

2012



KC Dignan, PhD

2012 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.



2012 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 (TVIs) and certified orientation and mobility specialists (O&M specialists or COMS). Individuals with both certifications are referred to as "dually certified." This report will provide information about the results of the survey conducted in September 2012.

The most striking findings include:

- In 2012, the **total number** of full- and part-time VI professionals increased from 899 to 940 individuals, or nearly a 5% increase since 2011.
 - The number of full- and part-time teachers certified in visual impairments (TVIs) increased from 693 to 699, or about a 1% increase, increasing by two full-time and four part-time TVI. The percentage of full-time teachers remained at 75%.
 - The data was different for O&M specialists. 2012 saw an increase of nearly 12% in the number of individuals available. Fifty-two percent of O&M specialists were full time. A "full-time" O&M specialist includes those employed by a single or multiple districts. or educational service center (ESC).
- The **rate of attrition** increased in 2012.
 - In 2010, 16 TVIs left the field in the previous year. In 2012, 50 TVIs left, **more than triple** the number from just 2 years ago. The rate of attrition for O&M specialists and dually certified specialists was less dramatic, but resulted in a 108% increase in all job categories since 2010.
 - The projected attrition over the next 3 years decreased, from 102 to 98, or 10% of all VI professionals.
- The cultural diversity of VI professionals continues to be a challenge. While their diversity statistics are similar to other educators in Texas, it is not keeping pace with the student population's diversity profile.
 - The number of Hispanic VI professionals increased in 2012, from 77 to 94. This is still below the 2010 total, which was 100. In 2012, 28 Hispanics were enrolled in training programs. This was an increase from the 15 enrolled in 2011.
 - In 2012, there were 36 African-American VI professionals, a drop of two from the 2011 totals. In 2012, 17 African Americans were enrolled in training programs.
- **Universities** are training as many VI professionals as funds allow. There are 126 VI professionals in programs leading to certification as either TVIs or O&M specialists. Eleven of those enrolled are undergraduate students in Steven F. Austin's O&M program.

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Introduction

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

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

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

Characteristics of VI Professionals in Texas

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

Number of VI professionals in Texas

This information has been gathered annually since 1996. Over a 17-year span, the number of VI professionals has increased with only occasional dips. This year, the number of VI professionals in Texas is 940 individuals, or 849 full-time-equivalents (FTEs), a 4.6% increase over the previous year.

The 4.6% increase comes after a negligible increase in 2011. Combined, over the past 2 years the number of VI professionals has *increased* by 50 individuals, or 5.6%. Forty-one of those individuals are O&M specialists. During the same 2-year period, the *Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments* indicated a 4% increase in the number of students served by VI professionals (TSBVI, 2012).

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

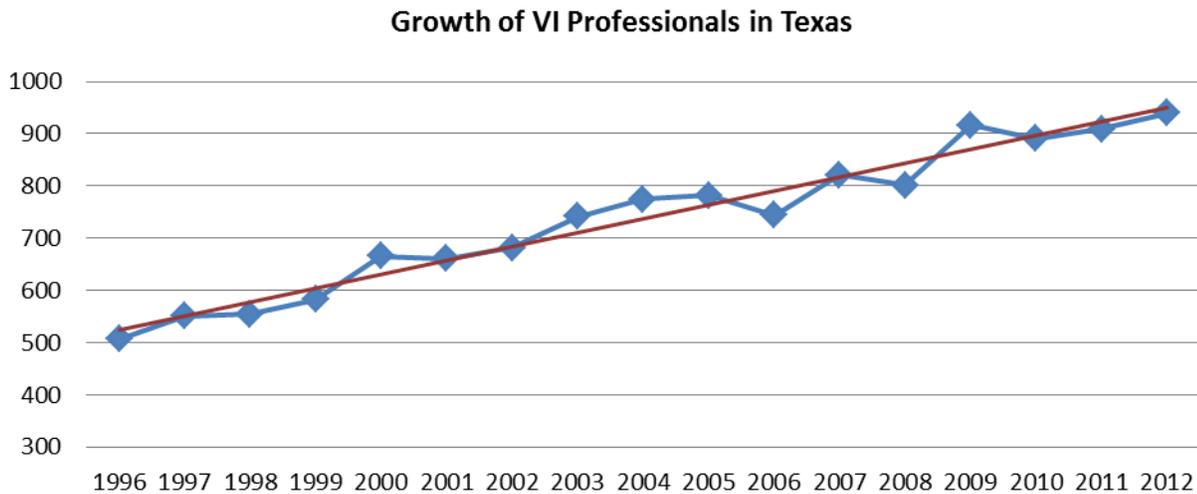


Table 1 that follows provides further details about VI professionals in Texas. The term “individuals” includes both full- and part-time VI professionals. The total number of individuals who are VI professionals increased by 4.6%, with the full-time-equivalents (FTEs) increasing by 3%. The FTE data adjusts for the part-time VI professionals, including those who are dually certified.

Table 1: Total VI Professionals Statewide

	2010		2011		2012	
	Individuals	FTE ²	Individuals	FTE ²	Individuals	FTE ²
ESC leadership ¹	29	24.1	29	20.4	30	19.7
TSBVI statewide ¹	27	26.5	27	25.5	27	25.5
VI and O&M service providers (adjusted for dually certified professionals)	834	772.0	843	779	883	803.5
Total VI professionals	890	822.6	899	824.9	940	848.7

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

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

Even with the fiscal challenges experienced by districts in recent years, the number of teachers certified in visual impairments in Texas has increased 95% since 1996.

School districts faced many significant challenges in recent years. Yet, even with these challenges, the number of VI professionals increased in 2012.

Direct-service providers

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

The number of VI professionals who work directly with children has increased by 49 full- and part-time individuals in the past 2 years. Most of them are O&M specialists.

This survey captures information about the number of individuals working with students with visual impairments in the state of Texas in either a full- or part-time capacity. It does not

gather information on the number of districts that employ full- and/or part-time VI professionals. Full- and part-time status is broadly defined. Individuals who work part-time but in multiple districts are considered “full-time VI professionals.” As a result, the number of “full-time” VI professionals described may vary from the number of districts or co-ops that employ TVIs on a full-time basis.

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

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

	2010		2011		2012	
	Individuals	FTE ¹	Individuals	FTE ¹	Individuals	FTE ¹
Full-time TVI	523		522		524	
Part-time TVI	168		171		175	
Total VI staff	691	607.0	693	607.5	699	611.5

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

The total number of *individuals* (full- and part-time) who work as a teacher of students with visual impairments increased very slightly (6 individuals, >1%) in the past year. The change since 2010 is only slightly more than 1%. During that same 2-year period, the number of students increased by 493 students (6%). The information about the changes in the number of full-time teachers certified in visual impairments (TVIs) and the FTEs is essentially static as well. The number of part-time TVIs increased by a modest 2%.

Full- and Part-time VI Teachers

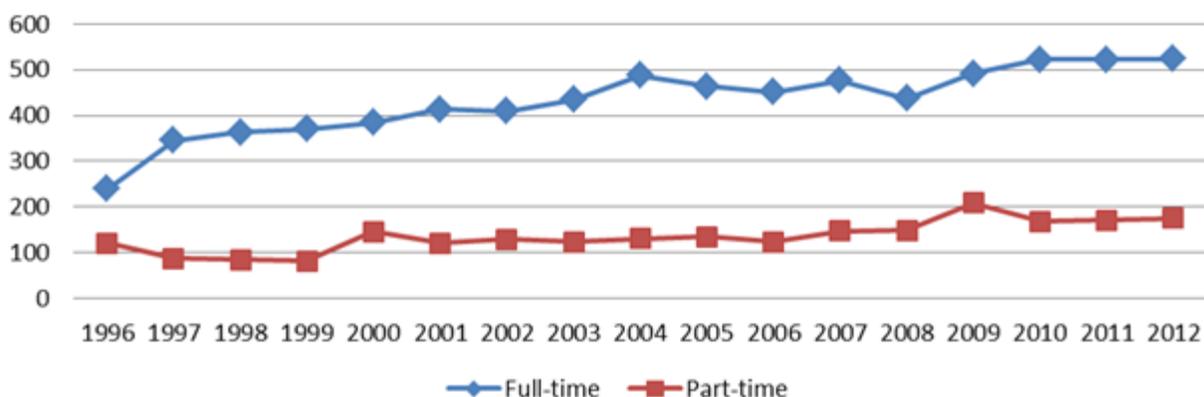


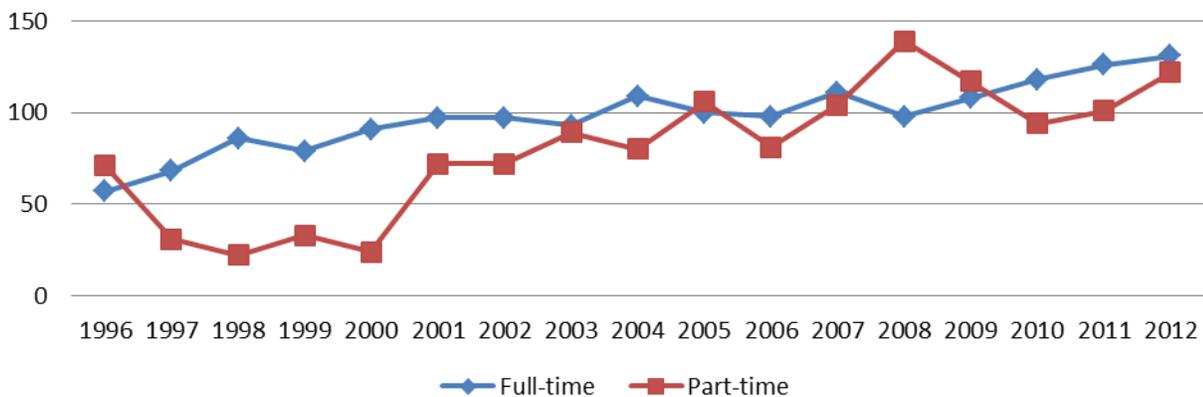
Table 3: Direct-Service Providers: O&M Specialists

	2010		2011		2012	
	Individuals	FTE ¹	Individuals	FTE ¹	Individuals	FTE ¹
Full-time O&M specialists	118		126		131	
Part-time O&M specialists	94		101		122	
Total O&M staff	212	165	227	176.5	253	192

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

Orientation and mobility (O&M) specialists account for the majority of the increase seen in 2012. The number of O&M specialists (individuals and FTEs) increased this year by 11.5%, or a 19% increase since 2010. Although an increase indicates improved capacity to meet students' needs, there was a dramatic 6% reduction in 2010. The 2009 report records 225 O&M specialists. It appears that the increases since then have helped make up for those decreases. It is necessary to go back to 2008's 237 O&M specialists to find a total that is close to the 2012 total.

Full- and Part-time O&M Specialists



The *Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments* (TSBVI, 2012) continues to show a small, steady increase in the number of students who receive an O&M evaluation by an O&M specialist (55%) and the number of students receiving O&M services (34%). It is projected that the increase will continue. Even though the number of O&M specialists increased this year,

availability of adequate staff is problematic due to the rate of student population growth and change.

Dually certified VI professionals

Dually certified VI professionals are those who are certified and function both as an O&M specialist and as a VI teacher (TVI). While many professionals may hold both certifications, not all dually certified professionals function in both capacities. This survey gathers data only about those who currently *function* both as a VI teacher and an O&M specialist. This year's data shows a slight decrease from last year. Since 2004, the number has fluctuated between 72 and 62, with an average of 67, this year's total. This change is not considered significant. It likely reflects a shift in staffing needs within districts.

The number of O&M specialists has increased by 41 full- and part-time O&M specialists in the past 2 years. This is a significant gain.

Table 4: Dually Certified Professionals

	2010	2011	2012
Dually certified	69	67	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 needs of students for a particular year. The changes between 2010 and 2012 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 succeed best when administrators have an understanding of both professions. Data show that administrators are highly likely to assign dually certified professionals a full-time VI caseload as well as a significant O&M caseload (Griffin-Shirley, Pogrund, Grimm, 2011). Since these are two separate professions, there is evidence that when either professional domain is overloaded, the students' learning will be compromised. Dually certified professionals report frustrations in these situations, sometimes to the point of letting a certification lapse or changing employment. (Griffin-Shirley, Pogrund, Grimm, 2011).

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

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

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

- They allow districts with a small number of students with visual impairments to meet their local needs.
- They can increase flexibility in districts that have just a bit more, or a bit less, than a full time VI professional can reasonably handle and still provide quality services.

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

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

- Due to other commitments and/or responsibilities, part-time staff members are at risk for not being able to provide the full caseload management necessary for even small caseloads.
- Those who provide generic special education in a classroom setting plus VI services in that classroom face special challenges. It is especially difficult to meet the functional and academic needs of students with visual impairments while working with one or two students in a classroom setting along with an array of other students, most of whom require tutoring. VI professionals should not be made responsible for tutoring.



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

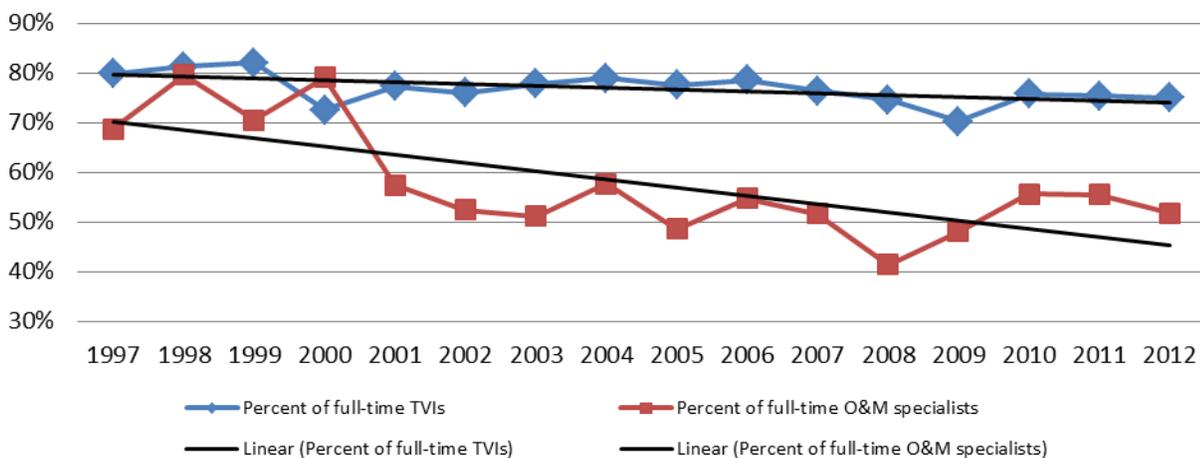


- Students with visual impairments require specialized instruction in skills necessary to access the general or core curriculum and expanded core curriculum (ECC). The expanded core curriculum consists of the 9 vision-specific educational domains for students with visual impairments. Teachers with part-time VI caseloads may find it challenging to provide these services in functional settings (as required by IDEA) when limited to classrooms
<http://www.eccadvocacy.org/section.aspx?FolderID=13>.

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.

- Federal law requires instruction in the home, school, and community in academic and functional domains that go beyond the standard curricula and beyond the classroom. The challenge is how to maximize their independence by providing specialized consultation and instruction designed for students with visual impairments if a teacher is restricted to providing services only in a classroom.
- 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.

Percentage of Full-time VI Professionals

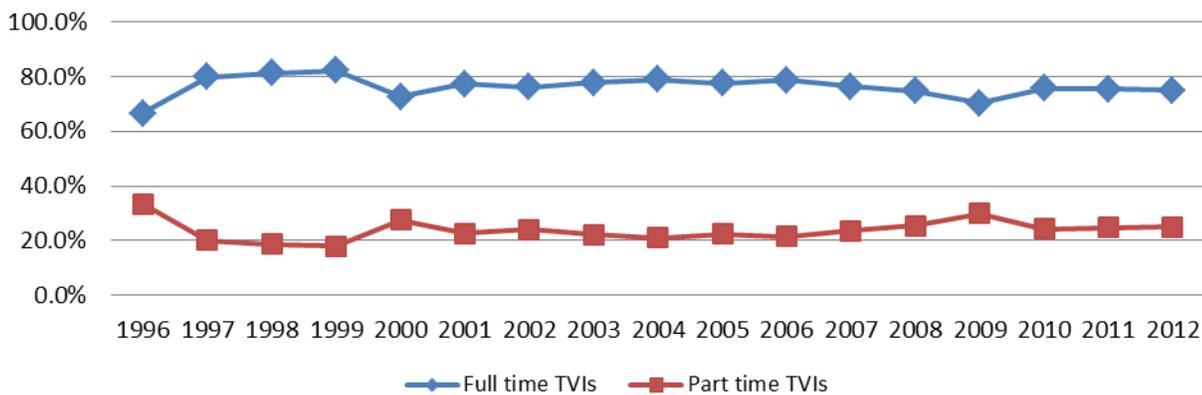


Teachers certified in visual impairments (TVIs)

Statistically, the prevalence of a full-time teachers certified in visual impairments (TVI) has been inching downwards since 1997. Currently, 75% are full time. The percentage has been fairly stable since 2010, but declining over time. In 1997, 80% were full time. Also, consider that in 2012 the number of TVIs in Texas increased by 6 individuals; only two of whom were full time, and the remaining four were part time.

The overall increase in TVIs is predominately in the part-time sector. It is hard to know if this will develop into a trend, and if so, if it is reflecting more diverse and flexible local needs, limited availability, limited instruction in the ECC, and/or administrative limitations.

Percentage of Full and Part Time TVIs



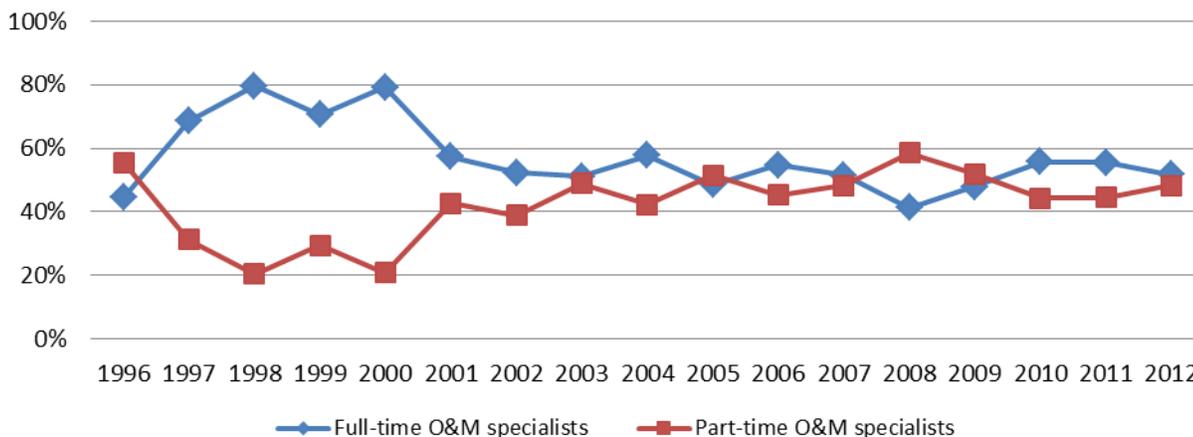
O&M specialists

The scenario is quite different for O&M services. Overall, the number of O&M specialists increased by 11.5% in the past year. The percentage of full-time O&M specialists decreased in the past year (down from 56% to 52%). A large portion of those considered “full time” are fully employed, but contracting with various districts and not full time within a district. The need for a full-time O&M specialist may not exist within that district. As a result, “full time” does not necessarily mean that the O&M specialists are employed by a single district or ESC.

Over the years, the percentage of full-time O&M specialists has varied from a high of 80% (1998) to a low of 41% (2008). Currently, it is at 52%. It is strongly hoped that the number of full- and part-time O&M specialists will continue to increase so that students statewide can receive adequate access to orientation and mobility specialists.

It is difficult to project the implications of changes in the full- and part-time ratios. A statistical trend line indicates that overall, the prevalence of full-time VI professionals is decreasing slightly for teachers certified in visual impairments (TVIs) and significantly for O&M specialists. Does this indicate an increase in flexibility and local services, or restrictions in the variety of educational experiences available to students with visual impairments? In the meantime, the number of students with visual impairments and students needing O&M services is increasing. VI professionals whose time is split with other responsibilities and/or responding to different employers may be challenged when it comes to adequately meeting the VI-specific needs of their students. These elements will be watched more closely in the future to determine if a trend exists and the possible implications of such a trend.

Percentage of Full and Part Time O&M Specialists



Direct services provided by ESCs

Each regional service center (ESC) provides an array of services to districts. Some ESC services include direct services to students with visual impairments. In these regions, the ESC staff are listed on the IEP. Nine regions provide no direct services. Of the 11 regions that provide any type of direct services, three provide VI services to 135 students, 11 provide O&M services to 278 students, and an additional 39 students get both. Seven ESCs provide at least 50% of the O&M services delivered in that region.

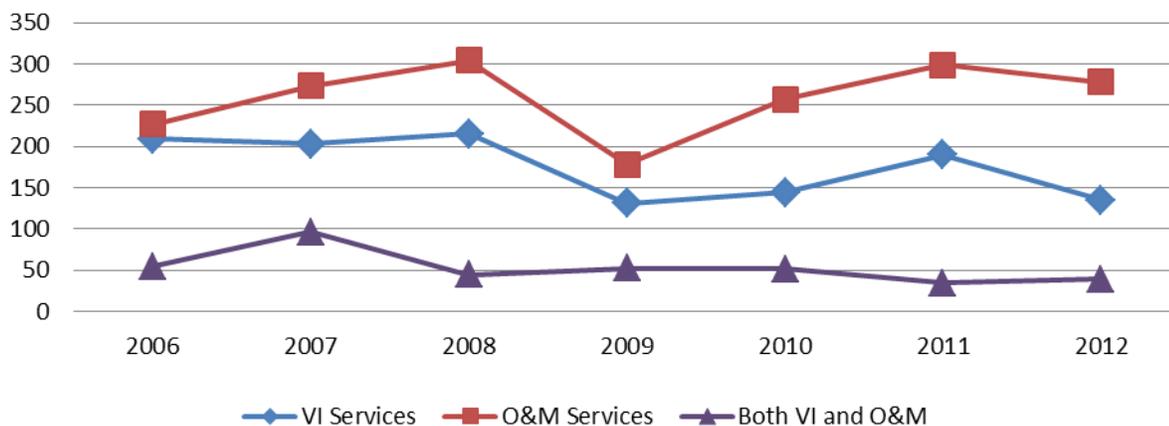
Table 5: Students Receiving Services from ESCs

	2010	2011	2012
VI-only services (3 regions)	144	190	135
O&M-only services (11 regions)	257	299	278
Both VI and O&M services (3 regions)	51	34	39
Total	452	523	452

After 2 years of increases, the number of students receiving services from an ESC dropped in 2012. It is still well above the 2009 pre-recession level of 317 students.

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

Students Receiving Services from ESCs



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

Statewide data on the number of students who receive O&M have been collected since 2001. Since that time, the number of students has increased by 83%, from 1,684 to 3,089. The number of students who receive O&M services from an ESC has increased from 266 to 278. Statewide, districts are expanding their ability to serve students locally, while still relying on ESCs when that service delivery system works best for that district. It seems likely that there is a relationship in the number of O&M specialists available to districts and increases or decreases in services from the ESC.



It seems likely that the reduction in direct services from an ESC was affected by the increased availability of VI professionals in districts and co-ops.



Eleven regions provide O&M services, the most common direct service provided. These regions include Regions 1, 2, 5, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19. Eight regional O&M specialists have caseloads of 20 or more students. Two west Texas regions report caseloads of 27 students scattered around the area. While a caseload of 20 students in an urban or suburban setting may be feasible, if not ideal, a caseload of 20 or more in a region that is larger than many states is alarming. It is a challenge to provide an appropriate level of service to that many students in large geographical areas and to provide training in home, school, and community settings as the law requires.

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

Cultural diversity

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

Table 6: Culturally Diverse VI Professionals

Hispanic VI Professionals

	2010	2011	2012
TVIs	83	61	75
O&M specialists	11	11	13
Dually certified	6	5	6
Total	100	77	94

Spanish-Speaking VI Professionals

	2010	2011	2012
TVIs	95	92	81
O&M specialists	10	11	16
Dually certified	7	5	6
Total	112	108	103

African-American VI Professionals

	2010	2011	2012
TVIs	25	24	20
O&M specialists	11	14	16
Dually certified	0	0	0
Total	36	38	36

Asian VI Professionals

	2010	2011	2012
TVIs	8	7	11
O&M specialists	0	1	4
Dually certified	0	0	2
Total	8	8	17

This year there were overall increases in the diversity of VI professionals in Texas. Within specific categories, the only decreases were in the African-American and Spanish-speaking TVIs subgroups. This is the second year for a decline in these subgroups. The areas that showed the greatest increase were Hispanic and Asian teachers certified in visual impairments at 23% and 57% respectively.

In September 2012, there were 20 teachers certified in visual impairments (TVIs) and 16 O&M specialists who were African-American, a slight decrease for TVIs and an increase for O&M specialists. The Hispanic VI professionals included 75 TVIs, 13 O&M specialists, and six dually certified professionals, for an overall decrease of 22% in a single year, and 6% decrease in the past 2 years. Eighty-one TVIs, 16 O&M specialists, and six dually certified professionals speak Spanish. This is a 5% decrease from last year. As of 2012, there are 11 Asian TVIs and four O&M specialists and two dually certified VI professionals.

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. While the number of VI professionals increased slightly, the increase was not commensurate with student population growth over the past 2 years. Issues related to the economy and other factors discussed below may help account for the gap between growth of the student numbers and the number of VI professionals to serve them.

Attrition factors

Much has been written about the existing and increasing rate of educators leaving the field (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). VI professionals are rare and difficult to find. Therefore, retention is of critical concern. Unlike other disciplines, even other high-need areas like math, when a VI professional is unavailable, typically there is no one else in the district with the specific expertise needed to assess and meet the visually impaired student's unique educational needs. As a result, students' functional and academic progress may suffer when there is substandard access to critical services from a highly qualified professional.

Several factors affect recruiting and attrition in the VI fields (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Below are factors that affect recruitment and retention of VI professionals.

- Most VI professionals are mid-career professionals with an average of 7 years of professional experience in other careers and are likely to have shorter careers in this second field.
- Most educators and other likely candidates are unaware that the field exists. Students with visual impairments are a low prevalence and extremely diverse population. Therefore, special recruitment challenges exist. People must be aware of the field and its possibilities before they can become a VI professional.
- It is not uncommon for mid-career professionals to need 2 or 3 years before they decide to initiate VI training, and then another 1 or 2 years to be trained. Making such a change mid-career is a big decision, especially given the time and expense they must invest and the likelihood that there will be no increase in salary.
- Distance education options are making it easier to access training for mid-career professionals who may not be able to leave their home and jobs for training.



Overall, cultural diversity improved for Hispanic and Asian professionals. Spanish-speaking and African-American numbers declined.

- Because VI professionals are so critical to student learning, a change of even one person, in any single district, can have dramatic effects on the annual yearly progress of students.
- Changes in the number of those who *function* as dually certified may or may not reflect attrition of dually certified professionals. Rather, it may reflect a change in how the VI professional functions this year.
- Economic factors drive attrition and hiring. Many districts have had to look at serious cost-cutting factors including reducing their workforce.

Attrition increased again in 2012. For TVIs, it has increased from 16 to 50 since 2010.

The question remains: How long will attrition continue to increase?

According to the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), 33% of eligible retirees are delaying retirements. There are many (published and unpublished) reports of educators delaying retirement for 2 to 4 years (Fleck, 2011). Additionally, people above the age of 60 are among the fastest growing segment of the labor force (Fleck, 2012).

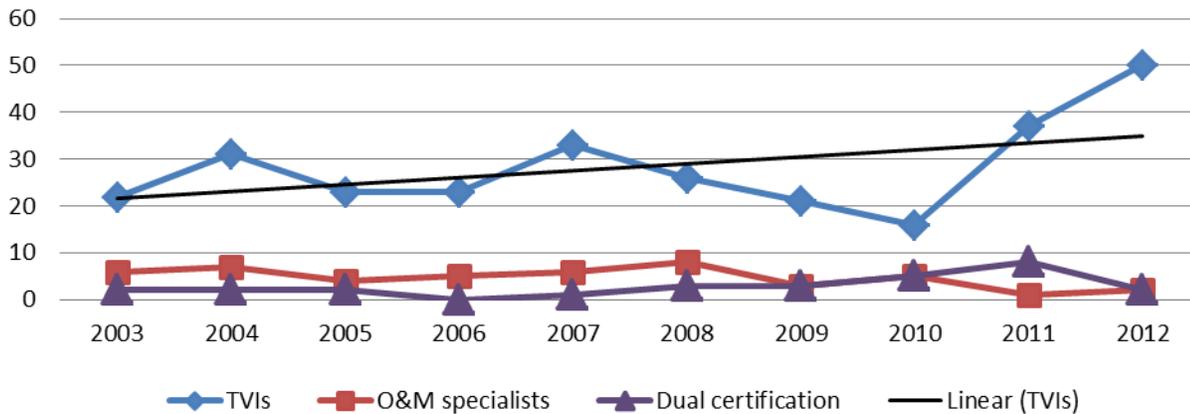
- As a profession, education is an aging field. A recent study by Ingersoll and Merrill (2010) indicated that in the late 1980s, the age of teachers was in a typical distribution pattern with the peak at 41 years old. The most recent review of that same data showed that the peak is now 55 years old, and that the distribution is no longer in the typical bell pattern; it is flatter.

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

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

	2010	2011	2012
TVIs	16	37	50
O&M specialist	5	1	2
Dually certified	5	8	2
Total	26	46	54

Attrition Within the Past Year (1-Year Attrition)



After 3 years of reductions in attrition, the number of VI professionals who left the field has increased markedly since 2010. It seems clear that people are either less worried about retirement prior to being able to access their Social Security, or have reached an age when various benefits or health concerns cause them to retire.

The information from the past 2 years raises questions.

- Will districts be able to adequately meet the needs of their students with visual impairments in the next 2 to 4 years?
- Will the increase witnessed the past 2 years be the apex in expected attrition or will it continue to increase?
- How long will this level of attrition be sustained before it begins to return to the pre-2010 average of 30 VI professionals a year?

Projecting attrition by discipline is difficult. Over the past 11 years, regional VI consultants have under-projected the attrition of TVIs by 18% and O&M specialists by 65%.

Projected 3-year attrition

The VI consultants at the ESCs are the best and *only* source for this information. However, historically (since 2000) their projections are well below actual attrition by a significant margin (18% for TVIs and 65% for O&M specialists). In general, VI consultants must rely on others for the information. Some people may be reluctant to share

their plans or their plans may change in the interim period. Nonetheless, this is the best source for information on attrition for VI professionals.

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

Table 8: Projected 3-Year Attrition by Job Assignment

Projections made in:	2010	2011	2012
TVIs	81	100	70
O&M specialist	11	16	12
Dually certified	10	12	16
Total	102	128	98

Projected Attrition by Job Assignment



In 2012, the VI consultants at the ESCs projected that 98 VI professionals will leave the field within the next 3 years. This is a 23% decrease from 2011. Historically, the projections are more conservative, with more people leaving than projected. Yet, even at this level at least 10% of *existing* VI professionals are projected to be retiring or otherwise leaving the field by 2015.

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

Table 9: Projected 3-Year Attrition by Expertise

Projections made in:	2010	2011	2012
TVIs	91	112	86
O&M specialist	21	28	28

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

Teachers certified in visual impairments (TVIs)—attrition and growth

Data collected since 2000 project that the student population will increase by 2.6% per year over the next 3 years or an additional 637 more students will be identified, for a total of 9,605 by 2015. Statewide, the average student: teacher ratio is 15 students per TVI full time equivalent (FTE) position. If this ratio is applied to the number of expected new students, it is projected that Texas will need 42 FTEs. If the current ratio of full- to part-time teachers continues, the number of TVIs needed to total 42 FTEs may be closer to 53 individuals.

In addition to serving the expected growth, Texas will need to replace TVIs who leave the field, mostly for retirement. It is projected that 86 individuals with VI certificates (TVIs and dually certified professionals) will leave the field by 2015. As documented above, this is likely a low projection as historically, the projections for those with VI certification (TVI and dually certified) are 11% below actual 3-year attrition.

The attrition could be closer to 95 full- and part-time individuals certified in visual impairments (TVIs and dually certified VI professionals).

Combining projected growth and attrition, Texas will need between 128 and 148 individuals with certification in visual impairments in the next 3 years to replace those who are likely to leave and respond to anticipated growth.

In October 2012, there were 94 people seeking VI certification. Of those, 41 (44%) are already working as TVIs and will not contribute to filling the gap identified above. Assuming all finish their program, only 53 teachers will be

Growth = 42 new TVI FTEs
 +
 Attrition = 86 to be replaced

Total needed = 128 TVIs

Assuming completion rates continue it is expected that 123 TVIs will complete their programs and be available to districts.

certified in visual impairments and available to meet the anticipated need for new personnel due to attrition and growth.

In the past year, 41 people completed the VI program. Assuming this rate continues, 123 people will complete their certification program over the next 3 years. With an expected 128–148 teachers needed over the next 3 years and a likelihood 123 TVIs will be available to fill the gap. Texas still demonstrates a continued need for teachers certified in visual impairments.

O&M specialists—attrition and growth

Information about the number of students who receive O&M services has been collected since 2001. Information about the number who have had an O&M evaluation has been available since 2006. Since 2001, the percentage of the total number of students who receive O&M services has grown by an average 0.8% per year. The *Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments* indicated that 34% receive O&M (TSBVI, 2012). It is projected that in 2015, 9,605 students will be identified as visually impaired. Of those, 35%, or 3,089 students, will be receiving O&M services, or 409 new students.

Statewide, the average student to O&M specialist's caseload is 14 students per O&M specialist. Using this as a means to predict need, Texas will need an additional 29 full-time-equivalent (FTE) O&M specialists will be necessary to meet expected student growth.

In Texas, full-time-equivalent positions can be quite different from the number of individuals needed to equal the FTEs, especially with O&M specialists. In 2012, 52% of O&M specialists were employed full time. These O&M specialists work full time in a single district or contract with several districts. If the current ratio of full- to part-time individuals is applied, the number of O&M specialists needed to result in 29 FTEs is likely to be closer to 44 individuals.

The regional VI consultants project that 28 people with O&M expertise (O&M specialists and dually certified professionals) will be leaving the field by 2015. Projecting attrition for those

Growth = 29 new
+ O&M FTEs

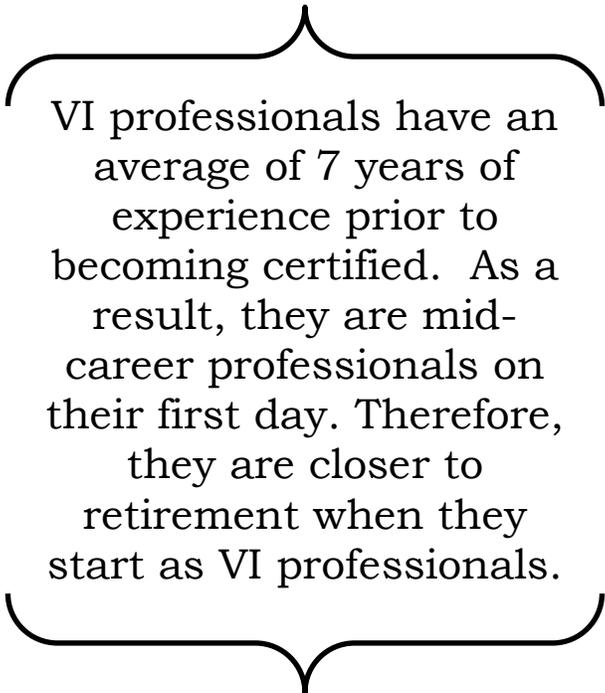
Attrition = 28 to be
replaced

**Total needed = 57 O&M
specialists**

O&M specialists take at least 2 years to become certified. It is important to maintain efforts to keep an adequate number in training for future needs.

with O&M expertise seems to be especially challenging. Those with only O&M certifications have been significantly under projected; those who are dually certified have been over projected. When both job assignments are combined to reflect professional expertise, it is likely that the projections will fall short by 8%. If the expected growth is combined with the 3-year adjusted projected attrition and based on statewide average student to teacher ratios, it is likely Texas will need between 57 and 59 additional full- and part-time O&M specialists over the next 3 years.

In October 2012, there were 43 undergraduate and graduate students 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. O&M certification is a national certification and valid in any state. It is also valid for all ages, not just students. Unless school districts are able to hire an adequate amount of O&M specialists many new O&M specialists will take positions in adult agencies, not schools. It is hoped that over the next 2 years, all 43 will find educational jobs and be able to help fill the expected gap.



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

Projected vs. actual attrition

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

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

The most recent 3-year time frame is 2010–2012. In 2007, there was a substantial increase in projected attrition. It went from 79 to 113 VI professionals. The projections remained relatively unchanged for the next 2 years. However, serious economic factors first became apparent in

2008 and 2009 and the recession was clearly evident in 2009–2010. In 2009, the number of people who left the field the previous year dropped substantially from 37 to 27. This remained essentially unchanged in 2010. This change is consistent with the research into delayed retirement completed by the AARP. While clearly VI professionals have been delaying retirement, ultimately they will retire.

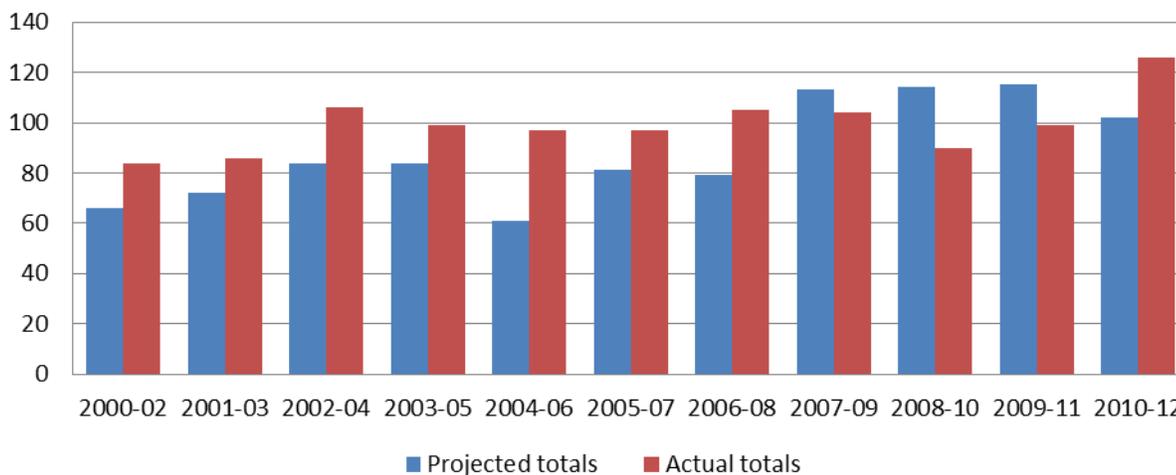
In 2010 it was projected that 102 people would leave the field by 2012. The actual loss between 2010–2012 indicated that 126 VI professionals left the field. This is 24% above the projection.

In 2010 and 2011, the data indicated that the 3-year projections were short of the actual attrition. However, this was reversed in 2012 as the actual attrition rate was 24% above what was projected.

Attrition for TVIs and O&M specialists was up sharply since 2010. Experts are expecting an increase in retirements as the economy recovers. Unless we are prepared, this could leave many districts with vacancies for VI professionals in 3–5 years.

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

Projected versus Actual Attrition



* 2010–2012 is the last year for which a complete set of data is available.

Over the past 10 years, the number of O&M specialists has consistently exceeded the projected attrition and the number of retiring dually certified specialists is under projected. In 2012, the number of VI professionals who left the field during the previous 3 years exceeded the projection. It is only the second time since 1998 that the projections for O&M specialists have been short. Since information has been collected on dually certified VI professionals (2001), this is the first time that the actual has exceeded the projected.

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

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 specific settings and ensure that appropriately modified materials are available. Additionally, they must travel to the student and provide instruction in the home, school, and community environments, not in a single classroom. Understanding the difference between classroom teachers and VI professionals is crucial when assessing the current and future need for specialists in visual impairments (Correa-Torres & Johnson Howell, 2004).

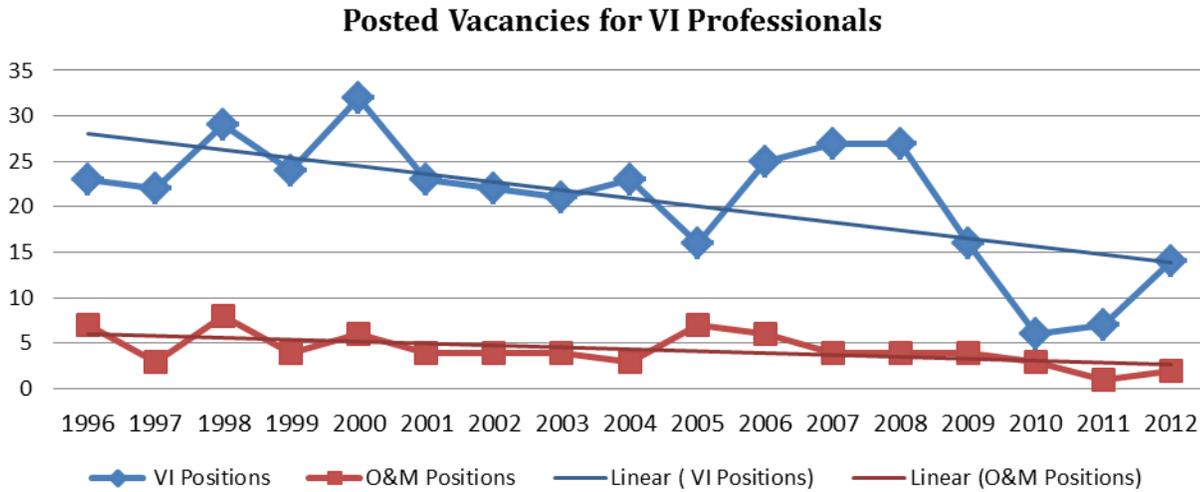
Interpreting and understanding the need for educational professionals traditionally relies on several factors, including the number of posted positions and recommendations from knowledgeable professionals. Below are data from each of these areas.

Posted positions

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

Table 11: Posted Positions

	2010	2011	2012
TVIs	6	7	14
O&M specialists	3	1	2
Dually certified	1	0	0
TOTAL	10	8	16



The chart above shows the posted level of need between 1996 and 2012. Statistically, the trend of having unfilled posted positions in September is decreasing over time. 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.
- Due to economic factors, administrators are reluctant or unable to seek additional VI professionals. As a result, interested local future VI professionals are not able to start training and districts may have difficulty filling a vacancy.

For all of these reasons, reviewing posted positions has not been a good indicator of true need for VI professionals, even with the increase in 2012.

Recommendations by knowledgeable professionals

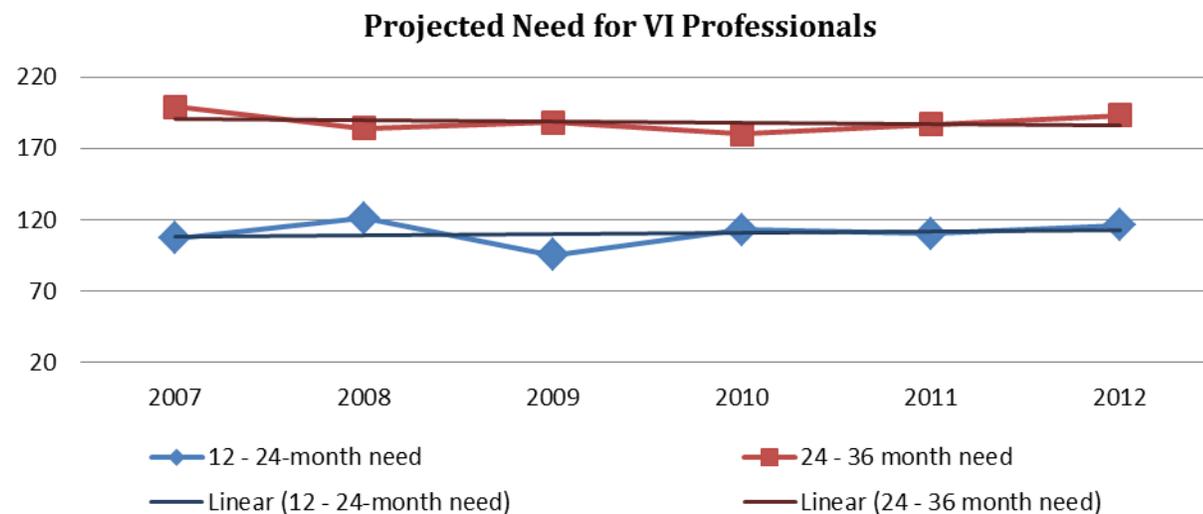
Regional VI consultants are the experts in visual impairments for their region. VI consultants and TSBVI staff were asked how many TVIs, O&M specialists, and dually certified personnel were needed in their area. The survey asked about projected need, not about positions available. However, historically,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

Table 12: Projected Short-term Need: 12–24 Months by Job Category

	2010	2011	2012
TVIs	68	68	73
O&M specialists	27	25	32
Dually certified	18	17	11
Total need	113	110	116

Table 12: Projected Longer-term Need: 24–36 Months by Job Category

	2010	2011	2012
TVIs	109	123	116
O&M specialists	37	44	53
Dually certified	34	20	24
Total need	180	187	193



It is helpful to review the longer-term need (24–36 months) in conjunction with the 3-year actual and the projected attrition. While the numbers do vary from year to year and in each professional area, adding a statistical trend line can assist in evaluating the changes over time. In the past 6 years, the projected need for VI professionals has remained fairly stable at an average of 189 VI professionals.

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

There are two ways to assess the short- and longer-term projected needs, either by professional expertise or by job assignment. The terms “TVI” or “O&M specialist” 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 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 and certification, not by job assignment. Dually certified VI professionals function as part-time TVI and part-time O&M specialists. As such they will be added to both areas as part-time TVIs and O&M specialists.

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

Table 13: Projected Short-term Need by Area of Expertise

	2010	2011	2012
TVI	86	85	84
O&M specialists	45	42	43

The lack of change in short-term need (12–24 months) over the past year is somewhat surprising. However, more probationary certificates were issued in 2012 than ever before. Additionally, according to the most recent national data available (data for 2011), districts have

been able to increase their hiring and demand has been increasing. This report cites special education and visual impairments are specifically cited as high-need areas (American Association for Employment in Education, 2011).

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

	2010	2011	2012
TVIs	143	143	140
O&M specialists	71	64	77

When the TVIs are combined with the dually certified VI professionals, the projected need for those certified to provide VI services shows no significant change over the past 3 years. This lack of change is surprising given that 748 additional students have been added to the *Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments* during that time frame and an additional 637 students are projected to be enrolled in the next 3 years (TSBVI, 2012).

Of the 140 new TVIs needed over the next 3 years, it is expected that 86 will be replacing those lost due to attrition. This leaves a remainder of 54 full- and part-time VI educators to meet the needs of the expected 637 new students.

This survey also asked about perceptions of overall changes in caseloads. Sixteen regions responded. The changes in overall caseloads are in the table below. The survey did not ask about specific districts or how many districts in a region experienced a change. The VI consultants were asked to use their professional expertise in their estimate.

Table 15: Regional Overall Changes in Caseloads

	TVIs	O&M specialists
Increases	7	10
Decreases	1	0
No significant change	8	6

A similar question has been asked in the two previous annual surveys. In both instances, the overall impression in most ESCs was that caseloads had increased in the previous year for both O&M specialists and TVIs. Since 2010, Texas has added 50 additional full- and part-time VI professionals. It seems possible that, statewide, these individuals have helped reduce the stress on large caseloads. However, in that same time, an additional 773 students with visual

impairments have been identified. It is possible that the increased caseloads reported in 2010, 2011, and 2012 have become “normalized” and no longer seem atypical.

Projections, accuracy, and impact

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

Teachers certified in visual impairments (TVI)

The VI consultants at the ESCs have identified the need for 140 individuals with VI certification (TVIs and dually certified specialists) within the next 3 years.

Currently, it is projected that 86 professionals with VI certification will leave by 2015, each of whom will need to be replaced in order to maintain current levels of service. Data about projected 3-year attrition has been collected since 2000 or for 10 3-year cycles. Over the past 10 cycles the projected attrition for those with VI certification has been under-estimated by 11%. If this margin of error is applied, then it is more likely that 95, not 86, TVIs will leave, reducing VI resources even more than projected.

The average rate of growth since 2000 years has been a fairly stable 2.6%. It is expected that 637 additional students will be identified in Texas by 2015. Statewide, the average student: teacher ratio is 15 students per TVI. Based on that information Texas will need 42 FTEs to meet the needs of these new students. Twenty-five percent of existing TVIs are part time. If converting the FTEs to the number of full- and part-time individuals, the total is closer to 53.

It appears that 140 VI professionals with educational expertise in the next 3 years is a minimum if students are to meet their legally mandated educational goals. If existing student: teacher ratios prevail, it may be closer to 208 individuals.

O&M specialists

The expressed projected need for those with orientation and mobility expertise is also likely to be low.

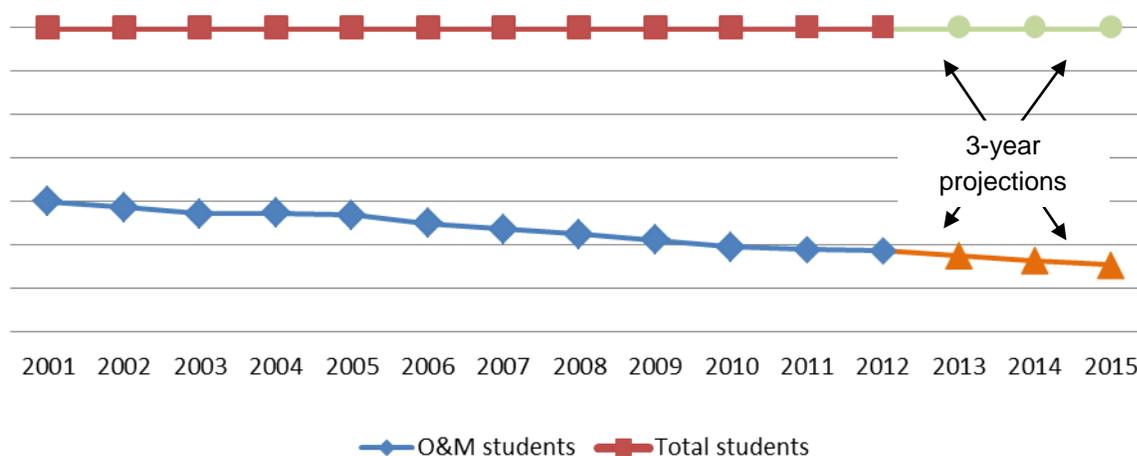
As of January, 2012 there were 3,089 students receiving O&M services, or 34% of the students with visual impairments. The total percent of students getting O&M services increases by 0.9% per year. The number of students who have had an O&M evaluation is also increasing at 1% per year. Currently, 55% have had an evaluation.

By comparison, the number of students with visual impairments is increasing at an average rate of 2.6% per year since 2000. The result is a gap in the growth rate, which compounds

every year. The chart below illustrates how the percentage of students getting services is not keeping up with student growth. It is projected that 3,541 students will be receiving O&M services by 2015. This is an increase of 409 students. It is impossible to know how many of the projected 9,693 students with visual impairments may actually need O&M services, since the level of evaluation has not kept pace with the student population increase.

In the chart, the increasing number of students with visual impairments is kept as a constant. The number of students who are receiving services is shown relative to the entire population of students with visual impairments. Included in the chart below are projections based on historical data (the green circles and orange triangle). It is clear that the gap is increasing. Without changes it will only get worse. According to reports from recent newly qualified O&M specialists, many have trouble finding jobs working in education. As a result, they have to look elsewhere for work.

Students Receiving O&M Services Relative to All VI Students



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. Vision affects movement and movement affects vision. Therefore, a key impact of visual impairments is limitation to orientation and mobility, of being able to observe and anticipate the environment and modify body movements accordingly. With only 55% of the students having an orientation and mobility evaluation, it is not possible to verify that all students who would benefit from O&M services are getting them. With that in mind, it is possible that the projected need could be quite low.

Universities are maximizing their existing resources to produce O&M specialists. The next step is for districts to ensure that all students with visual impairments receive an O&M

evaluation. Only then can the educational team members be assured that those who need O&M are receiving it.

Universities and districts need to work together to ensure that students who need O&M have access to it. The first step is to ensure that all students receive an O&M evaluation.

Interrelationship of projected need and attrition

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

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

In addition to age and economic factors, attrition is affected by factors commonly cited as important for retention. For VI professionals, among the most important retention factors are administrative support and caseload size. As reported previously, there has been a trend for the past 3 years indicating that:

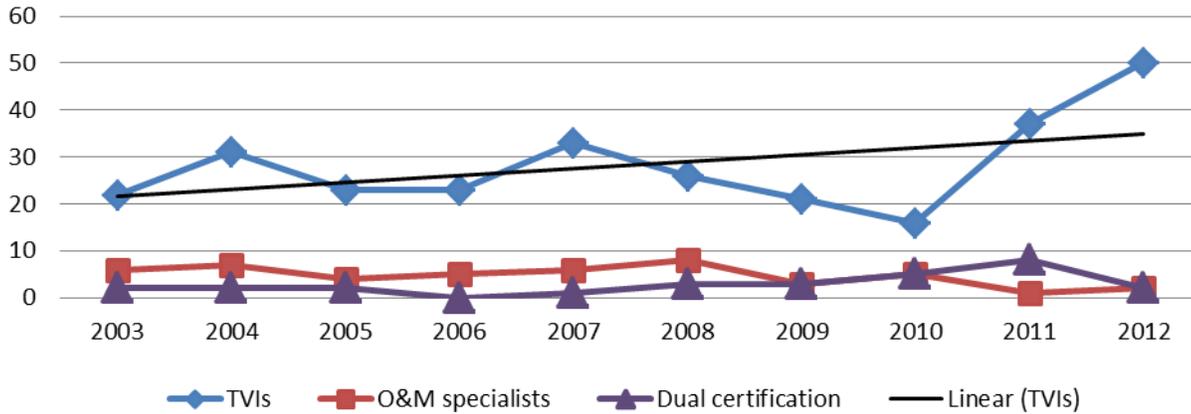
- caseloads are increasing, and
- the need for additional VI professionals is clear.

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

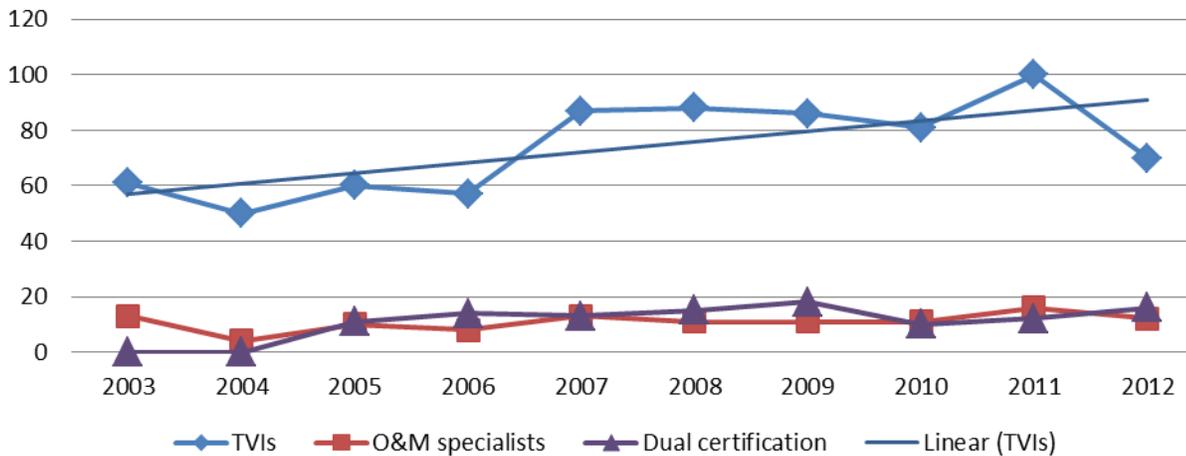
As VI professionals retire, districts may not opt for replacing them or may reduce contracts, even though the numbers of students are increasing. There was an increase in TVIs in 2012 albeit a slight one. While there are a record number of new teachers on probationary certificates, it appears that most of them were replacing those who left the field. Only two full-

time and four part-time TVIs were added to meet the needs of 180 additional students who have been added in the past year.

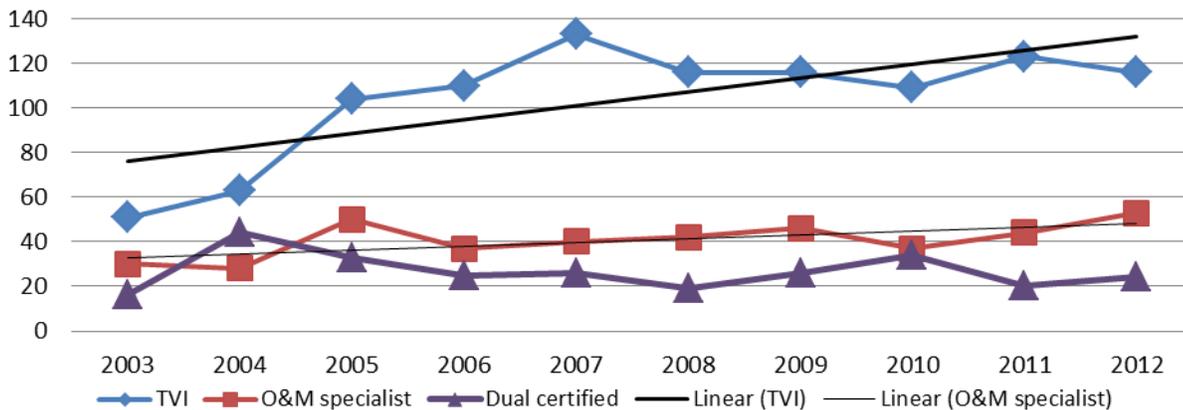
Attrition Within the Past Year (1-Year Attrition)



Projected 3-Year Attrition



Longer-term Need



Data on the number of students who receive O&M services have been collected since 2001. In 2012, 34% are getting O&M services. This proportion of students receiving O&M grows by about 1% per year. If statistical forecasts are accurate, it is projected that 36% will be receiving services by 2015. Each student will need adequate access to a fully qualified O&M specialist.

The relatively small change in the projected need of O&M specialists is noteworthy. Not all students need O&M services at all times. At this point, there are no reliable statistical projections on the percentage of students with visual impairments who are at risk for needing O&M services at any given time. Further, not all students with visual impairments currently receive O&M evaluations. In fact, according to the *Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments*, only 55% of visually impaired students were evaluated for O&M skills within the previous 3 years (TSBVI, 2012). 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 (including dually certified professionals) is under-projected by 8%. Therefore, it is difficult to explain the lack of growth in reported need for O&M specialists (including dually certified professionals) by ESC specialists. The most obvious explanation seems to be capacity to meet the need.

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 University (SFASU). Both schools have graduate programs for TVIs and O&M specialists. SFASU also has an undergraduate program for O&M specialists funded by the Rehabilitation Services Administration. Both schools serve students throughout the state with a combination of face-to-face, interactive audio, and Internet courses.

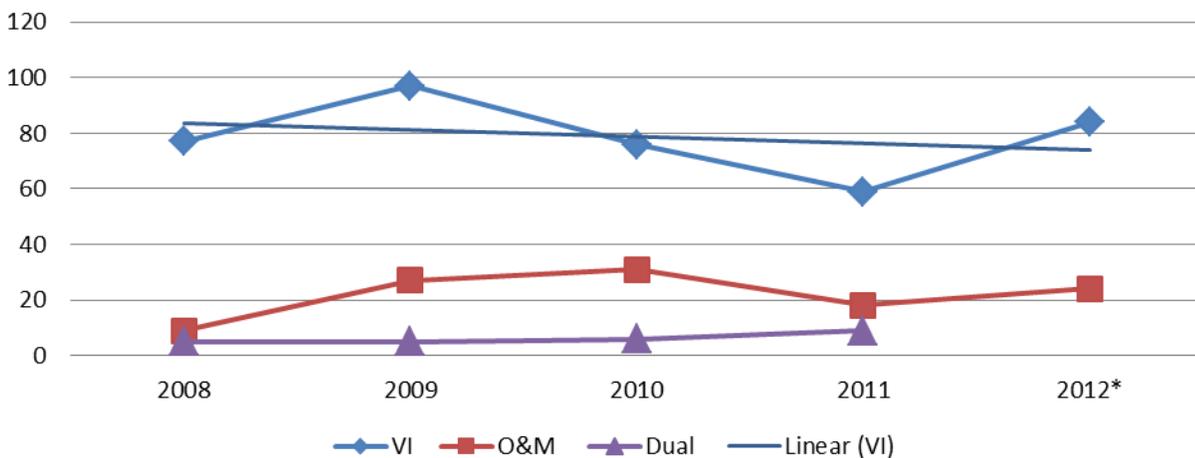
The combination of distance-learning options and supportive funding has had a major impact on the number of VI professionals in Texas. Enrollments increased substantially with the development of distance-learning options. Participation also fluctuates depending on levels of student support.

Table 17: Number of Students in Training Programs

	2010	2011	2012*
TVIs	88	73	94
O&M specialists	57	39	43
Dually certified	6	11	
Total	151	123	137

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

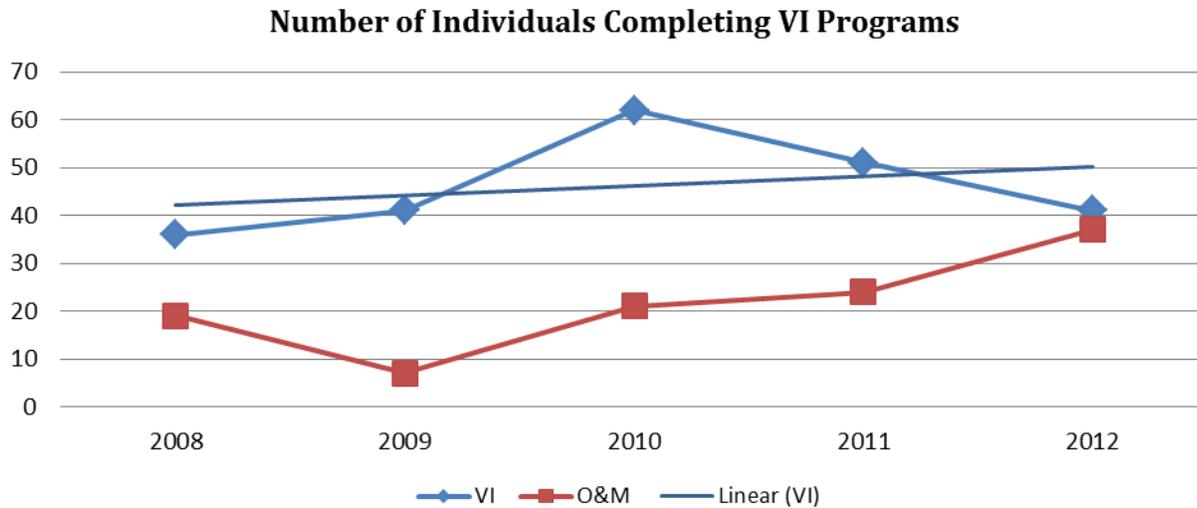
Number of Individuals Registered for Classes in Fall of Each Year



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

In October 2012, a total of 126 students were registered for courses leading to certification either as a teacher in visual impairments or an O&M specialist. Ninety-four were seeking VI certification and 43 were seeking O&M certification. This is a 31% improvement over the 2011 totals, but a reduction in the totals from the years prior to 2011.

In the past year, 41 individuals completed VI training and 37 completed O&M training. This is slightly below the average of 46 for TVIs and well above the average of 22 “completers” for O&M.



In 2008, the state funds were increased. However, subsequent and significant increases in tuition and other required costs have negated those gains. Scholarships have declined since 2009, the year following the increased grant. In 2012, the number of people receiving financial assistance, a strong incentive for enrollment, declined from 81% to 61% for TVIs and showed a slight increase for O&M.

Table 18: Percentage of Students Receiving Support through Texas Grants

	2010	2011	2012
TVIs	87%	81%	61%
O&M specialists	57%	50%	56%

Existing scholarships are not sufficient to address the needs of the applicants. The tuition set for 2012 also reflected a significant increase. Currently, a single class is approximately \$1,200, plus books and related expenses. As a result, existing funds are not having the same impact that they had even 2 years ago.

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

Clearly, the 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 2012, Texas had 940 individuals (848.7 FTEs) providing vision-related services, either directly to students or in a leadership and/or technical-assistance capacity. After adjusting for dually certified professionals (69), there are 883 individuals providing direct service either on a full- or part-time basis. The total includes the following full- or part-time individuals:

- 699 teachers certified in visual impairments (611.5 FTEs)
- 253 O&M specialists (192 FTEs)
- 69 dually certified professionals

In addition, there are:

- 57 regional or statewide leadership or technical-assistance specialists (45.2 FTEs).

While the number of individuals providing leadership and technical assistance remained static, the amount of time they spend providing VI-related services was reduced from 50.6 to 45.2 FTEs, or by 11% since 2010.

The total number of VI professionals increased by 1% from last year, with virtually no change since 2009. The TVI category did not show significant improvement, only increasing by two full-time and four part-time individuals. The O&M specialists increased from 212 to 253 individuals, or an 11.5% increase. The number of part-time VI professionals in both professions seems to be increasing at a greater rate than the number of full-time VI professionals.

In September 2012, there were 20 TVIs, 16 O&M specialists, and six dually certified professionals who are African-American. The Hispanic VI professionals included 75 TVIs, 13 O&M specialists, and six dually certified professionals. Eighty-one TVIs, 16 O&M specialists, and six dually certified professionals speak Spanish. There are 11 Asian TVIs, four O&M specialists, and two dually certified professionals. Overall, this was an increase in the cultural diversity of VI professionals, especially Hispanic and Asian TVIs.

An examination of the attrition, projected attrition, growth, and need indicates challenges ahead. The attrition rate increased this year from 46 to 54 VI professionals. Teachers certified in visual impairments (TVIs) had the biggest change. In 2010, 16 left the field the

previous year; in 2012, 50 left, or more than triple the amount from 2010. This is the second year with an increasing rate of retirements among VI professionals.

The projected 3-year attrition rate was estimated at 98, or 10% of all VI professionals. Further analysis of the data over the past decade indicate that although the regional VI consultants are the best predictors for attrition, even they underestimate attrition for TVIs by 19% and O&M specialists by 65%, and overestimate attrition for dually certified VI professionals by 33%. Therefore, it is likely that as delayed retirements are realized, attrition over the next 3 years will be substantially increased.

A long-term examination of growth patterns predicts that students with visual impairments will increase by 2.6% each year, or by 637 additional students in 2015. It is expected that Texas will have 9,693 students with visual impairments by that year.

This report assessed need based on two methods: (a) including the number of posted available positions in September and (b) recommendations from VI consultants at the ESCs. Job vacancy posting data gathered since 1996 about has proven to be a poor predictor of need.

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

Table 19: Summary of Need by Job Category

	TVIs	O&M specialists	Dually certified	Total
12–24-month-need projections	116	32	11	159
24–36-month-need projections	116	53	24	193

Both types of indicators of need were reviewed in this document: posted vacancies and recommendations by regional consultants. While each source revealed a different set of numbers, what is clear is that regardless of the method used, Texas has a clear and ongoing need for VI professionals.

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



Appendix

Methodology

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

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

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

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

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

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