

2009 Summary of Need for VI Professionals in Texas

Compiled by KC Dignan, PhD

Introduction

Since 1996 the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired has conducted an annual survey to assess the need for VI professionals in Texas. "VI professionals" includes teachers certified in visual impairments (VI teachers) and certified orientation and mobility specialists (O&M). Individuals with both certifications are referred to as "dually certified." This report will provide information about the results of the survey conducted in September 2009.

The most striking findings include:

- A comparison of VI professionals in Texas since 1996 indicates an 87.2 increase in the past 14 years.
- In 2009, the total number of full- and part-time VI professionals increased to 949 or a 12.7% increase since 2008.
 - The number of full- and part-time VI teachers increased to 701, or a 20% increase. The number of FTEs increased from 511.5 to 596.
 - However, this increase was not mirrored in the O&M data, which saw a reduction of 5% in the number of individuals available.
- For the first time in 9 years the rate of attrition within the past year decreased. However, 115 or 12% of VI professionals are projected to leave the field within the next 3 years.
- The number of new positions created is not keeping pace with growth. With an average VI student increase of 3%, we need to plan not only for attrition, but growth, just to keep pace with current levels of services.
- Excluding one region which changed its service delivery model, the number of new VI teachers was the lowest change since this data was first collected in 2000, a mere 19 new VI teachers.
- The cultural diversity of VI professionals is changing improving. While the diversity is similar to other educators in Texas, it is not keeping pace with the student population.
- Universities are training as many VI professionals as funds allow. There are 150 VI professionals in a post-baccalaureate program either as VI teachers or O&M specialists. There are 11 undergraduate students in training.

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.

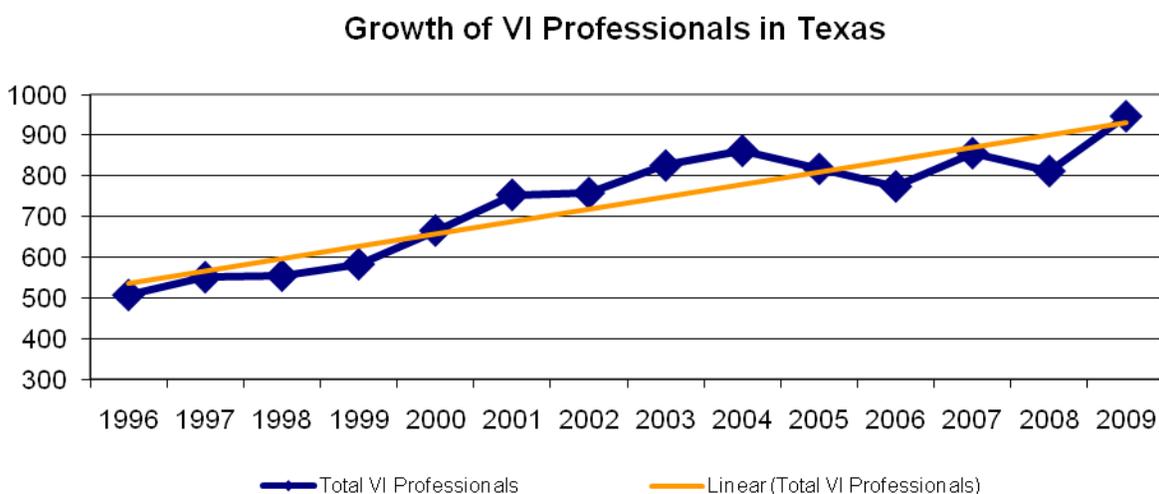
More information about how this data was collected is included in the Appendix.

Characteristics of VI professionals in Texas

The survey asked about the number of people *functioning* as VI professionals. Similarly, many professionals may have certification as both a teacher certified in visual impairments (TVI or VI teacher) and an orientation and mobility (O&M) specialist. However, not all such dually certified professionals function in both capacities every year. Only data on those who are functioning as dually certified is collected.

Number of VI professionals in Texas

This data has been gathered annually since 1996. Over a 13 year-span the number has increased dramatically. This year the number of VI professionals in Texas has increased by 87.2% since 1996. A chart showing the changes is below.



Since 1996, the number of VI professionals in Texas has increased by 87.2%.

Table 1: Total VI Professionals Statewide

	2007		2008		2009	
	Individuals	FTE ²	Individuals	FTE ²	Individuals	FTE ²
TSBVI Outreach ¹	23	21.5	23	21.5	23	21.5
ESC Leadership ¹	32	20.4	34	24	32	22.2
VI and O&M service providers (adjusted for dually certified professionals)	802	712.5	756	679	894	767.5
Total VI Staff	857	754.4	813	724.5	949	811.2

¹ TSBVI outreach and ESC consulting VI staff provide leadership/technical assistance statewide or within their region as part of their responsibilities. Educators at TSBVI or ESCs who provide direct educational service to students with visual impairments are counted as "VI and O&M direct service providers".

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

Direct service providers

Below are data about direct service providers. Direct service providers include VI teachers, O&M specialists and dually certified personnel who work with students on a regular basis and are the teacher of record for issues related to visual impairments.

This does not include those people at the regional education service centers (ESCs) who provide vision-related leadership or technical assistance as part of their responsibilities. The ESC leadership VI staff provides an array of services specifically related to students with visual impairments. Other responsibilities may include more general tasks related to low-performing schools, state accountability measures and transition. These responsibilities vary from ESC to ESC.

For the purposes of this survey, professionals who are certified in both visual impairments and orientation and mobility (dually certified) are counted as a part-time VI teacher and a part-time O&M specialist. These specialists will show up in the VI teacher data and the O&M data. All of the totals below about part-time VI professionals include both dually certified professionals. Information about the number of combined direct service providers has been adjusted for dually certified professionals.

A review of the data over time indicates growth over the past 5 years. However, a more detailed analysis showed an increased reliance on part-time VI professionals.

Table 2: Direct Service Provider: VI teachers

	2007		2008		2009	
	Individuals	FTE ¹	Individuals	FTE ¹	Individuals	FTE ¹
Full-time VI teachers	476		437		492	
Part-time VI teachers	75		82		144	
Dually certified VI professionals	72		67		65	
Total VI Staff	623	549.5	586	511.5	701	596.5

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

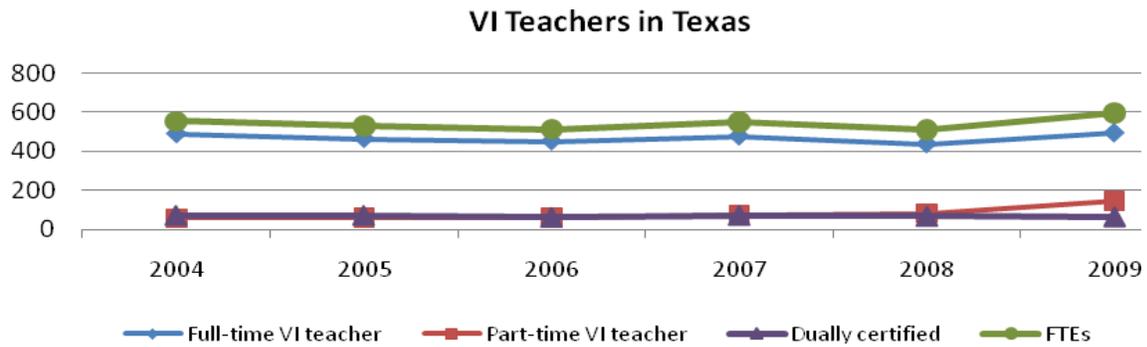
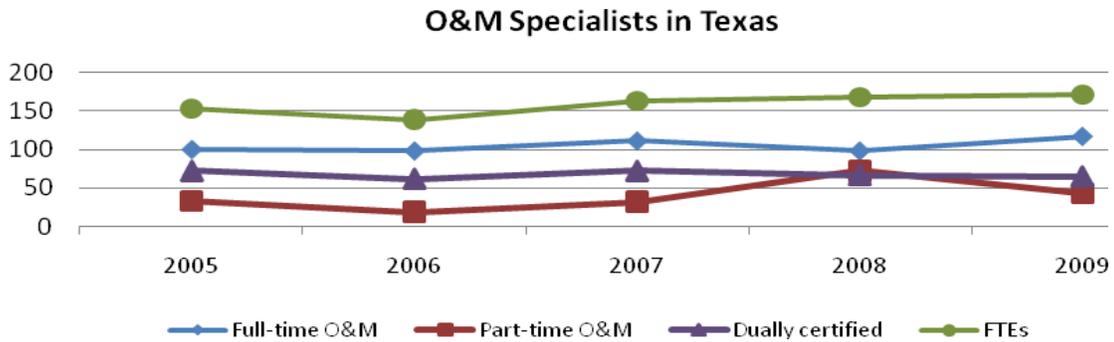


Table 3: Direct Service Providers: O&M specialists

	2007		2008		2009	
	Individuals	FTE ¹	Individuals	FTE ¹	Individuals	FTE ¹
Full-time O&M specialists	111		98		117	
Part-time O&M specialists	32		72		43	
Dually certified VI professionals	72		67		65	
Total O&M Staff	215	163	237	167.5	225	171

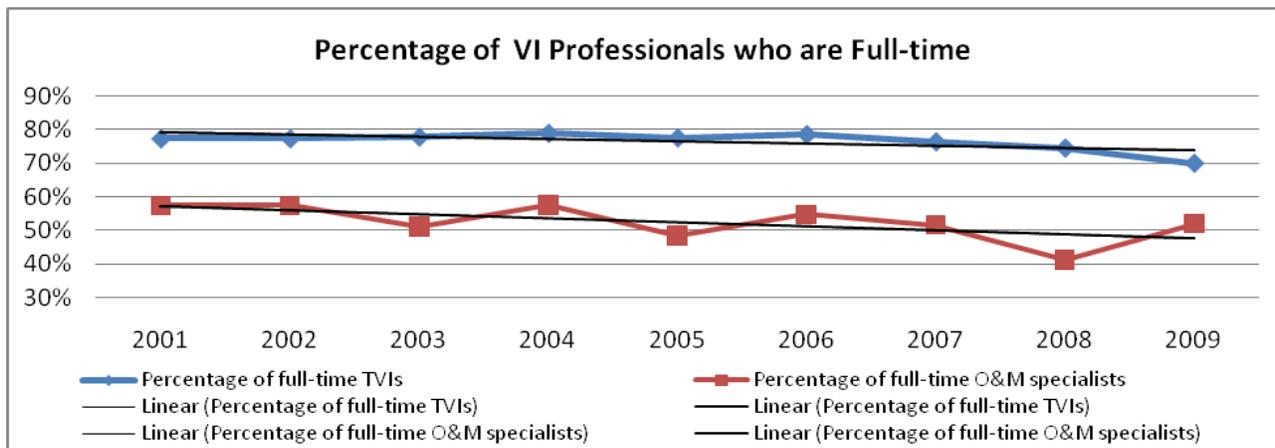
1. FTE = .part-time x .5 + full-time for all charts



Part-time VI professionals have advantages and disadvantages.

- They allow a district to meet the district’s needs for a small number of students.
- They may be either employed by the district on a part-time contractual basis or have duties related to visual impairments as a portion of their full-time student caseload.

Either way, due to other commitments and/or responsibilities part-time staff are at-risk for not being able to provide the full caseload management, specifically instruction designed for and consultation needed for students to maximize their independence.



The prevalence of a full-time VI teacher has been fairly consistent until recently. From an initial 77% in 2001 it stayed in the 77% - 78% range until 2007, with the high point being 78.6% in 2004. In 2007 it dropped to 76.4% and has been dropping steadily ever since. Currently only 69.6%, are full-time; a decrease of nearly 10% since 2004. This year the number of part-time VI teachers (including dually certified specialists) jumped from 149 to 209, a 40% increase.

The scenario is quite different for O&M services. The overall number of O&M specialists decreased by 5%. However, the percentage of full-time O&M specialists increased.

In 2001 57% of O&M specialists were employed full-time. The percentage of full-time O&M specialists reached a low in 2008 (41%) and increased in 2009 to 52%. While the increase is appreciated, it does not indicate an overall growth in the number of full-time O&M specialists who are able to dedicate all their time to working with children.

It is difficult to project the implications of this change. A statistical trend line indicates that overall, the prevalence of full-time VI professionals is decreasing. One large region reported a significant increase in part-time VI teachers. It could be due to data collection techniques necessary in the large region. It may also be due to anecdotal reports that a number of VI professionals have retired from their full-time position and are now working as part-time contract staff in another district. Yet, VI professionals who are fractured by other responsibilities and responding to different employers may also be challenged when it comes to 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.



In 2009, the number of part-time VI teachers (including dually certified specialists) jumped from 149 to 209, a 40% increase.

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* both as a VI teacher and an O&M specialist. This year's data shows a slight decrease from last year. Since 2004 the number has fluctuated between 72 and 62. This year it was less than the two previous years: 65. This change is not considered significant. It likely reflects a shift in staffing needs within districts.

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 students for a particular year. The changes between 2006 and 2008 likely reflect changes in staffing needs statewide.

At first glance, hiring staff who are dually certified may seem highly desirable. However, dually certified professionals also face unique challenges and best succeed when administrators have an understanding of both professions. The temptation is for administrators to assign dually

certified professionals a full time VI caseload and a full-time or even part-time O&M caseload. Since these are two separate professions, there is evidence that this is rarely successful at meeting the student’s needs in both areas. The students’ learning will be compromised. The VI professionals will be frustrated and may leave the district for a more reasonable caseload.

Table 4: Dually Certified Professionals

	2007	2008	2009
Dually certified	72	67	65

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; the ESC staff is listed on the IEP. Of the 10 regions that provide **any type** of direct services, 3 provide VI services to 131 students. Ten regions provide direct O&M services to 178 students. Fifty-two additional students receive both VI and O&M services from the ESC.

The number of ESCs providing direct services decreased this year from 13 to 10. Changes in regional service delivery are typically a reflection of changes in district and/or ESC philosophy or capacity. One region has changed their service plan and will no longer be providing any direct VI services, but continues with O&M. Another region has an O&M vacancy and is not able to provide services. Once that vacancy is filled it plans to reinstate its O&M services. It is anticipated that the number of ESCs who provide direct services will change next year.

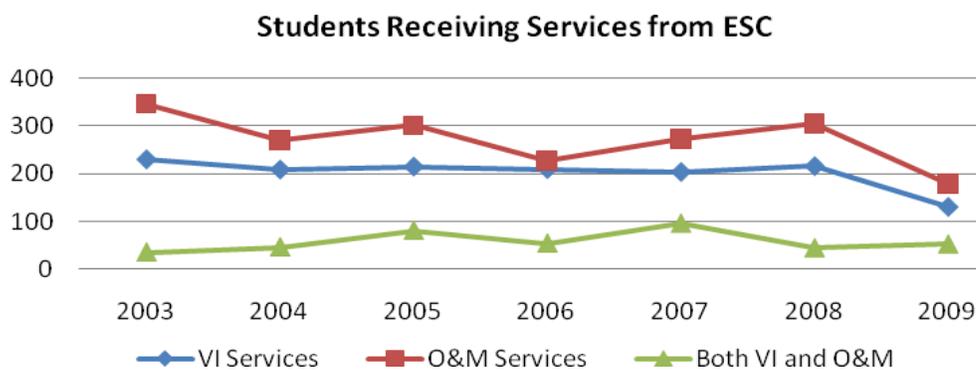


Table 6: Students Receiving Services from ESCs

	2007	2008	2009
VI- only services (3 regions)	203	215	131
O&M-only services (10 regions)	273	304	178
Both VI and O&M (3 regions)	96	44	52
Total	522	563	361

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.

Table 7: Culturally Diverse VI Professionals**Hispanic VI professionals**

	2007	2008	2009
VI teachers	63	67	72
O&M specialists	9	10	10
Dually certified	8	3	7
Total	80	80	89

Spanish-speaking VI professionals

	2007	2008	2009
VI teachers	68	75	84
O&M specialists	14	12	12
Dually certified	10	8	9
Total	92	95	105

African-American VI professionals

	2007	2008	2009
VI teachers	17	18	23
O&M specialists	10	9	11
Dually certified	1	0	1
Total	28	27	35

Asian VI professionals

	2007	2008	2009
VI teachers	4	5	8
O&M specialists	0	0	0
Dually certified	0	0	1
Total	4	5	9

This year there were overall increases in all areas of cultural diversity. Some individual categories maintained, while others increased.

In September 2009 there were 23 VI teachers, 11 O&M specialists, and one dually certified professional who are African-American, for an overall increase of 30%. The Hispanic VI professionals included 72 VI teachers, 10 O&M specialists and seven dually certified professionals, increasing their numbers by 11%. Eighty-four VI teachers, 12 O&M specialists and nine dually certified professionals speak Spanish. This is an increase of 11% from last year.

As of 2009, there are now eight Asian VI teachers, and one Asian dually certified VI professional. While the numbers are very small, it does represent an eighty percent increase.

With the progress made from the previous year, VI professionals are now moving into parity with educators in Texas. However, nationally recruiting and retaining culturally diverse educators remains a serious problem.

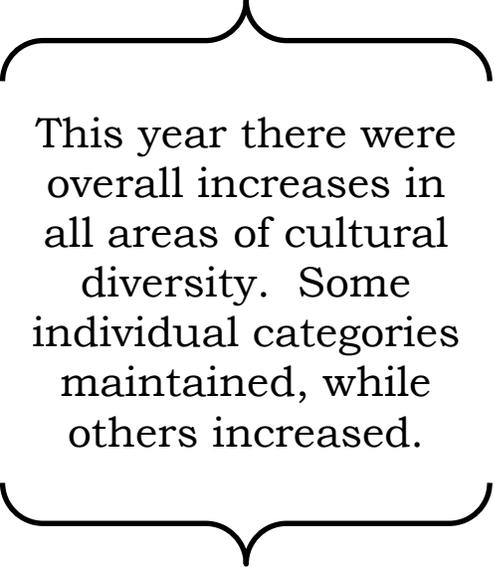
New Positions and Attrition

New Positions

According to the *Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments*, the number of students has increased by an average of 3% a year. Data about new positions to meet the increasing need has been collected since 2000. The number of new positions is an indication of Texas' ability to meet the expanding need for VI professionals. Texas showed significant growth in 2003 and 2007 (31 and 37 new positions respectively). The lowest number of new positions occurred in 2005.

In 2009, the number of new positions increased for VI teachers but significantly declined for O&M specialists and dually certified staff. Meanwhile, 135 additional students are receiving O&M services. There was only a single new O&M position to meet the needs of these new students. Using a standard recommended formula for caseloads, this caseload growth should have resulted in at least 11 full-time-equivalent (FTE) positions for O&M specialists. Given that 48% of O&M specialists are employed by districts on a part-time basis, 11 FTEs is more likely to represent 14 individuals with O&M certificates needed to serve the increase.

It is likely that some part-time O&M specialists have increased their time with districts. However it is impossible to estimate if those increases are enough to meet the needs of all of these new students.



This year there were overall increases in all areas of cultural diversity. Some individual categories maintained, while others increased.

New VI Positions

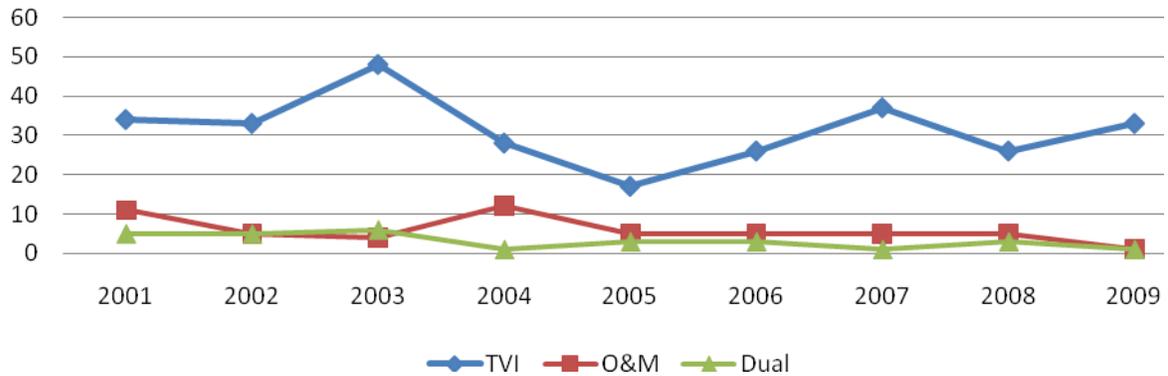


Table 7: New VI Positions 2005-2009

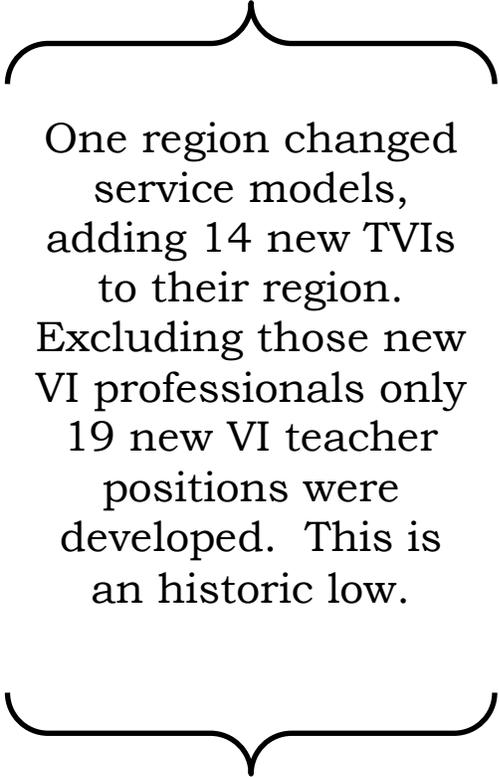
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
VI Teacher	17	26	37	26	33
O&M Specialist	5	5	5	5	1
Dual Certified	3	3	1	2	1
Total	25	34	43	33	35

The increase in new VI positions is very encouraging. This is due, in part, to a change in service delivery model in one region. Previously the ESC staff had been providing the majority of the VI services to the districts in that region. As of 2009 there are 14 new VI professionals in that region. This was the first time since 2003 that this region had developed any new VI positions. So this is, indeed, a significant development.

However, removing the new VI teachers from that region, only 19 new TVI or 21 total positions were created statewide. This is a serious decrease from previous years. In fact, it is the lowest number of new positions statewide since data collection was started in 2000. It is hoped that improvements in the economy and increases in the availability of training stipends will help reverse this contraction.

In 2009, there was only a single new O&M position to meet the needs of 135 new students who are receiving O&M and are registered on the *Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments*.

Texas has been able to provide stipends for those seeking university training in visual impairments since 2001. However the funds remained flat until September 2009. In the meantime, the tuition has increased by more than 100% since 2001. As a result, fewer stipends were available, causing some students to assume the cost of the tuition, seek funding elsewhere, or not receive training. Having access to a training program and funds for stipends has proven to be a significant factor in attracting students. It is possible that the limited funds have had an effect on administrators' ability to identify a future VI professional and enrollment in training programs. Adding a trend line indicates that, statistically, there is no evidence of overall growth in the number of new positions statewide. In fact, the number of reported new positions is decreasing.



One region changed service models, adding 14 new TVIs to their region. Excluding those new VI professionals only 19 new VI teacher positions were developed. This is an historic low.

Starting in September 2009 the amount of funds available to provide stipends has increased. Yet, even with the increase, the university programs are reporting applications beyond their ability to supply financial support. Texas still faces a challenge training an adequate number of VI professionals.

Attrition Factors

Much has been written about the existing and increasing rate of educators leaving the field. 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 there is no one with the specific expertise needed to assess and meet the blind students' unique educational needs. As a result, students' progress and independence may suffer when there is sub-standard access to critical services from a highly qualified professional.

Several factors affect recruiting and attrition in the VI fields. Below are some of those factors.

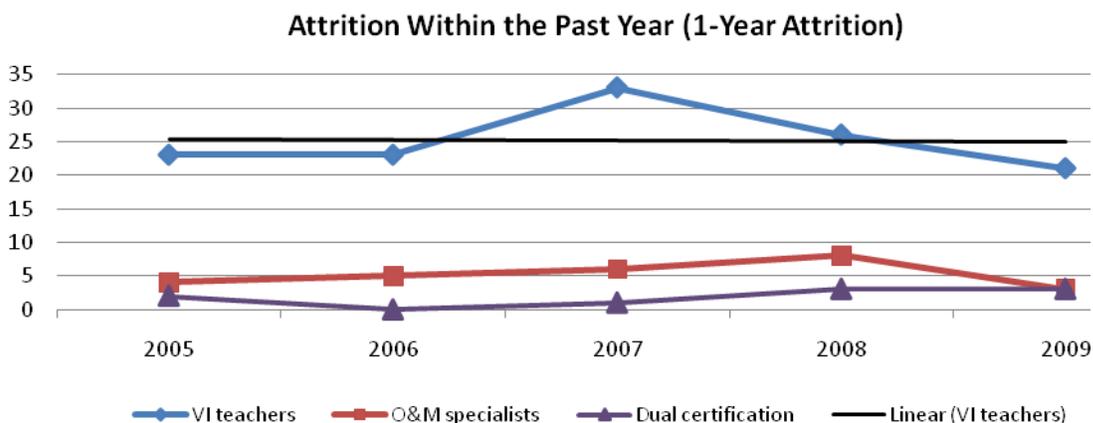
- Most VI professionals are mid-career professionals with an average of seven years of professional experience in other careers and are likely to have shorter careers in this second field.
- Most educators and other likely candidates are unaware that the field exists. Blindness is a low incidence field with a very small population. Therefore, special recruitment

challenges exist. People must be aware of the field and its possibilities before they can become a VI professional.

- It is not uncommon for mid-career professionals to need two or three years before they decide to initiate VI training, and then another one or two years to be trained. Making such a change mid-career is a big decision.
- In Texas there are two programs, more than most states. Most states don't even have a single program. Distance education options are making it easier to access training for mid-career professionals who may not be able to leave their home and jobs for training.
- Because VI professionals are so critical to student learning, a change of even one person, in any single district, can have dramatic effects on the annual yearly progress of students.
- Changes in the number of those who *function* as dually certified may or may not reflect attrition of dually certified professionals. Rather, it may reflect a change in how the VI professional functions this year.
- Economic factors drive attrition and hiring. The 2009 recession greatly affected the entire educational workforce. There are many reports of educators in general, and VI professionals in specific, delaying retirement for two to four years.

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

As a result, it is important to consider and analyze the existing and projected attrition rates when considering personnel needs for the future. Significant under-projecting 3-year attrition can affect longer-term planning for VI professionals and discounts the time needed for recruitment and training.



Attrition within the Past Year (1-Year attrition)

	2007	2008	2009
VI Teacher	33	26	21
O&M Specialist	6	8	3
Dual Certified	1	3	3
Total	40	37	27

This year (2009) was the second year that attrition decreased. While this may be a hopeful sign, changes in the economy must be considered. According to the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), Personnel Today (a human resource data organization) and other data sources report between 20% and 34% of expected retirees will be delaying retirement between three and six years. While it is always positive to retain VI professionals, one must wonder how this will impact the projected retirement. Will this delay exacerbate attrition in the near future? (www.gokcfew.org/newsletter/articles/slow_economy.htm, www.personneltoday.com/articles/2009/09/24/52306/recession-will-lead-to-delayed-retirement-workers-believe.html)

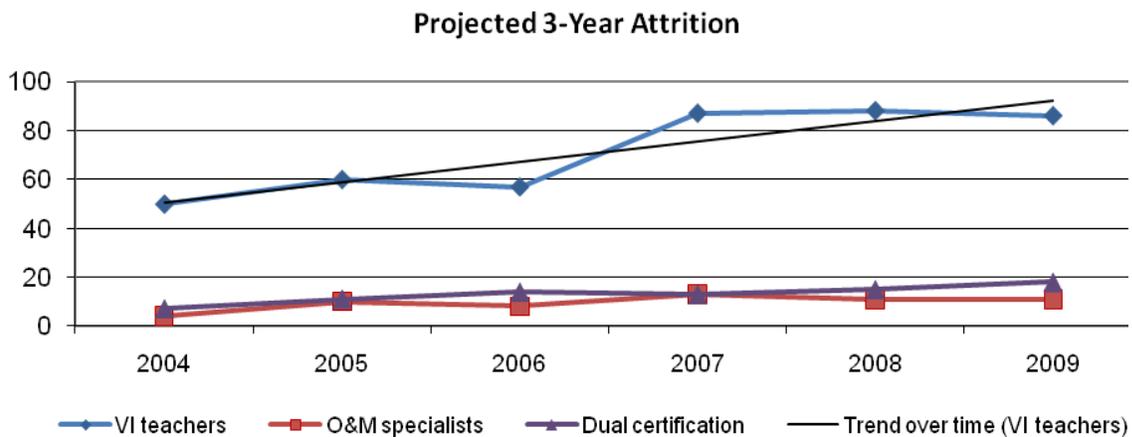
2009 was the first year that attrition decreased. While it is always positive to retain VI professionals, one must wonder how this will impact the projected retirement. Will this delay exacerbate attrition in the near future?

Projected 3-year attrition

In 2009, the VI consultants projected that 115 VI professionals will leave the field within the next 3 years. This means an estimated 12% of existing VI professionals will be retiring or moving to another profession or state. This data specifically addresses those who will **leave the field**, not move from school-employment to private contractual work.

At the same time, historical data indicates that students will increase by 3% per year over the next 3 years or by 768 more students by 2012. Using a standard caseload formula, an additional 80 FTEs with VI certification will be needed statewide to meet the growth. This is in addition to replacing the retiring VI teachers. If the current ratio of full-time to part-time individuals is applied, the number of individuals needed to result in 80 FTEs is likely to be closer to 98 certified individuals. As a result, we can project that Texas will need at least 219 individuals with VI certification in the next 3 years to replace those who are likely to leave and respond to anticipated growth.

Since 2001, when the first data was collected, the percentage of students who receive O&M services grows by approximately 1% per year. The 2009 census indicated that 32% receive O&M. It is projected in the next 3 years that 35%, or an additional 512 students, will need additional O&M. Applying a standard caseload formula this means an additional 53 FTEs will be necessary to meet the O&M needs. If the current ratio of full-time to part-time individuals is applied, the number of individuals needed to result in 53 FTEs is likely to be closer to 70. If this growth is combined with the 3 year projected attrition, it is likely Texas will need 89 more full- and part-time O&M specialists.



Projected 3-Year Attrition

Projections from:	2007	2008	2009
VI Teacher	87	88	86
O&M Specialist	13	11	11
Dual Certified	13	15	18
Total	113	114	115

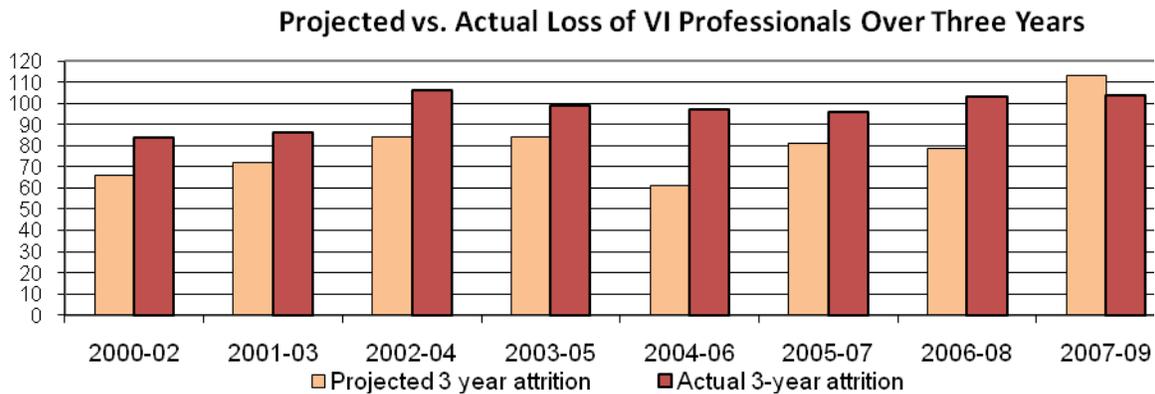
Projected vs. Actual Attrition

2007 saw a substantial increase in both actual attrition and projected 3-year attrition.

In 2007 the actual attrition increased dramatically, by 41%. The projected attrition also increased by 41%. Since that time, the estimates from the VI consultants have been more accurate at predicting attrition.

The actual loss in the most recent and complete 3-year cycle of data (2007 -2009) shows the projection was very close, off by 10 people or 9%. It is also the first year when the projections were greater than the actual attrition. Students with visual impairments may be benefiting from higher than average normal retention due to the current economic situation.

The table below compares projected versus actual attrition. A review of the projections by professional group shows where the significant (41%) increases in the 2007 projections occurred: the VI teachers and O&M specialists. It appears that the largest (proportional) variance between the projection and actual attrition was in the dually certified group (six of the 10). More VI teachers were also expected to leave the field than actually left. The O&M attrition was under-projected.



* 2007 is the last year for which a complete set of data is available.

Projected vs Actual loss of VI Professionals Over Three Years 2000 – 2009

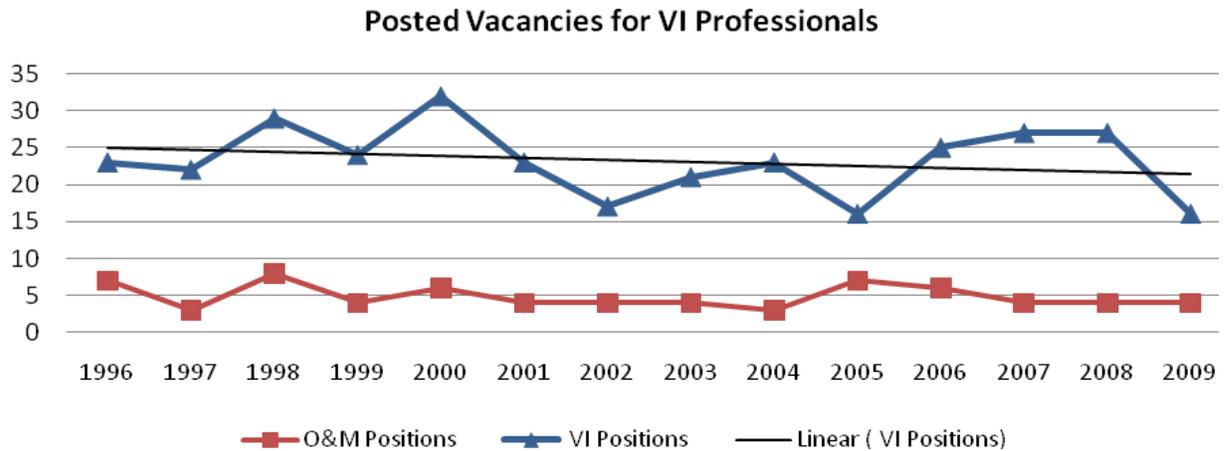
	2004 - 2006	2005 – 2007	2006 – 2008	2007 - 2009
Projected VI teacher	50	60	57	87
Actual VI teacher	77	79	82	80
Projected O&M specialist	4	10	8	13
Actual O&M specialist	16	15	19	17
Projected dually certified	7	11	14	13
Actually dually certified	4	3	4	7

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 was collected in October 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.



Posted positions 2007 - 2009

	2007	2008	2009
VI teachers	27	27	16
O&M specialists	4	4	4
Dually certified	1	0	0
TOTAL	32	31	20

Through the use of a statistical trend line, it is apparent that the number of posted positions has not showed a significant change since 1996, even with the drop in 2009. 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.

The chart above shows the posted level of need since 1996. Statistically, the trend of having unfilled posted positions in September is decreasing, and decreased substantially in 2009. This may be due to various factors, such as those listed below.

- Administrators are better able to recruit from within and enroll the candidate in a training program, thus avoiding the need to post a position.
- Administrators are able to recruit candidates prior to the start of the school year.
- Increases in the grant which funds VI training programs was substantially increased as of September, making it easier for candidates to start a program either in June or September.
- Administrators are not confident they will be able to fill a position, so they are reluctant to advocate for or post a new position.
- Due to economic factors administrators are reluctant to seek a VI professional.

Regardless of the reason, the numbers should not be considered without reflecting on the total number of VI professionals. In 1996 there were postings for 7 O&M specialists and 23 VI teachers. In 2009 there were 4 official O&M openings and 16 positions for VI teachers. In that same period, the total number of individuals working with students has risen from 487 to 894, an 87.2% increase in VI professionals. The percentage of unfilled positions is declining overall.

Furthermore, each year approximately 56 – 60 individuals complete training. Most have jobs waiting for them, either new positions or positions that have been vacated the year before. For all of these reasons, reviewing posted positions has not been a good indicator of true need for VI professionals.

Recommendations by knowledgeable professionals

VI consultants and TSBVI staff were asked how many VI teachers, O&M specialists, and dually certified personnel were needed in their area, 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.

Short-term Need: 12 – 24 months

	2007	2008	2009
VI teachers	68	76	56
O&M specialists	23	26	28
Dually certified	18	19	11
Total Need	109	121	95

Longer-term Need: 24-36 months

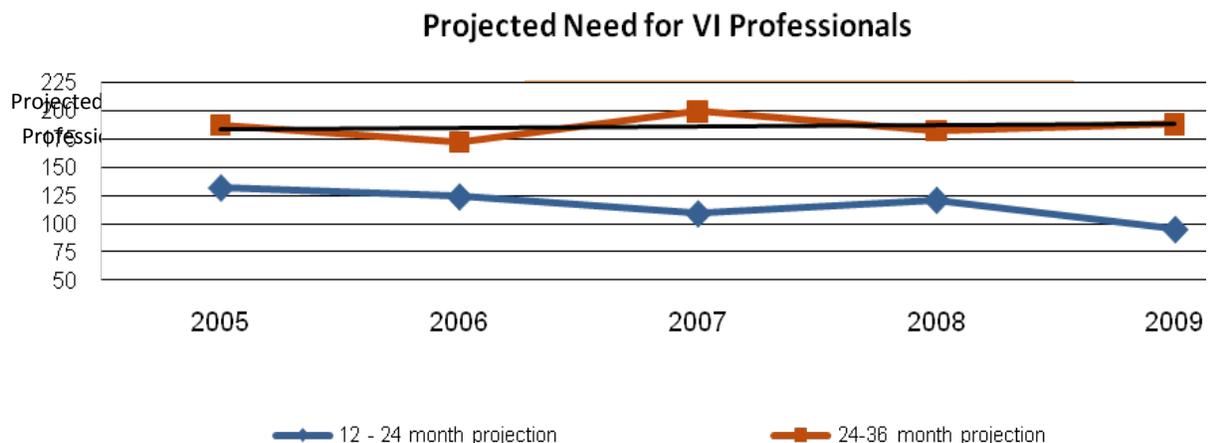
	2007	2008	2009
VI teachers	133	116	116
O&M specialists	40	42	46
Dually certified	26	26	26
Total Need	199	184	186

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

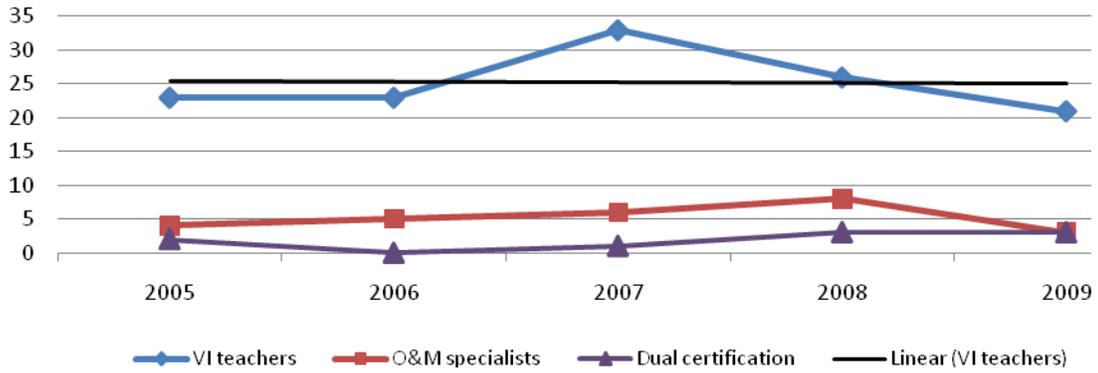
The reduction in shorter term need is not surprising especially since many VI professionals (and other educators) report that they are putting off retirement in hopes of an improving economy. The longer-term need has remained consistent for the past two years.

It is helpful to review the longer-term need (24-36 month) in conjunction with the 3-year actual and the projected attrition. While the numbers do vary from year to year in each domain, adding a statistical trend line can be helpful in evaluating the changes over time.

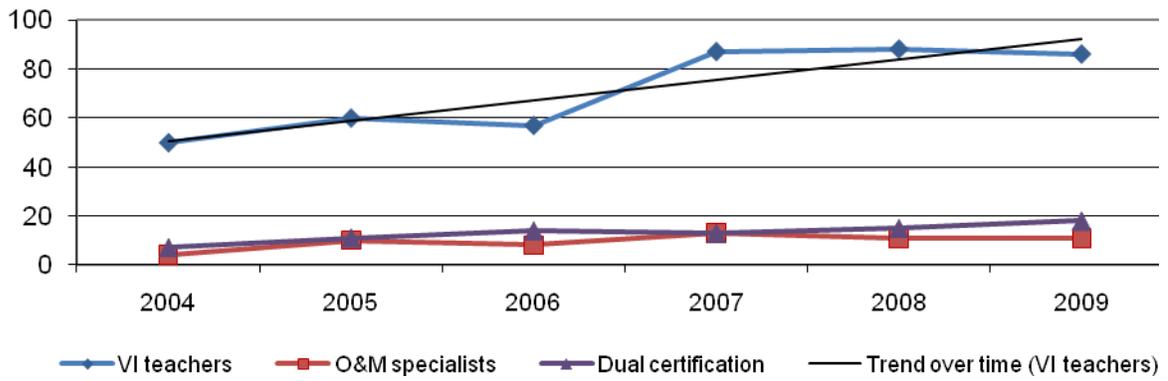
Below are tables showing attrition within the past year, projected attrition, and longer-term (36 months) need. The O&M and dually certified data remains essentially the same, showing little significant change from year to year. However the VI teacher data shows changes. Notice the slope of the trend lines. The projected attrition has the steepest statistical slope. Assuming the historical under projection of 30% that slope would be even steeper. This indicates a growing need for VI professionals.



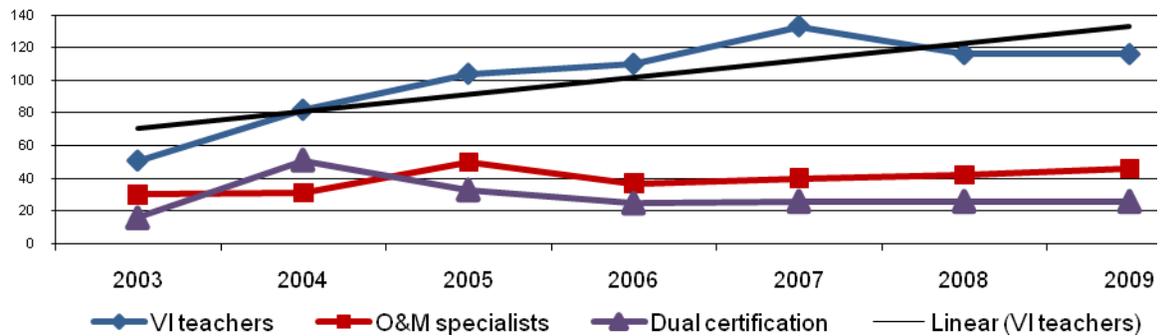
Attrition Within the Past Year (1-Year Attrition)



Projected 3-Year Attrition



Longer-Term Need for VI Professionals



The lack of change in O&M specialist data is noteworthy. At this point, there are no reliable statistical projections on the percentage of students with visual impairments who likely need O&M services. Nor do all students with visual impairments even receive O&M evaluations. In fact, according to the data gathered from the 2009 *Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments*, only 51% of visually impaired students were evaluated for O&M skills within the previous 3 years. Therefore, it is difficult to evaluate the lack of growth in reported need for O&M specialists (including dually certified professionals) based on data.

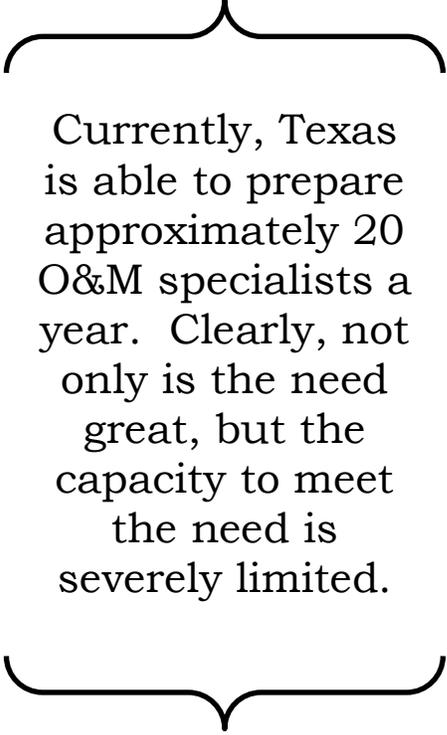
However, we do know the number of students who receive O&M and how that has changed since the data has been collected (2001). The first year 25% of students with visual impairments were receiving O&M services. In 2009, 32.4% are getting services. If statistical forecasts are accurate, it is projected that 34% will be receiving services by 2010. Each student will need a fully qualified O&M specialist.

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* (2000) 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 2009 there were 8,197 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 recommended 8 –12 students per teacher ratio, Texas has a need for between 683 and 1,025 full-time equivalent direct service VI teachers. Currently there are 596.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) VI teachers. Therefore using this measure, Texas is lacking between 87 and 428 (FTE) VI teachers. (The mean of this range is 257 FTEs.)



Currently, Texas is able to prepare approximately 20 O&M specialists a year. Clearly, not only is the need great, but the capacity to meet the need is severely limited.

This does not accommodate for the number of *individuals* needed. Approximately 30% of the VI teacher workforce is employed as a VI teacher on a part-time basis. (Of the 209 part-time VI teachers, 65 are dually certified; the remaining either contract with the district or are employed

in some other capacity.) The number of *individuals* needed to fill 257 FTE positions would be ***much*** higher. Based on current ratios, the number of individuals needed is closer to 315 full- and part-time VI teachers.

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*, 2,655 students were receiving O&M services in January of 2009. 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 221 and 332 full-time equivalent (FTE) O&M specialists. With 171 full-time equivalent (FTE) O&M specialists, Texas is lacking between 50 and 161 (FTE) O&M specialists. (The mean of this range is 106 FTEs.) However it must be noted that, given the shortage cited above and that only 51% have even been evaluated by an O&M specialists, it is likely that not all students who could benefit from O&M are receiving instruction.

Also, the impact of part-time O&M specialists is more significant than for VI teachers. Approximately 48% of the O&M specialists in Texas provide services on a part-time basis. These individuals may be dually certified or private contractors working with districts and other agencies or organizations. Therefore, even the average estimated need for 106 O&M specialists should be considered *very* conservative. The number of *individuals* needed to fill 106 FTE positions would be *much* higher; at least 157 O&M specialists. Based on current ratios, the number of individuals needed is closer to 139 full- and part-time O&M specialists. Currently, Texas is able to prepare approximately 20 O&M specialists a year. Clearly, not only is the need great, but the capacity to meet the need is severely limited.

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

	2007	2008	2009
VI teachers	280	326	257
O&M specialists	88	95	106

Summary

This report reviewed characteristics of and indicators of need for VI professionals. In September 2009, Texas had 949 individuals 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 756 individuals providing direct service either on a full- or part-time basis. The total includes the following full- or part-time individuals:

- 701 VI teachers (596.5 FTEs)
- 225 O&M specialists, (171 FTEs)
- 65 dually certified professionals

In addition, there are:

- 55 leadership/technical assistance specialists (53.7 FTEs)

This is an increase from the 2008 report, including an increase of 138 direct service providers. The area of biggest increase was in VI teachers. There were more full- and part-time VI teachers. The number of O&M specialists decreased from 237 to 225. However, the number of full-time O&M specialists increased; from 98 to 117. The overall effect of this increase was an increase in FTEs for O&M (from 167.5 in 2008 to 171 in 2009).

It is hard to assess the changes in a single year. Some ESCs are able to respond to the survey based on their direct knowledge of the region. Some regions (at least 3) distribute the survey to individual districts and must then summarize the results. At least one of those regions showed a marked difference from the previous year. Another region changed their service delivery model; decentralizing it from the ESC to the districts. It is possible the increase reflects a combination of data collection changes and actual increases.

In September 2009 there were 23 VI teachers, 11 O&M specialists, and one dually certified professionals who are African-American. The Hispanic VI professionals included 72 VI teachers, 10 O&M specialists and seven dually certified professionals. Eighty-four VI teachers, 12 O&M specialists and nine dually certified professionals speak Spanish. There are now eight Asian VI teachers and one dually certified specialist.

The change in cultural diversity was an overall improvement.

An examination of the attrition, projected attrition and new positions being created indicates challenges lie ahead. The number of new positions is not keeping pace with student growth. The attrition rate decreased this year from 37 to 27 VI professionals. This good news is

tempered by realities of the current economic situation and a belief that retirements were merely delayed. The projected 3-year attrition rate was estimated at 115, or 12% of the total population of VI professionals. In the past 3 years, the projected attrition has been in the 12%-14% range.

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. 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.

This report considers the recommendations of the VI specialists at the regional service centers to be the best indicators of real need in Texas. These professionals have extensive knowledge of their districts and region. All three types of indicators of need were reviewed in this document: posted vacancies, recommendations by regional consultants, 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.

Comparison of Methods for Determining Need

Method for determining need	VI teachers	O&M specialists	Dually certified	Total Needed
Posted vacancies (full- and part-time)	16 individuals	4 individuals	0 individuals	20 individuals
Regional VI consultant recommendations: 12-24 months	56 individuals	28 individuals	11 individuals	95 individuals
Regional VI consultant recommendations: 24-36 months	116 individuals	46 individuals	26 individuals	188 individuals
Caseload formula	257 FTEs	106 FTEs	Not applicable	363 FTEs

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 need will continue to grow. These positions must be filled to ensure that students with visual impairments have the skills 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.

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 (29.8% of the VI teachers and 42% 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. Statewide totals are adjusted for dually certified professionals.