

2010



**T S B V I**  
Outreach Program

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# **2010 SUMMARY OF NEED FOR VI PROFESSIONALS**

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



# 2010 Summary of Need for VI Professionals in Texas

Compiled by KC Dignan, PhD

## Executive Summary

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 (O&M) specialists. Individuals with both certifications are referred to as "dually certified." This report will provide information about the results of the survey conducted in September 2010.

The most striking findings include:

- A comparison of VI professionals in Texas since 1996 indicates a 78% increase in the past 14 years.
  - VI teachers have increased by 92.5% since 1996.
  - O&M specialists have increased by 65.6% since 1996.
- However, in the past year the total number of all VI professionals decreased by 2.5%. The number of O&M specialists declined by 6%, for a two-year reduction of 11%.
- Attrition in the past year decreased in 2010. However, it is expected to sharply increase in the next 3 – 5 years.
- It is projected that 11% of VI professionals will leave the field within the next 3 years.
  - Over the past 10 years, regional VI consultants (the best source for this information) have under-projected attrition for VI teachers by 25% and O&M specialists by 70%.
  - As a result, the actual attrition will likely be significantly higher than projections.
- Projections of growth and attrition indicate that Texas will need between 173 – 216 VI teachers and 80 – 121 O&M specialists by 2013.
- Universities are training as many VI professionals as funds allow. The availability of public and private funds is expected to be reduced over the next biennium as funds are reduced and tuitions continue to increase substantially. On average over the past 3 years, 46 VI teachers and 15 O&M specialists complete their training each year. It will be a serious challenge to maintain existing levels of VI professionals and to accommodate needs related to student growth in the future without additional funding.



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## Introduction

Data was collected from the 20 regional education service centers (ESCs) 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 ESCs. Unless otherwise noted TSBVI data is included in the data presented in this report. Data from TSBVI includes information about those who provide direct services via the Comprehensive Program and those who provide statewide training, short-term services and leadership via the Short-Term and Outreach Programs.

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. 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.

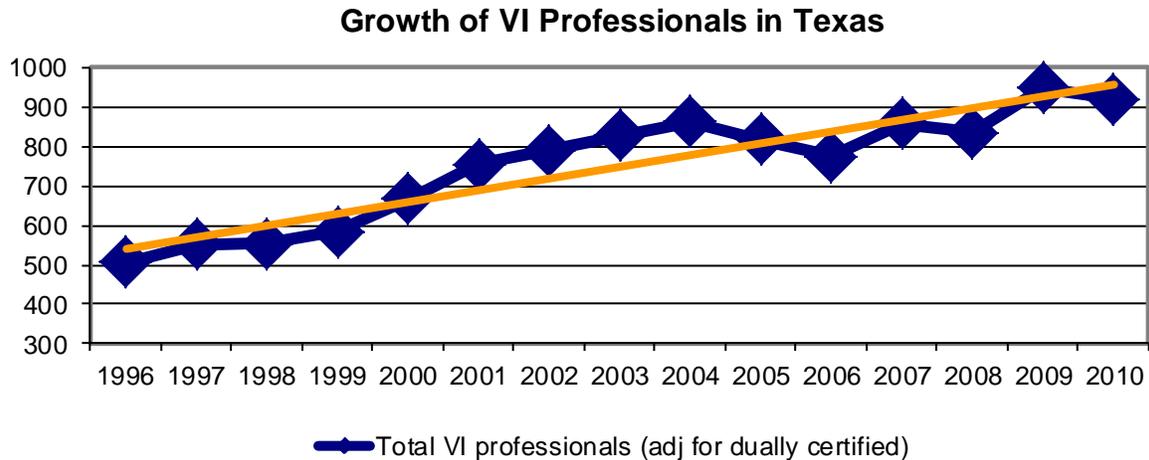
## Number of VI professionals in Texas

This data has been gathered annually since 1996. Over a 14 year-span the number has increased with occasional dips. This was one of the years that saw a decrease in the number of VI professionals. This year the number of VI professionals in Texas decreased to 925 individuals and/or 821.6 full-time equivalents (FTEs) when adjusted for dually certified VI professionals.

This 2.5% reduction is interesting when compared to other changes in the student and professional populations in Texas. In general, this reduction is not parallel with other educational data. Using the most recent statewide data available, from 2009, Texas experienced a 2% growth in teachers in public school systems in a single year and a 5.2% growth in the past 2 years.<sup>1</sup>

During the same time period (the 2008-09 academic year) the *Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments* indicated a 3.4% increase in the number of students served by VI professionals. Also, the federal appropriation for IDEA-B Formula funds in Texas has increased by 6.5% in the past two years, increasing basic resources coming to the districts. While

certainly not the only source of funds for students with disabilities, it would seem likely that district hiring practices for VI professionals would mirror federal funding and/or statewide hiring of special education professionals. This does not seem to be the case.



The table below provides further details about VI professionals in Texas. While the total number of individuals who are providing VI services went down, the FTEs increased by 2%. This can be explained by an increase in the number of VI professionals that are full-time. This year a greater percentage of VI teachers (TVIs) are full-time, rather than part-time.

**Table 1: Total VI Professionals Statewide**

	2008		2009		2010	
	Individuals	FTE <sup>2</sup>	Individuals	FTE <sup>2</sup>	Individuals	FTE <sup>2</sup>
TSBVI Statewide <sup>1</sup>	23	21.5	23	21.5	28*	26.5
ESC Leadership <sup>1</sup>	34	24	32	22.2	28	24.1
VI and O&M service providers (adjusted for dually certified professionals)	756	679	894	763	869	771
<b>Total VI Staff</b>	<b>813</b>	<b>724.5</b>	<b>949</b>	<b>806.7</b>	<b>925</b>	<b>821.6</b>

<sup>1</sup> TSBVI statewide and ESC consulting VI staff provide specialized training, 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".

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

\* The increase in TSBVI Statewide data reflects a change in the functional definition, *not* an increase in staff. This year the VI professionals who provide statewide leadership at TSBVI include those who provide short-term services in Special Programs at TSBVI as well as those with the Outreach Program. The five VI professionals in Special Programs were not counted in previous years.

## **Direct service providers**

Below are data about direct service providers. Direct service providers include VI teachers (TVIs), orientation and mobility (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) or the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired who provide vision-related leadership, technical assistance or statewide services. The VI staff at ESCs provide 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 and employed 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 are embedded in VI teacher data and the O&M data. Specific information on dually certified VI professionals is listed in the “Dually certified VI professionals” on page 5. Information about the number of combined direct service providers has been adjusted for dually certified professionals.



Even with the reductions seen in 2010, the number of teachers certified in visual impairments in Texas has increased 92% since 1996.



**Table 2: Direct Service Provider: VI teachers**

	2008		2009		2010	
	Individuals	FTE <sup>1</sup>	Individuals	FTE <sup>1</sup>	Individuals	FTE <sup>1</sup>
Full-time VI teachers	437		492		523	
Part-time VI teachers	149		209		168	
<b>Total VI Staff</b>	<b>586</b>	<b>511.5</b>	<b>701</b>	<b>596.5</b>	<b>691</b>	<b>607.0</b>

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

The total number of *individuals (full- and part-time)* who work as a teacher of students with visual impairments decreased slightly (1.4%). The information about the changes in the number of individuals and the FTE is essentially static as well. The portion of full-time VI teachers increased by 6.3% and the number of part-time VI teachers (including dually certified VI professionals) decreased by 20%. This resulted in an overall increase in the number of full-time-equivalent VI professionals in Texas. However, overall, the increase in FTEs and the decrease in individuals are so close as to equalize each other out.

**Table 3: Direct Service Providers: O&M specialists**

	2008		2009		2010	
	Individuals	FTE <sup>1</sup>	Individuals	FTE <sup>1</sup>	Individuals	FTE <sup>1</sup>
Full-time O&M specialists	98		117		118	
Part-time O&M specialists	139		108		94	
<b>Total O&amp;M Staff</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>167.5</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>165</b>

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

The number of O&M specialists decreased this year by 6%. This is alarming when balanced by the fact that the number of students receiving O&M services increased by 8% (*2010 Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments*). The total number of students who have been receiving O&M evaluations and then O&M services has been steadily increasing by 1% per year. It was projected that the increase would continue. Yet the number of O&M specialists declined this year for the second year in a row or by 11% in that same period. These factors, along with reports of increased caseloads, combine to increase concern over adequate availability of O&M specialists for students with visual impairments.

## 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 increase from last year. Since 2004 the number has fluctuated between 72 and 62, with an average of 67. This change is not considered significant. It likely reflects a shift in staffing needs within districts.

The number of O&M specialists has declined by 11% in 2 years while the number of students needing O&M has increased by 14% in that same period.

**Table 4: Dually Certified Professionals**

	2008	2009	2010
Dually certified	62	65	69

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 2008 and 2010 likely reflect changes in staffing needs statewide.

At first glance, hiring dually certified staff may seem highly desirable. However, dually certified professionals also face unique challenges and best succeed when administrators have an understanding of both professions. Data show that administrators are highly likely to assign dually certified professionals a full-time VI caseload as well as a significant O&M caseload.<sup>2</sup> Since these are two separate professions, there is evidence that when either professional domain is overloaded the students' learning will be compromised.<sup>3</sup> Dually certified professionals report frustrations in these situations, sometime to the point of letting a certification lapse or changing employment. Educators in general cite lack of administrative support as a key reason for leaving a district.<sup>4</sup>

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

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

- They allow a district to locally meet the district’s needs for a small number of students.
- They can increase flexibility in districts that have just a bit more, or a bit less than a caseload can reasonably handle and still provide quality services.
- 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 job responsibilities.

Disadvantages include various challenges to meeting the needs of the students. Due to other commitments and/or responsibilities, part-time staff are at-risk for not being able to provide the full caseload management necessary for even small caseloads. It is especially difficult for those holding both generic special education and visual impairments certifications who have one or two students in their resource room. Students with visual impairments require instruction in the core and expanded core curricula, which are the disability-specific educational domains for students with visual impairments. Federal law requires instruction in the home, school and community in academic and functional domains that go beyond the standard curricula. The challenge is how to provide specialized consultation and instruction designed for students with visual impairments and necessary for students to maximize their independence on a part-time basis.

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.

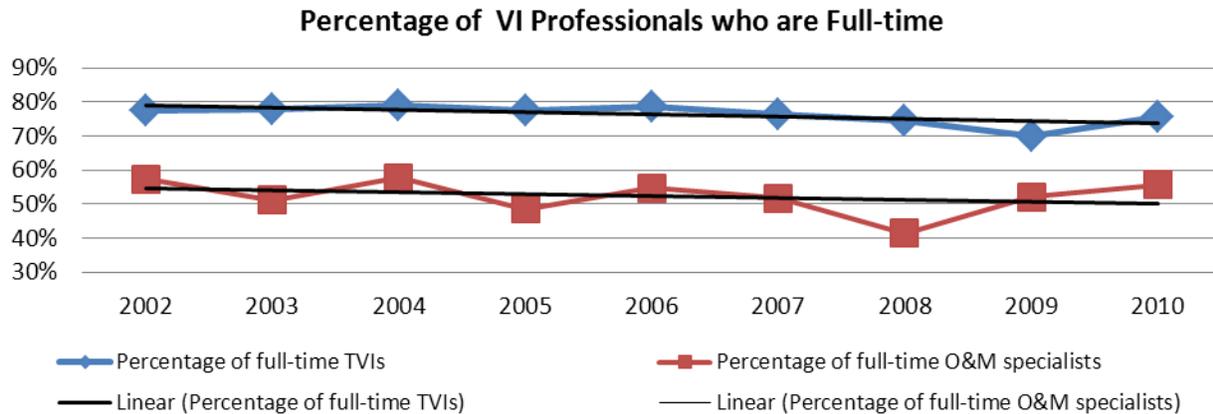
The prevalence of a full-time VI teacher has been fairly consistent until 2006. Then the



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



percentage gently sloped down over the next few years, until 2009. This increased in 2010; currently 75.7% are full-time VI teachers. This year the number of part-time VI teachers (including dually certified specialists) dropped from 209 to 168, a 20% decrease. While the total number of VI teachers decreased slightly, the change in the balance between full- and part-time VI teachers resulted in a small gain in FTEs for VI teachers.



The scenario is quite different for O&M services. Overall, the number of O&M specialists decreased by 6%. The percentage of full-time O&M specialists increased from 52% to 56% in the past year. However, while this looks like a positive change further inspection reveals the opposite. 2010 saw an increase of only a single full-time O&M specialist. The number of part-time specialists dropped from 108 to 94, a 13% reduction with no increase in full-time O&M specialists to off-set the loss.

Over the years, the percent of full-time O&M specialists has declined dramatically. Overall, it has fallen from a high of 80% in 1998 to its lowest point of 41% in 2008. Currently it is at 56%. Although historically the trend line for full-time specialists is decreasing, the percent of full-time O&M specialists increased again in 2010. It is strongly hoped that this trend will continue, enabling students with visual impairments to receive adequate access to orientation and mobility specialists.

It is hard to know if part-time VI professionals offer districts increased flexibility or restrict the access to educational curricula that is unique to students with visual impairments.

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 VI teachers and significantly for O&M specialists. Does this indicate an increase in flexibility and local services, or restrictions in the variety of educational experiences available to students with visual impairments? In the meantime, the number of students with visual impairments and students needing O&M services is increasing. VI professionals whose time is split with other responsibilities and/or responding to different employers may be challenged when it comes to adequately meeting the VI-specific needs of their students. These elements will be watched more closely in the future to determine if a trend exists and the possible implications of such a trend.

### **Direct 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 11 regions that provide any type of direct services four provide VI services to 144 students. All 11 regions provide direct O&M services to 257 students. Fifty-one additional students receive both VI and O&M services through three of the 11 regions that provide direct services.

**Table 5: Students Receiving Services from ESCs**

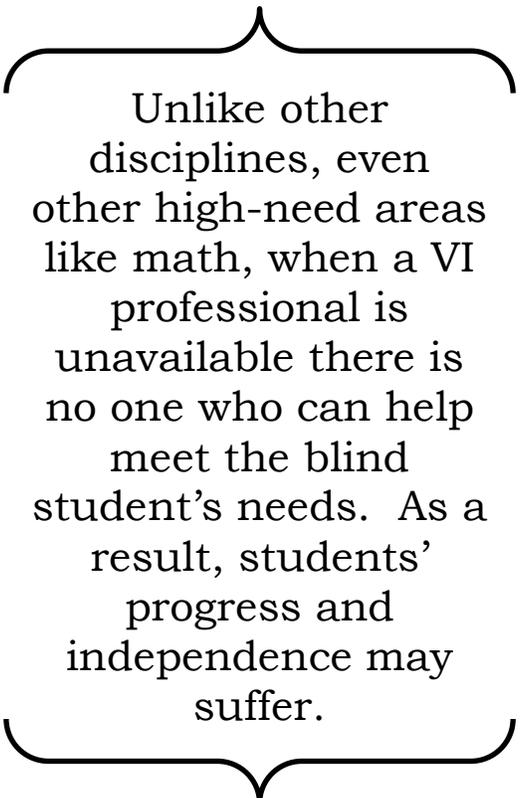
	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>
VI- only services (4 regions)	215	131	144
O&M-only services (11 regions)	304	178	257
Both VI and O&M (3 regions)	44	52	51
<b>Total</b>	<b>563</b>	<b>361</b>	<b>452</b>

In the past year the number of students who receive ESC-based services has increased by 25%. This is one of the biggest increases since the data has been collected and after a significant decrease from 2008-2009. Of the eleven regions that provide direct services, eight experienced increases. Some of the increases were due to previous staff vacancies at the ESC which have been filled, resulting in increased services available from an ESC. For the most part, the increases reflect relatively small increases in multiple regions that added up to a significant increase statewide.

The need for services from the ESC depends on many factors, including population size, region/district agreements and regional service delivery options. This makes it difficult to point to a single cause in the recent increase. For example, one regional center recently ceased providing direct VI services from the ESC and

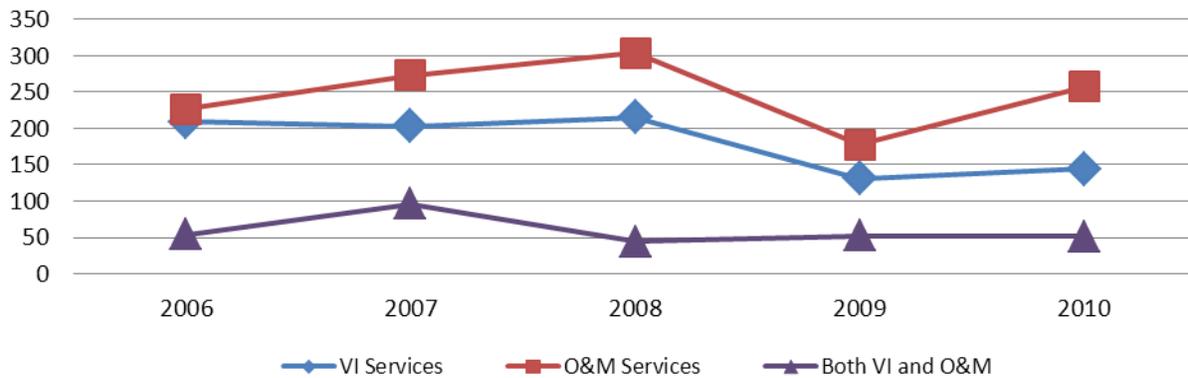
substantially increased the number of VI teachers in the districts. The ESC continues to provide O&M services for the districts. This year the number of students who are receiving O&M services in that region went from 9 to 22, a significant increase. It is not uncommon for there to be an increase in documented need when service provision goes from regional to local. However, changes in other regions will have stemmed from different situations.

Eleven regions provide O&M services, the most common service provided. These regions include Regions 1, 2, 5, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19. For the most part only districts with very small caseloads arrange for services from the ESC. Eight ESCs have a single O&M specialist; of those five have caseloads of 20 or more students. In fact, one west Texas O&M specialist has 40 students scattered around the region. While a caseload of 20 students in an urban or suburban setting may be feasible if not ideal, a caseload of 20 or more in a region that is larger than most states is alarming. It would be a challenge to provide an appropriate level of services to that many students in such a large geographical area and to do it in the home, school and community as the law requires.



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.

### Students Receiving Services from ESC



Statewide data on the number of students who receive O&M has been collected since 2001. Since that time, the number of students has increased by 70%; from 1,684 to 2,867. The number of students who receive O&M from the ESC has increased from 266 to 308, or an increase of 16% since 2001. Statewide, districts are expanding their ability to serve students locally, while still heavily relying on ESCs when that service delivery system works best for that district.

In addition to providing direct services, ESCs also are a *major* part of the state’s infrastructure that ensures access to high quality VI services. Regional VI specialists are critical players in the provision of technical assistance, leadership, workshops, and materials for both VI professionals and students. Additionally the region may assist in braille production and act as a crucial source of information and guidance and information on VI-related issues for regional special education administrators.

### 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.

This year increases in Hispanic and Spanish-speaking VI professionals continued and have increased by 25% since 2008.

**Table 6: Culturally Diverse VI Professionals**

**Hispanic VI professionals**

	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>
VI teachers	67	72	83
O&M specialists	10	10	11
Dually certified	3	7	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>100</b>

**Spanish-speaking VI professionals**

	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>
VI teachers	75	84	95
O&M specialists	12	12	10
Dually certified	8	9	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>112</b>

**African-American VI professionals**

	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>
VI teachers	18	23	25
O&M specialists	9	11	11
Dually certified	0	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>36</b>

**Asian VI professionals**

	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>
VI teachers	5	8	8
O&M specialists	0	0	0
Dually certified	0	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>

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

In September 2010 there were 25 VI teachers and 11 O&M specialists who are African-American, a slight increase. The Hispanic VI professionals included 88 VI teachers, 11 O&M specialists and six dually certified professionals, increasing their numbers by 13% in a single year and 25% in two years. Ninety-five VI teachers, 10 O&M specialists and seven dually certified professionals speak Spanish. This is an increase of 12% from last year. As of 2010, there are eight Asian VI teachers, a loss of one dually certified VI professional.

Even with the progress made in recent years, nationally recruiting and retaining culturally diverse educators remains a serious issue in Texas and around the country.

## Attrition

School districts and VI professionals must be responsive to the general economy. Issues related to the economy may account for both the decrease in the number of VI professionals and issues related to attrition and projected attrition.

### 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 visually impaired student's 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.

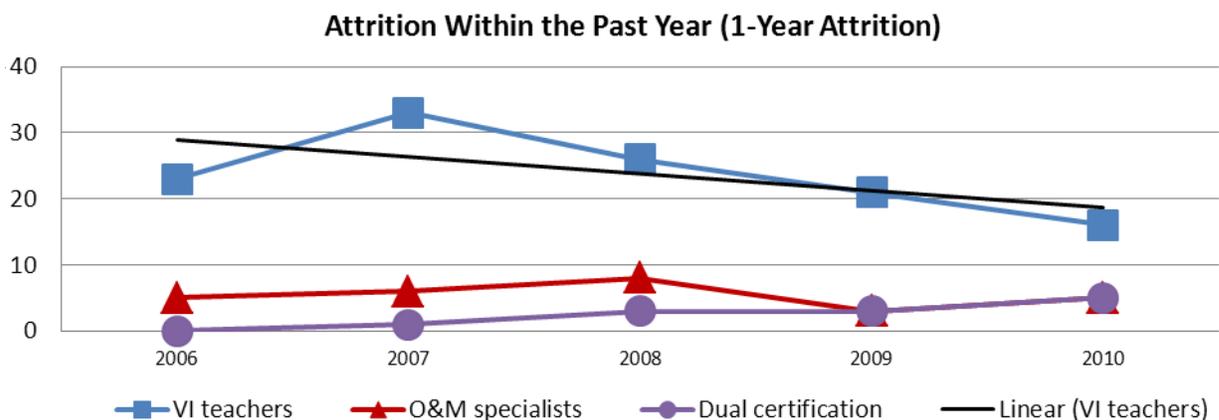
Attrition decreased again in 2010. While it is always positive to retain VI professionals, the concern is that delayed retirements will have a longer-term impact. The question remains: Will attrition, as experts predict, accelerate in the near future?

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.
- 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 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. Additionally, many districts have had to look at serious cost-cutting factors including reducing their workforce.
- As a profession, education is an aging field. According to the National Education Association 37% of educators are over 50 and are either close to or are eligible for retirement.

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-projections of 3-year attrition can affect longer-term planning for VI professionals and discounts the time needed for recruitment and training.



**Table 7: Attrition within the Past Year (1-Year attrition)**

	2008	2009	2010
<b>VI Teacher</b>	26	21	16
<b>O&amp;M Specialist</b>	8	3	5
<b>Dual Certified</b>	3	3	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>26</b>

This year (2010) was the third consecutive 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) <sup>5</sup>, Pew Research Center <sup>6</sup> and other data sources<sup>7</sup> between 20% and 60% of expected retirees will be delaying retirement between three and six years. It is always positive to retain experienced VI professionals, yet the question remains: how this will impact future projected retirements. Will this delay ultimately exacerbate attrition in the near future? It seems inevitable that it will, especially since VI professionals come to the field from another career or certification area with an average of 7 years prior experience.<sup>8</sup> As a result, VI professionals are in their mid-career even on their first day in the VI field.

Projecting attrition is difficult. On average over the past 10 years regional VI consultants, have under-projected the attrition of VI teachers by 25% and O&M specialists by 70%.

### Projected 3-year attrition

The VI consultants at the ESCs are the best and *only* source for this information. However, historically (since 2000) on average their projections are 26% below actual attrition. In general, they must rely on others for the information. Some people may be reluctant to share their plans or their plans may change in the interim period. Nonetheless, this is the best source for information on attrition for VI professionals. This data specifically addresses those who will leave the field, not move from school-employment to private contractual work.

**Table 8: Projected 3-Year Attrition**

Projections made in:	2008	2009	2010
VI Teacher	88	86	81
O&M Specialist	11	11	11
Dual Certified	15	18	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>102</b>

In 2010, the VI consultants at the ESCs projected that 102 VI professionals will leave the field within the next 3 years. This is an 11% decrease from 2009. Assuming that this projection is accurate, then 11% of existing VI professionals are projected to be retiring or otherwise leaving the field by 2013.

This is lower than that expected by educators-at-large. Edutopia<sup>9</sup> cites the National Education Association statistics as saying that 37% of educators are over 50 and considering retirement. Given that VI professionals have an average of seven years of experience prior to becoming VI certified and the historical trends showing projected vs. actual attrition, it is possible that the ESC projection is overly optimistic and that many more VI professionals will leave the field within the next 3 years.

### **VI teachers - attrition and growth**

Data from the past 15 years projects that the student population will increase by 3% per year over the next 3 years or 786 more students by 2013.<sup>10</sup> Using the most commonly accepted caseload formula, an additional 82 FTEs with VI teacher certification will be needed statewide to meet the growth.<sup>11</sup> If the current ratio of full- to part-time teachers continues, the number of VI teachers needed to total 82 FTEs may be closer to 102 individuals.

In addition to serving the expected growth, Texas will need to replace VI teachers who leave the field, mostly for retirement. It is projected that 91 individuals with VI expertise (VI teachers and dually certified professionals) will leave the field by 2013. As documented above, this is likely a low projection as historically the projections have been 25% below actual 3-year attrition. The attrition could be closer to 114 individuals.

As a result when considering the intersection of growth and attrition, Texas will need at between 173 and 216 individuals with VI certification in the next 3 years to replace those who are likely to leave and respond to anticipated growth.

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

In October, 2010 there were 91 people seeking VI certification. Of those, 73 are already working as VI teachers and will not contribute to filling the gap. Only 17 VI teachers will be available to meet the anticipated need for new personnel due to attrition and growth.

### **O&M specialists – attrition and growth**

Since 2001, when the first data was collected, the percentage of students who receive O&M services has grown by approximately 1% per year. The 2010 census indicated that 34% receive O&M. It is projected in the next 3 years that 37%, or an additional 560 students, will need O&M instruction.

Applying a standard caseload formula, this means an additional 58 FTEs will be necessary to meet the increased need for orientation and mobility services. In Texas, full-time-equivalent positions can be quite different from the number of individuals needed to equal the FTEs. If the current ratio of full- to part-time individuals is applied, the number of O&M specialists needed to result in 58 FTEs is likely to be closer to 84 individuals.

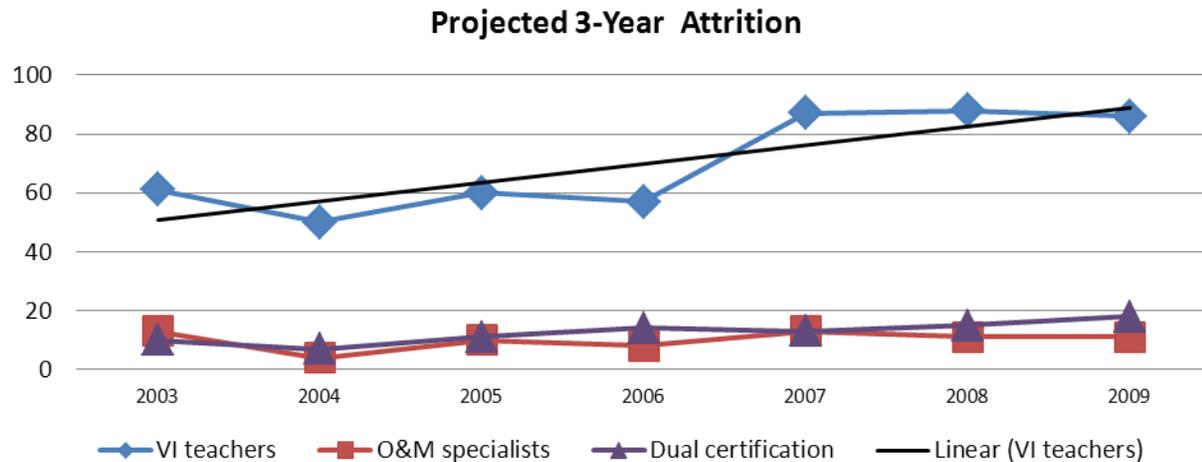
The regional VI consultants project that 22 people with O&M expertise (O&M specialists and dually certified professionals) will be leaving the field by 2013. Based on 10 years of comparisons of real vs. projected attrition, this projection may be off by as much as 70%. It could be closer to 37 O&M specialists leaving the field within the next three years.

If growth is combined with the 3 year projected attrition, it is likely Texas will need between 80 and 121 more full- and part-time O&M specialists.

In October, 2010 there were 60 people seeking O&M certification. Candidates must complete their entire program before they can start working as an O&M, which typically takes about 2 years. It is hoped that all 60 will find educational jobs and be able to help fill the expected gap.

In October 2010, 60 people were seeking O&M certification. It is hoped that all 60 will find educational jobs and able to help fill the expected gap. Even so, that still leaves a minimum of 20 and as many as 61 positions unfilled.

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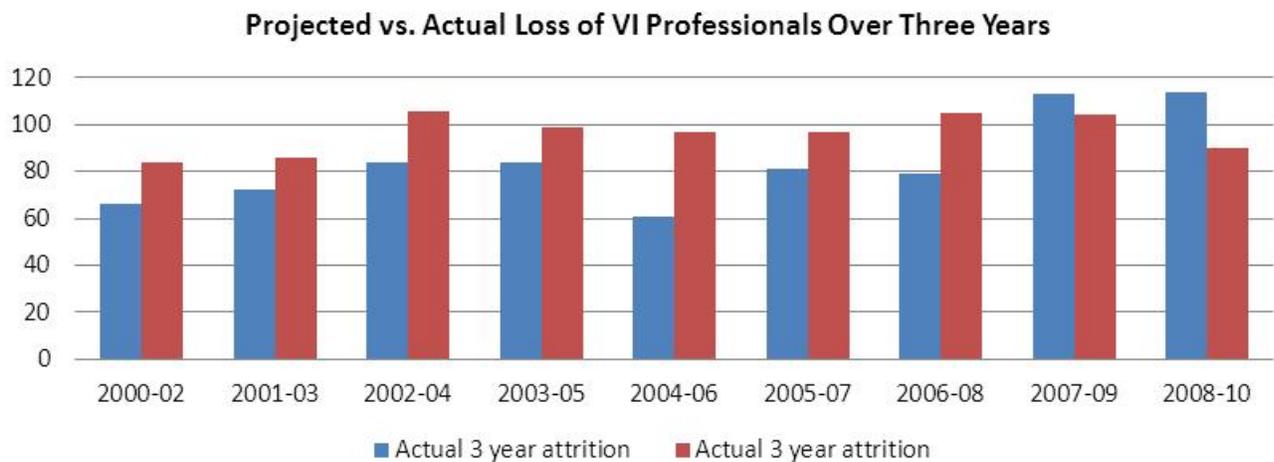
### Projected vs. Actual Attrition

The most recent time frame for which a complete set of data is available is 2008-2010. In 2007 there was a substantial increase in projected attrition, from 79 to 113 VI professionals. The projections remained relatively unchanged for the next two years, in 2008 and 2009. However, serious economic factors first became apparent in 2008 and the recession was clearly evident in 2009. In 2009 the number of people who left the field dropped substantially from 37 in 2008 to 27 in 2009 and dropped just a bit more in 2010 (26 VI professionals). This drop is in line with current research into delayed retirement. Clearly people are delaying retirement, but they will ultimately retire.

In 2008 it was projected that 114 people would leave the field by 2010. The actual loss in the most recent and complete 3-year cycle of data (2008 -2010) shows the projection was short by 24 people. This is a mirror image of the situation two years/cycles ago. At that time (2006-

Although attrition within the past year and projected attrition over the next three years was down in 2010, experts are expecting an increase in retirements once the economy recovers. Unless we are prepared, this could leave many districts with vacancies for VI professionals in 3-5 years.

2008), it was projected that 79 VI professionals would leave the field, but 105 actually did, a difference of 26. Students with visual impairments may be benefiting from higher than average retention due to the current economic situation. However the concern is what will happen when the inevitable happens; when the economy improves, and more VI professionals are eligible, able and interested in retiring



**Table 9: Projected and Actual Attrition by Discipline**

	2004 - 2006	2005 – 2007	2006 – 2008	2007 - 2009	2008 - 2010
Projected VI teacher	50	60	57	87	88
Actual VI teacher <sup>1</sup>	77	79	82	80	63
Projected O&M specialist	4	10	8	13	11
Actual O&M specialist	16	15	19	17	16
Projected dually certified <sup>2</sup>	7	11	14	13	15
Actual dually certified	4	3	4	7	11

<sup>1</sup> Over the past 10 years, on average VI teacher projections have been underestimated by 25%.

<sup>2</sup> Over the past 10 years, on average, O&M specialist projections have been underestimated by 70%.

It is interesting to note that O&M specialists consistently exceed the projected attrition and dually certified specialists are under expected levels of attrition. This has been true since the data has been collected. It could be surmised that many O&M specialists are closer to retirement when they initially become O&M specialists as it is often spoken of as a good pre-retirement option since part-time contracting in this field is a viable option.

Another factor may be related to becoming dually certified just prior to leaving the field and/or as a post-retirement employment option. It is plausible that people who function as dually certified retire or change from their existing position providing both services, but then continue to provide O&M services contractually. The survey explicitly asks about people who 'leave the field' and is not limited to retirement, so people who retire from a school district but continue to provide contractual services to another district would continue to be counted. This could be another reason for the consistent over projecting of dually certified personnel and under projecting of O&M attrition.

## **Anticipated Need**

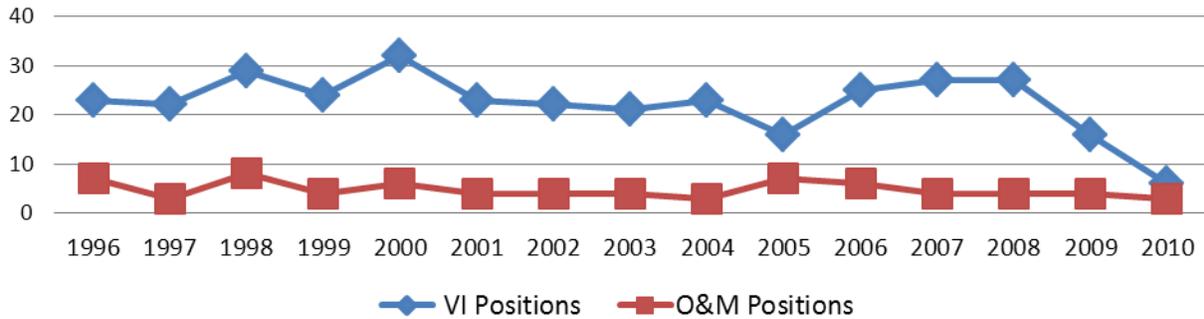
A basic construct in assessing need is to realize that most VI professionals are not classroom teachers; they are primarily itinerant specialists in visual impairments who work in a variety of schools, community settings and homes. In addition to direct services, they also provide critical consultations on the functional impact of a specific visual impairment on a student in a specific setting 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 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.

Interpreting and understanding the need for educational professionals traditionally further relies on several factors, including 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 2010. This data was collected in October after all regular hiring for the academic year has 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.

### Posted Vacancies for VI Professionals



**Table 10: Posted Positions**

	2008	2009	2010
VI teachers	27	16	6
O&M specialists	4	4	3
Dually certified	0	0	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>

The chart above shows the posted level of need between 1996 and 2010. Statistically, the trend of having unfilled posted positions in September is decreasing, and decreased substantially in 2010. This may be due to various factors, such as those listed below.

- Administrators are better able to recruit from within the district and enroll the candidate in a training program, thus avoiding the need to post a position.
- Administrators are able to recruit candidates prior to the start of the school year.
- Administrators are not confident they will be able to fill a position, so they are reluctant to advocate for or post a new position.
- The funds for VI training programs received a substantial increase in 2009, making it easier for candidates to start a program either in June or September.
- Due to economic factors administrators are reluctant to seek additional VI professionals.

Each year an average of more than 60 individuals complete training. Most have jobs waiting for them or started working with a probationary certificate as VI teachers while still in training. These postings may be 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 the experts in visual impairments for their region. The results are indicated in the table below. The survey asked about projected need, not about positions available. However, historically positions follow the availability of VI professionals.

**Table 11: Projected short-term Need: 12 – 24 months**

	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>
VI teachers	76	56	68
O&M specialists	26	28	27
Dually certified	19	11	18
<b>Total Need</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>113</b>

**Table 12: Projected longer-term Need: 24-36 months**

	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>
VI teachers	116	116	109
O&M specialists	42	46	37
Dually certified	26	26	34
<b>Total Need</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>180</b>

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

There are two ways to assess the short- and longer-term projected needs, either by professional expertise or by job assignment. The terms “VI teacher” or “O&M specialists” 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. Many, many more people hold dual certification than are reflected in this report. Only those whose job responsibilities are in both disciplines are considered “dually certified” in this report.

Functioning as a dually certified VI professional primarily reflects district need and therefore is a job assignment and not a unique discipline. For the purposes of this section of the report, the data reported will be by professional discipline or area of expertise, not by job assignment such as a dually certified VI professional. Dually certified VI professionals function as part-time VI teachers and part-time O&M specialists. As such they will be added to both areas as part-time VI teachers and O&M specialists.

**Table 13: Projected Shorter-term Need by Area of Expertise**

	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>
VI teachers	95	67	86
O&M specialists	45	39	45

The increase in shorter term need (12-24 month) is not surprising. In a separate survey of regional VI consultants (18 of 20 responding) 15 reported an overall increase in caseloads in the past year.<sup>12</sup> One region that did not report an increase stated that while caseloads weren't increasing many of the VI professionals have been given additional responsibilities in non-VI areas and had to cut back on their VI responsibilities. The net effect of this is similar to an increase in caseloads. It seems likely that the expressed need for VI professionals is in response to increased caseloads and the retirements that are anticipated within the next 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 professional area, adding a statistical trend line can assist in evaluating the changes over time. In the past five years the projected need for VI professionals has remained fairly stable at an average of 183 VI professionals.

**Table 14: Projected Longer-term Need by Area of Expertise**

	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>
VI teachers	142	142	143
O&M specialists	68	72	71

## VI teachers

When the VI teachers are combined with the dually certified VI professionals, the projected need for those certified to provide VI services shows essentially no change over the past three years. This lack of change is surprising given that in the past three years 435 additional students identified have been added to the *Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments*.

Of the 143 new VI educators needed over the next three years, it is expected that 91 will be replacing existing VI teachers and dually certified professionals. This leaves a remainder of 52 VI educators to meet the needs of new and existing students.

Based on historical data it is projected that there will be 786 more students identified by 2013 for a total of 9,261 students.<sup>13</sup> If projected attrition is accurate, and historically it has been under-estimated by 25% , that leaves only 52 full- and part-time educators in visual impairments to meet the needs of 786 additional students scattered all over the state; a huge challenge.

It is important to remember that *all* dually certified VI professionals and an average of 25% of VI teachers are part-time. As a result, it is assumed that a significant portion will be available to meet the needs of their students on a part-time basis. Of the 143 VI educators (VI teachers and dually certified VI professionals) 61 or 43% are likely to be part-time VI teachers. It appears that 143 VI professionals with educational expertise in the next three years is a minimum if students are to meet their legally mandated educational goals.



In a recent separate survey, 16 regions reported increases in caseloads or increases in non-VI responsibilities.

The expressed projected need for those with orientation and mobility expertise is also likely to be low. To assess the projected need, whether it is for VI teachers or O&M specialists, it is necessary to analyze data on student growth and projected attrition.

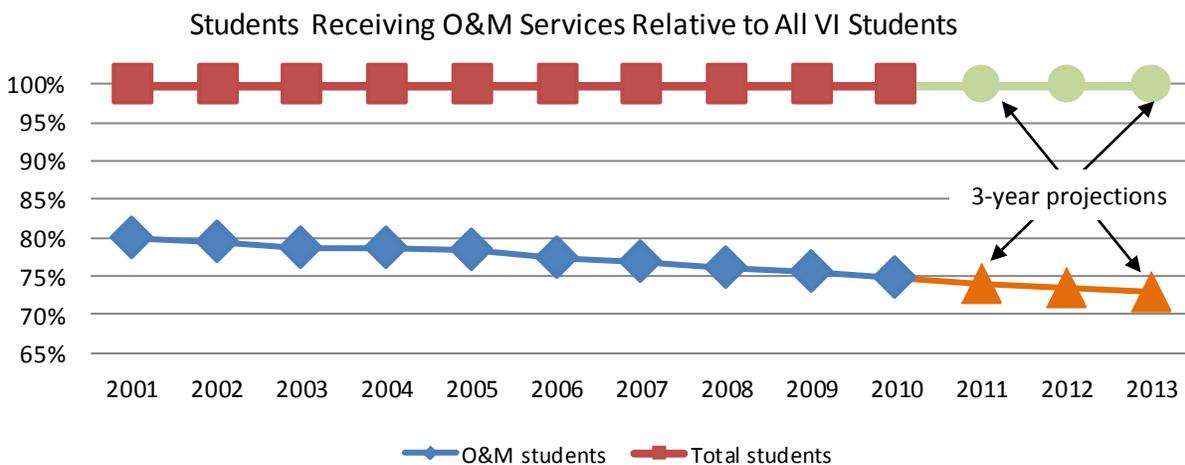
## O&M specialists

As of January, 2010 there were 2,867 students receiving O&M services, or 33.8% of students with visual impairments. The number of students getting O&M services is increasing about 1% per year. The number of students who have had an O&M evaluation is also increasing at the same rate: 1% per year. Currently 53% have had an evaluation within the past three years.<sup>14</sup>

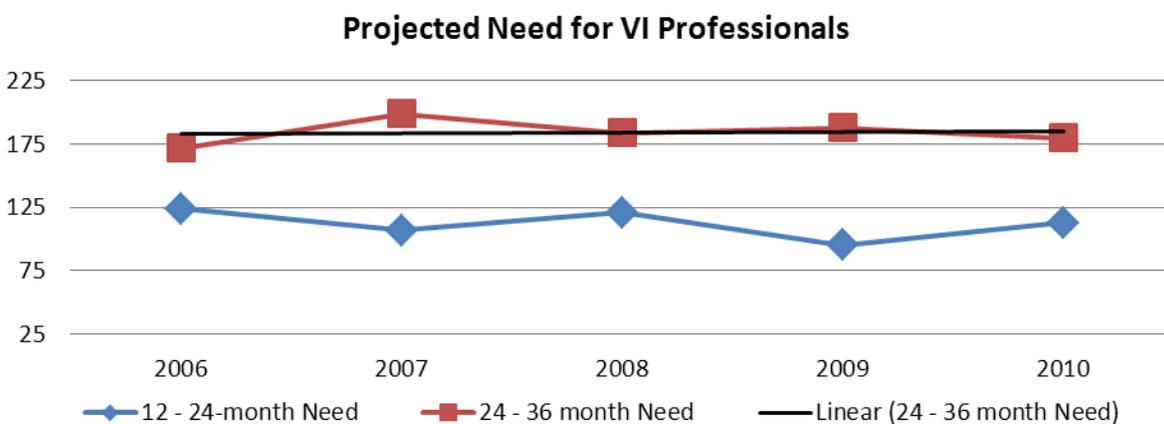
Recommendations on the need for O&M specialists do not seem to be keeping pace with the growth of VI students.

By comparison, the number of students with visual impairments is increasing as an average rate of 3% per year. The result is a 2% gap in the growth rate which compounds every year. The chart below illustrates how the percentage of students getting services is not keeping up with student growth. It is projected that 3,127 students will be receiving O&M services by 2013. This is an increase of 260 students. Without a greater percentage of students getting an O&M evaluation, it is impossible to know how many of the projected 9,261 students with visual impairments may actually need O&M services.

In the chart, the increasing number of students with visual impairments since 2001 is kept as a constant. The number of students who are receiving services is shown relative to the entire population of students with visual impairments. Included in the chart below are projections based on historical data (the years 2011 – 2013, the green circles and orange triangle). It is clear that the gap is increasing. Without changes it will only get worse.



Of course, it is possible that changes in the population of students with visual impairments are such that an adequate number of students are receiving O&M services or that the gap won't continue to expand. However, with only 53% of the students having an orientation and mobility evaluation it is not possible to verify that those students who would benefit from O&M services are getting them.



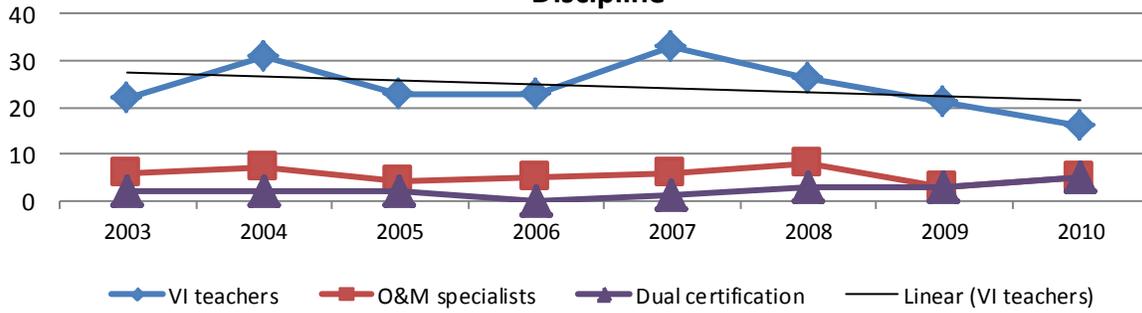
### **Interrelationship of projected need and attrition**

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

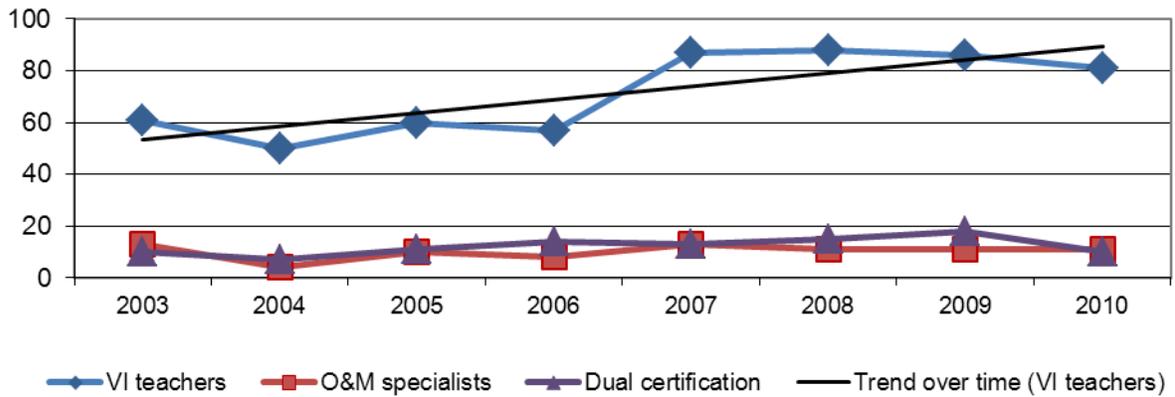
Below are tables showing attrition within the past year, projected attrition over the next three years, and longer-term (36 months) need by professional discipline. The O&M and dually certified data remains essentially the same, showing little significant change from year to year. However the VI teacher data shows changes. Notice the slope of the trend lines. The slope of the projected attrition and projected need are nearly identical.

Attrition is also affected by factors commonly cited as important for retention. For VI professionals amongst the most important retention factors are administrative support and caseload size.<sup>15</sup> With the increases in caseloads (and/or the addition of new responsibilities) will VI professionals be more likely to leave the field, either for retirement or for other professions? As the economy recovers people may be more inclined to retire and leave the field. However, given that the Texas budget for the biennium 2011-13 will be significantly reduced, overall educational hiring will be reduced. As a result, VI programs, among the smallest in education, are likely to feel significant negative pressure. As VI professionals retire, districts may not be able to replace them even though the numbers of students are increasing.

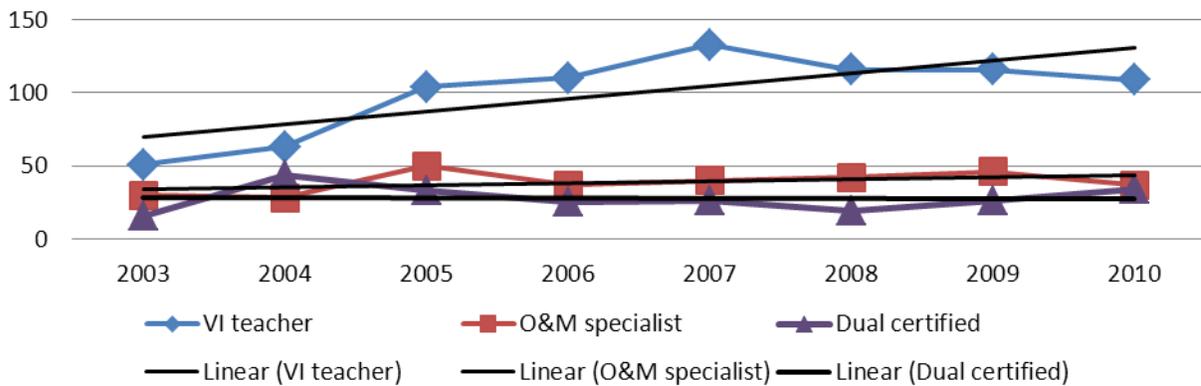
**Attrition Within the Past Year (1-Year Attrition) by Professional Discipline**



**Projected 3-Year Attrition by Professional Discipline**



**Longer-term Need by Professional Discipline**



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 are at-risk for needing O&M services at any given time. Further, not all students with visual impairments currently receive O&M evaluations. In fact, according to the data gathered from the *2010 Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments*, only 53% of visually impaired students were evaluated for O&M skills within the previous 3 years. Still, the number of students who receive O&M grows each year. Additionally, when compared to actual attrition, the projected rate of attrition for O&M specialists is under-projected by 70%. Therefore, it is difficult to explain the lack of growth in reported need for O&M specialists (including dually certified professionals) by ESC specialists.

Data on the number of students who receive O&M has been collected since 2001. The first year, 25% of students with visual impairments were receiving O&M services. In 2010, 34% are getting services. If statistical forecasts are accurate, it is projected that 37% will be receiving services by 2010. Each student will need adequate access to 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) recommend 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 2010 there were 8,475 students with visual impairment in Texas identified on the *2010 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 706 and 1,059 full-time equivalent direct service VI teachers. Currently there are 607 full-time equivalent (FTE) VI teachers. Therefore using this measure, Texas is lacking between 99 and 452 full-time-equivalent VI teachers. The mean of this range is 276 FTEs.

Relying solely on FTE data does not accommodate for the number of *individuals* needed. Approximately 24% of the VI teacher workforce is employed as a VI teacher on a part-time basis. (Of the 168 part-time VI teachers, including the 69 who are dually certified; the remaining either contract for part-time work 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 full- and part-time ratios, the number of individuals needed is closer to 343 full- and part-time VI teachers. In October 2010, 91 people were enrolled in a training program for VI teachers and 62 completed their programs since October of the previous year. This is significantly lower than caseload formulas project as the number of new VI professionals needed.



Assessments of needs based on caseload formula provide an indication of need, but only consider full-time equivalent positions. Texas has a substantial number of part-time and dually certified VI professionals.



### **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.<sup>16</sup> However, not all students need O&M services each year and in Texas only 53% have had an evaluation within the past three years.

The *2010 Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments* includes 2,867 students receiving O&M services in January of 2010. Assuming that all students who would benefit from O&M currently receive it, and basing calculations on the suggested 8 –12 students per O&M specialist, Texas has a need for between 239 and 358 full-time equivalent (FTE) O&M specialists, with a mean average of 299 FTEs. With 165 FTE O&M specialists currently Texas is lacking between 74 and 193 full-time-equivalent O&M specialists. The mean of this range is 134 FTEs. However it must be noted that, given the shortage cited above and that only 53% have even been evaluated by an O&M specialist, 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 44.5% of the O&M specialists in Texas provide educational services on a part-time basis. These individuals may be dually certified or private contractors working with districts and non-educational agencies or organizations. Therefore, even the average estimated need for 135 O&M specialists should be considered *very* conservative. The number of *individuals* needed to fill 135 full-time-equivalent positions would be *much* higher. Based on

current ratios, the number of individuals needed is closer to 194 full- and part-time O&M specialists. Currently, Texas is able to prepare between 15 - 20 O&M specialists a year.

**Table 15: VI professionals needed based on caseload formula (Mean of range)**

	2008	2009	2010
VI teachers (FTE)	326	257	276
VI teachers (likely individuals needed for FTE equivalent)	409	334	343
O&M specialists (FTE)	95	106	135
O&M specialists (likely individuals needed for FTE equivalent)	151	161	195

## Capacity 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 Universities (SFASU). Both programs serve students throughout the state with a combination of face-to-face, interactive television and internet courses. The development of distance learning options and student support has had a major impact on the number of VI professionals in Texas. Both programs train VI teachers and O&M specialists.

In October 2010, a total of 151 students were registered for courses leading to a VI certification. Ninety-one were seeking VI certification and 60 were seeking O&M certification. On average 46 individuals completed VI training and 15 completed O&M training.

Enrollments have increased over the past 3 years. Candidates access a variety of funds to pay for the university training; either through funding awarded by the Texas Legislature via Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, very limited federal funds that are restricted to SFASU’s O&M program and/or private loans.

In 2008 the State funds were increased. However subsequent and significant increases in tuition, health care costs and other university-related costs have negated those gains. Existing scholarships are not sufficient to address the needs of the applications. It is expected that the tuition set for 2011 will also reflect a significant increase. As a result, existing funds are not having the same impact that they had even two years ago. It is not expected that enrollments will be increasing, despite the anticipated growth in Texas and the need for qualified VI professionals. In fact, it may be a struggle to maintain current levels of enrollment.

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

Clearly, the capacity to prepare VI professionals is not sufficient to the need.

## Summary

This report reviewed characteristics of and indicators of need for VI professionals. In September 2010, Texas had 925 individuals providing vision-related services, either directly to students or in a leadership and/or technical assistance capacity. After adjusting for dually certified professionals (69) there are 763 individuals providing direct service either on a full- or part-time basis. The total includes the following full- or part-time individuals:

- 691 VI teachers (607 FTEs)
- 212 O&M specialists, (165 FTEs)
- 69 dually certified professionals

In addition, there are:

- 56 regional or statewide leadership/technical assistance specialists (50.6 FTEs). This appears to be an increase from last year, but the change is actually due to a change in definitions, not a change in resources.

This is an overall decrease of 2.5% from the 2009 report. Neither the VI teacher nor O&M specialist categories showed a significant improvement. Two sub-categories showed a modest increase. There were more full-time VI teachers in 2010, but less VI teachers overall. The number of O&M specialists decreased from 237 to 212 in a two-year period, or by 10.5%. The



Currently, Texas is able to prepare between 15 - 20 O&M specialists a year. Clearly, not only is the need great, but the capacity to meet the need is severely limited.



number of full-time O&M specialists increased by a single specialist, to 118. The number of part-time specialists (including dually certified VI professionals) decreased from 139 in 2008, to 108 in 2009 and finally to 94 in 2010. The overall effect of this increase was a decrease in FTEs for O&M (from 171 in 2009 to 165 in 2010).

In September 2010 there were 25 VI teachers and 11 O&M specialists who are African-American. The Hispanic VI professionals included 83 VI teachers, 11 O&M specialists and seven dually certified professionals. Ninety-five VI teachers, 10 O&M specialists and seven dually certified professionals speak Spanish. There are eight Asian VI teachers. This change in cultural diversity was an overall improvement although the cultural diversity continues to lag behind student demographics.

An examination of the attrition, projected attrition, growth, and need indicates challenges lie ahead. 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 body of evidence that retirements were merely delayed.

The projected 3-year attrition rate was estimated at 102, or 11% 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 under-estimate attrition for VI teachers by 25% and O&M specialists by 70%. Therefore it is likely that as delayed retirements are realized, attrition over the next three years will be substantially increased.

A long-term examination of growth patterns reveals that students with visual impairments will increase by 3% each year or by 786 students in 2013. In addition, statewide reports of increased caseloads do not bode well for retention over the next few years.

This report included an assessment of need based on the number of “posted” positions in September and by using a caseload formula. However, neither of these methods is considered a reliable or accurate indicator of need. Based on data gathered since 1996, the data have proven to be a poor predictor of need.

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. Their estimates indicate a growing shortage of VI professionals. Without dramatic increases in university programs the difficulty in meeting the needs of students with visual impairments will continue to get worse.

**Table 16: Summary of Need by Area of Expertise**

	<b>VI teachers</b>	<b>O&amp;M specialists</b>	<b>Total</b>
12-24 Month need projections	86	45	131
24-36 Month need projections	143	71	212

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.

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.

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