is no one who can help meet the student's needs. Because there are so few VI students, and fewer VI professionals, when a student has sub-standard access to critical services from a highly qualified VI professional student progress and independence will suffer. Several factors affect the VI fields.

- Most VI professionals are mid-career professionals with an average of seven years experience and are likely to have shorter careers in this field.

- Most educators and other likely candidates are unaware that the field exists. Therefore special recruitment challenges remain. People must be aware of the field and its possibilities before they can become a VI professional.
- It is not uncommon for people to need two or three years before they decide to initiate VI training, and then another one or two years to be trained.
- Because VI professionals are so rare in any single district a change of even one person can have dramatic effects on the annual yearly progress of students.
- Changes in the number of those who *function* as dually certified may reflect changes in function, and not an individual leaving the field.

As a result, it is important to consider and analyze the existing and projected attrition rates when considering personnel needs for the future.

Actual 1-Year Attrition

	2004	2005	2006
VI Teacher	31	23	23
O&M Specialist	7	4	5
Dual Certified	2	2	0
Total	40	29	28

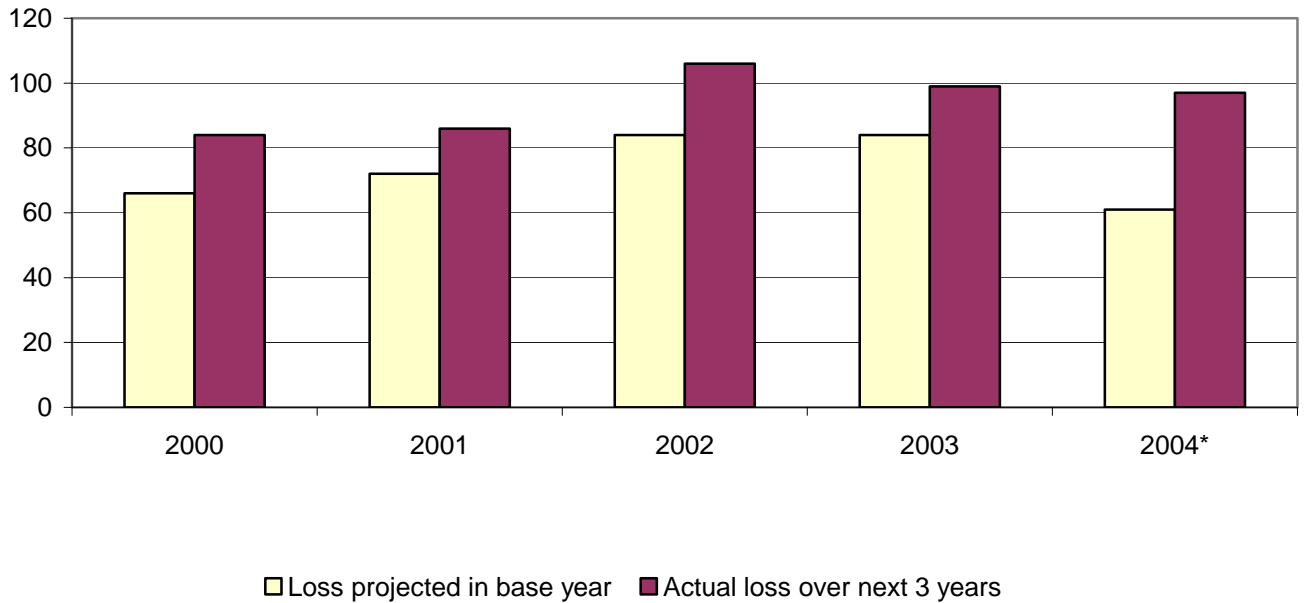
Under-projecting 3-year attrition can affect longer-term planning for VI professionals and discounts the time needed for recruitment and training

Projected 3-Year Attrition

	2004	2005	2006
VI Teacher	50	59	57
O&M Specialist	4	9	8
Dual Certified	7	11	14
Total	61	79	79

The number of professionals who have left the field and the number who are projected to leave within the next three years is available. Complete (3-year) data comparisons are available for the years 2000 – 2004. Of concern is the consistent under-projecting the number of VI professionals who actually leave the field within 3 years. The actual loss in the most recent and complete 3-year cycle of data (2004) shows that that the projection is short by 37% or 36 people. This is a significant difference. It may take one to two years to recruit a candidate, and another one to two years to get that person trained.

Projected vs. Actual Loss of VI Professionals Over Three Years



* 2004 was the last year for which there is a complete set of data available.

Direct service from ESCs

Each regional service center (ESC) provides an array of services to districts. Some services include direct services to students with visual impairments: where the ESC staff is listed on the IEP. Of the 12 regions that provide any type of direct services, four provide VI services to 209 students. Twelve regions provide direct O&M services to 227 students. Thirty-five students receive both VI and O&M services from the ESC. The number of ESCs providing direct services dropped this year from 14 to 12.

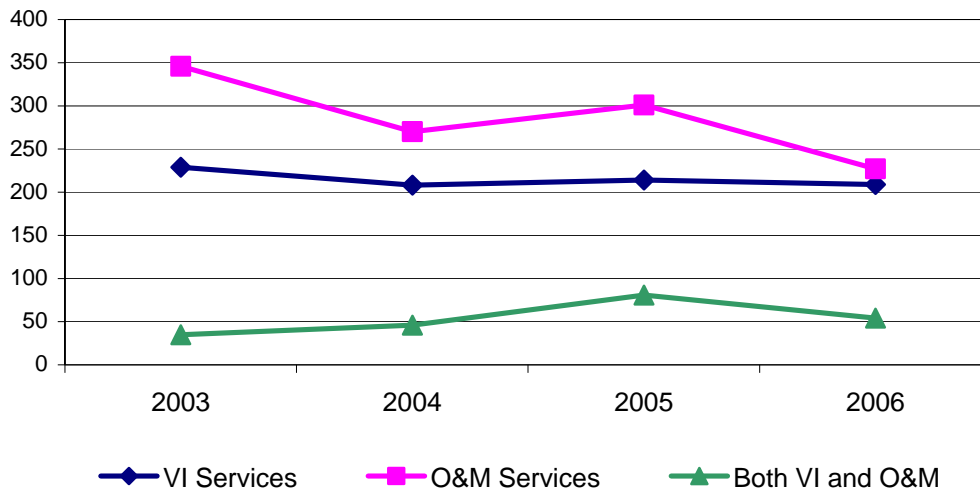
The reduction in direct services from ESCs may reflect:

- Diminished ESC capacity,
- Change in ESC policy, and/or
- Increased district capacity to meet their own needs.

Students receiving services from ESCs

	2004	2005	2006
VI services (4 regions)	208	214	209
O&M services (12 regions)	270	301	227
Both VI and O&M	46	81	54
Total	524	596	490

Students Receiving Services from ESCs



Cultural diversity

Texas is a diverse state and needs 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 are listed below.

Hispanic VI professionals

	2004	2005	2006
VI teachers	53	55	64
O&M specialists	4	7	6
Dually certified	6	5	9

Spanish-speaking VI professionals

	2004	2005	2006
VI teachers	62	53	65
O&M specialists	9	7	6
Dually certified	8	8	9

African-American VI professionals

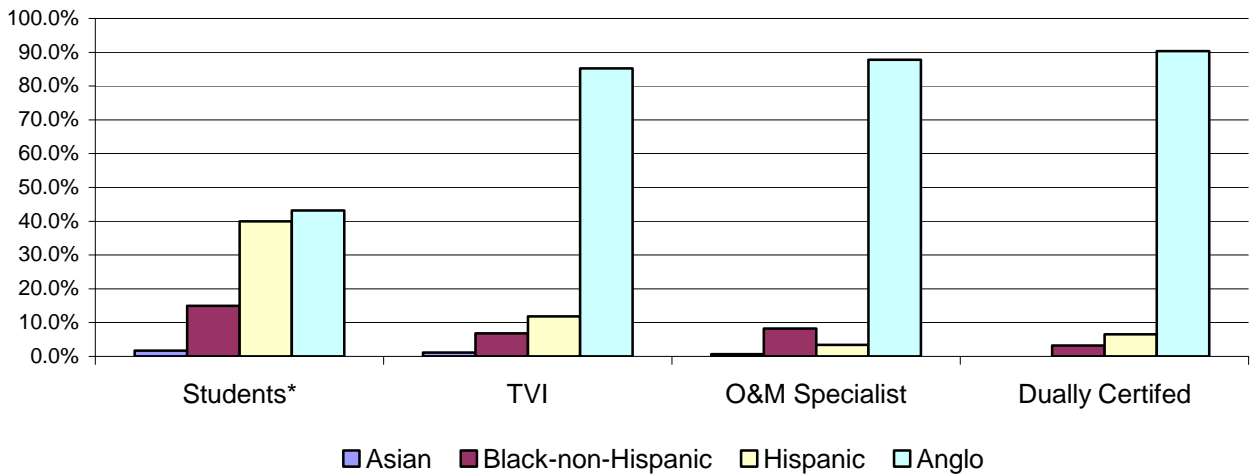
	2004	2005	2006
VI teachers	12	10	10
O&M specialists	11	11	12
Dually certified	3	3	2

Asian VI professionals

	2004	2005	2006
VI teachers	3	3	6
O&M specialists	0	0	1
Dually certified	0	0	0

Progress in having a culturally diverse work has been made in the Hispanic and Asian VI teacher and African-American O&M groups. However much work remains to be done. A comparison of the workforce and students with visual impairments shows significant disparities in all non-Anglo ethnicities and professions.

Comparison of Ethnicity of Students and VI Professionals



* Student data taken from the 2006 Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments

Anticipated Need

Interpreting and understanding need relies on several factors. Typically these include the number of posted positions, recommendations from knowledgeable professionals and recommended student/teacher ratios. Below are data from each of these areas.

Posted positions

The respondents at each ESC and at TSBVI were asked how many part- and full-time positions were posted in their regions or at TSBVI in September. This data were collected in September after all regular hiring for the academic year has been completed. These positions remained unfilled and active, or were developed after the start of the school year. The figures reflect postings for part- and full-time staff.

Posted positions

	2004	2005	2006
VI teachers	24	16	25
O&M specialists	4	7	6
Dually certified	0	1	1
TOTAL	28	24	32

Over time the number of posted positions has not showed a significant change. In 1996 the numbers were very similar. Research completed in 1997, 2001, and 2005 (Dignan, TSBVI) indicated that special education administrators are willing to advocate for new or additional VI professionals based on their confidence they can fill the positions. In other words, if administrators are confident they can fill a position, they will post one. Therefore, this has not been a good indicator of true need.

Recommendations by knowledgeable professionals

VI consultants were asked how many VI teachers, O&M specialists, and dually certified personnel were needed in their region, in addition to those already in training. Regional VI consultants are considered to be experts in the needs of their region. The results are indicated in the table below.

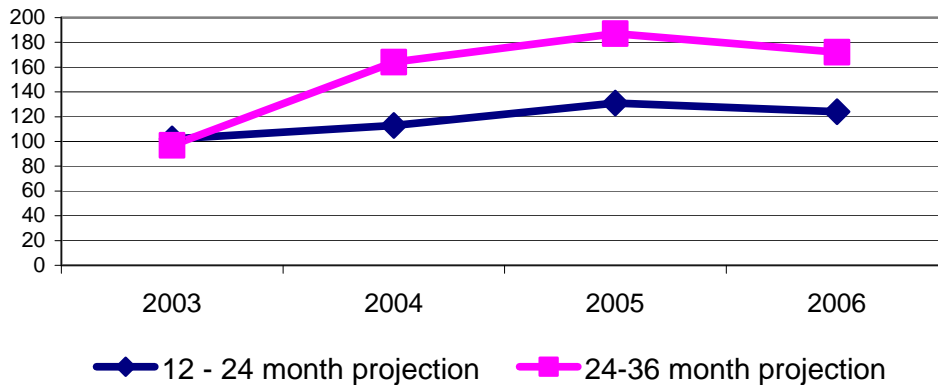
Needed within 12 months

	2004	2005	2006
VI teachers	77	85	76
O&M specialists	28	32	32
Dually certified	8	15	16

Needed within 24-36 months

	2004	2005	2006
VI teachers	82	104	110
O&M specialists	31	50	32
Dually certified	51	33	16

Projected Need for VI Professionals



The number of VI teachers desired within the next 24-36 months has risen sharply over the past two years. It is possible that the VI consultants are either anticipating or witnessing the accelerating rate of retirements as well as growth in the student population. These figures, in conjunction with the 2-year reduction in FTEs available in Texas and the continued unanticipated high attrition rates, indicate a strong and continuous need for VI professionals.

Recommendations using a caseload formula

The American Foundation for the Blind's *Program Planning and Evaluation for Blind and Visually Impaired Students: National guidelines for educational excellence* (1989), and the *National Plan for Training Personnel to Serve Children with Blindness and Low Vision* recommends that caseloads for VI teachers and O&M specialists be restricted to 8 – 12 students per full-time equivalent (FTE) position.

VI teachers

In January 2006, there were 7,762 students with visual impairment in Texas identified on the *Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments*. Based on that figure, and in light of the suggested 8 – 12 students per teacher ratio, Texas has a need for between 647 and 970 full-time equivalent direct service VI teachers. Currently there are 512.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) VI teachers. Therefore Texas is lacking between 134 and 457 (FTE) VI teachers. (The mean of this range is 296 FTEs.)

In 2006, 124 VI professionals were in training; likely more than any other state. Universities and alternative certification programs are at their fiscal capacity. Yet, we are unable to keep up with the need for VI professional or match cultural diversity goals.

This does not accommodate for the number of *individuals* needed. Approximately 21% of the VI teacher workforce is employed as a VI teacher on a part-time basis. (Of the 123 part-time VI teachers, 31 are dually certified; the remaining either contract with the district or employed in some other capacity.)

In 2006, 89 people started their training as VI teachers. Most of these people will seek probationary certification. Typically these individuals were employed in a district as a special educator, and simply transfer to a VI position.

O&M specialists

Determining the need based on a comparison of the data for orientation and mobility services is more complicated. According to the American Foundation for the Blind, 8 - 12 students is the recommended caseload for O&M specialists. However, not all students need O&M services each year.

According to the *Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments*, 2263 students were receiving O&M services in January of 2006. If we assume that all students who would benefit from O&M currently receive it, and base the calculations on the suggested 8 –12 students per teacher ratio, Texas has a need for between 189 and 236 full-time equivalent O&M specialists. With 138.5 full-time equivalent O&M specialists, Texas is lacking between 50 and 146 (FTE) O&M specialists. (The mean of this range is 97 FTEs.) However it must be noted that, given the shortage cited above, not all student who could benefit from O&M may be receiving it.

Each year Texas has approximately 31 people start O&M training, certainly more than almost any other state. Assuming no growth in need for services, and that all candidates complete training, internship and certification, it would take 4.5 years to meet the current need.

The impact of part-time O&M specialists is more significant than VI teachers. Approximately 43% of the O&M specialists in Texas provide services on a part-time basis. These individuals may be dually certified or be private contractors, working with other districts or the Division for Blind Services (DBS). Therefore, even the lowest estimated need for 50 O&M specialists should be considered *very* conservative. The number of individuals needed to fill 50 FTE positions would be much higher. At present, Texas has 31 people in O&M training.

VI professionals needed based on caseload formula (Mean of range)

	2004	2005	2006
VI teachers	225	268	296
O&M specialists	58	65	97

Results of data from special education administrators

In April 2005 special education administrators received a questionnaire that focused on personnel issues in visual impairments. The final result represents data from 171 respondents, or 35.3% of the administrators in public schools. An analysis of the respondents indicated that they were highly representative of administrators statewide. As a result there was a high degree of confidence that the data was indicative of statewide needs.

The complete report is available on the TSBVI website (<http://www.tsbvi.edu/pds/spedir-survey.pdf>). Below is a summary of those findings.

- 62% of the respondents identified a need for additional VI teachers either in their districts or at the regional education service center (ESC).
- 60% of the respondents identified a need for more O&M specialists either in their districts or at the regional education service center (ESC).
- Directors identified a need for **229 VI teachers** and **119 O&M specialists** (for a total of 348 additional VI professionals) in districts in Texas.
- 58% of the participants would like to see more VI teacher and/or O&M expertise at the ESCs.
- 77% of those who have tried to hire a VI professional report that recruiting VI professionals is either very or moderately difficult.

Additionally, for the 3rd time in eight years, administrators reported that their willingness to advocate for a new or additional VI professional is directly related to their confidence that the position will be filled in a timely fashion. In other words, directors want to be confident that a position can and will be filled prior to advocating for a new or additional position. This has a dramatic impact on identifying need for VI professionals. Reliance on direct statements of needs, such as those reviewing posted vacancies is not a strong predictor of need in this field.

The findings highlighted above confirm that Texas has a continuing and significant need both for VI professionals and to increase its capacity to effectively recruit VI professionals.

Summary

This report reviewed characteristics of, and indicators of need for VI professionals. In September 2006, Texas had 744 individuals providing vision-related services, either directly to students or in a leadership and/or technical assistance capacity. After adjusting for dually certified professionals (62) there are 691 individuals providing direct-service either on a full- or part-time basis. Overall, this is a decrease of 65 individuals or 9.4% of direct-service providers. The total includes the following full-or part-time individuals:

- 530 VI teachers (512 FTEs)
- 179 O&M specialists, (138.5)
- 62 dually certified professionals.

In addition, there are:

- 52 leadership/technical assistance specialists (or 41.5 FTEs)

In September 2006 there were only 10 VI teachers, 12 O&M specialists, and two dually certified professionals who are African-American. The Hispanic VI professionals included 64 VI teachers, five O&M specialists and four dually certified professionals. Sixty-five VI teachers, seven O&M specialists and eight dually certified professionals speak Spanish. This number has not shown a dramatic increase over time. While the number of VI professionals has increased significantly since 1996, the cultural diversity of those professionals has remained fairly stagnant.

This report included the number of “posted” positions in September. However, this is not considered a reliable or accurate indicator of need. The numbers are too low to be reliable and have proven to be a poor predictor of need. Data and experience indicates that posting and hiring practices are directly related to confidence that a position can be filled. These data are valuable as a crude indicator that a need exists even after the start of the school year.

Relying solely on use of a formula also poses problems. Formulas address only full-time equivalent positions. In Texas use of part-time or dually certified personnel is a valuable option for serving children with visual impairments. Sole reliance on a method that only measures FTEs does not address the need for part-time or dually certified VI professionals. Part-time and dually certified VI professionals increase the flexibility of local staff and may assist students in getting more frequent service.

This report considers the recommendations of the VI specialists at the regional service centers and the need identified by special education administrators to be the best indicators of real need in Texas. These professionals have extensive knowledge of their districts and region.

Comparison of Methods for Determining Need

Method for determining need	VI teachers	O&M specialists	Dually certified
Posted vacancies (full- and part-time)	16 individuals	7 individuals	1 individuals
Regional VI consultant recommendations (placed within 36 months)	104 individuals	50 individuals	33 individuals
Special education administrators' needs	229 individuals	119 individuals	Not applicable
Caseload formula	268 FTEs	65 FTEs	Not applicable

Four indicators of need were reviewed in this document: posted vacancies, recommendations by regional consultants, VI professionals desired by special education administrators, and caseload formulas. All provided very different data. While each source reveals 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 considerable need for VI professionals, and that the need will continue to grow. These needs must be met if students with visual impairments are to succeed.

Appendix

Methodology

The survey asked about the number of people *functioning* as VI professionals. These individuals may be VI teachers, 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 in leadership or technical assistance roles may be full- or part-time capacity. VI professionals may w Texas employs both full- and part-time VI professionals. Full-time professionals are those who work .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 workforce (21% of the VI teachers and 45% 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, which is a combination of VI teachers and O&M professionals. Data on each profession is also included separately. When appropriate, data on dually certified VI professionals is also presented.

People who provide 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 VI teachers 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.