



# Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Outreach Programs

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## **A Model of Individual Support to Provide Appropriate Access to Education for Students who are Deafblind**

Prepared by Texas Deaf-Blind Outreach, December, 2000

These documents have been designed to help families and school districts in Texas make decisions about using an intervener in the school setting for a student who is deafblind.

Based on original documents created by families, educators, and administrators at a series of Intervener Planning Meetings held in 1993-1994, co-sponsored by Texas Deaf-Blind Outreach and Texas Tech University.

For more information on interveners contact Texas Deaf-Blind Outreach.

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### **What is an Intervener?**

In educational settings, an intervener is a staff person who provides individual support to a student who is deafblind. The term "deafblind" refers to a combination of a vision impairment with a hearing impairment that affects the way a student is able to access information and function in the educational environment. Even mild impairments can have a profound effect when combined with another sensory loss. A student with deafblindness is defined by the state for educational purposes in 19 TAC §89.AA, Commissioner's Rules Concerning Special Education Services, §89.1040(c).

There is an array of instructional models regularly used within traditional general and special education settings that may potentially provide the unique instructional support needed for a child with deafblindness. However, when traditional models fail to provide access to appropriate

services, another option for the IEP committee is to designate a support staff as an intervener assigned to the child.

An intervener is a paraprofessional with specialized skills and training who is designated to provide direct support to a student with deafblindness for all or part of the instructional day. The intervener supports the existing service delivery model in implementing the student's IEP. The decision to use an intervener is based on the level of support a student currently needs to effectively participate in his or her instructional environment. Additionally, if a student with deafblindness requires extensive and novel modifications to the existing educational model, the services of an intervener can be used to simplify the process for the other members of the educational team.

Though the use of interveners for students with deafblindness is relatively new in Texas, the effectiveness of the model has been validated through widespread use for many years in Canada, and more recently in Utah and several other states. On its web site, the [Canadian Deafblind Rubella Association](#) defines this kind of intervention as "the process that allows individuals who are deafblind to receive visual and auditory information that they are unable to gather on their own in a way meaningful to them such that they can interact with the environment and thus be enabled to establish and maintain maximum control over their lives."

In an article on Utah's program to provide interveners in schools, the following basic definition of an intervener is given. "An Intervener is specially trained to provide clear and consistent sensory information to an individual who is deafblind, compensating for both vision and hearing loss in such a way as to facilitate and enhance learning and interaction with the physical environment and with society. An intervener acts as the eyes and ears of the individual who is deaf-blind, making him or her aware of what is occurring and attaching language and meaning to all experiences. An intervener intercedes between the individual who is deafblind and the environment in such a way so as to minimize the affects of multisensory deprivation, and to empower the individual to have control over his or her life." (Henderson & Killoran, 1995.)

Understanding what an intervener is, and why this support model has evolved and is becoming more widely used, begins with understanding the needs of children and youth who are deafblind. Deafblindness, or the combination of visual impairment with hearing impairment, often presents unique challenges to educators and others working with a child. The role of the intervener is to join with the entire educational team to meet those challenges by providing individual support for the child.

(Paddi Henderson & John Killoran, "Utah Enhances Services for Children who are Deaf-Blind," Deaf-Blind Perspectives, Fall, 1995)

In summary, an intervener is defined as follows:

- An intervener is one of an array of strategies and services which can be used to effectively meet the educational needs of a student who is deafblind;
- An intervener is a paraprofessional with specialized skills and training in communication and other issues related to deafblindness, who works as an essential member of the student's educational team;
- An intervener works individually with a student who is deafblind within any educational setting as determined by the IEP;
- An intervener provides access to information, environments, and materials the student might otherwise be unable to access or understand due to sensory impairments;

- An intervener communicates with a deafblind student using methods and strategies that are effective for the individual student;
- An intervener guides the student through activities and hands-on exploration of materials as appropriate based on individual learning styles;
- An intervener provides modifications to lessons as needed by the child and specified in the IEP.

## **The Unique Educational Needs of Children with Deafblindness**

Individuals with deafblindness have unique life-long needs for support that must be addressed in order for them to function in a world driven by sight and sound. Consistent with this, they have unique needs within the educational system. The information that follows outlines some of these needs as well as services which impact quality education for students with deafblindness.

Around 700 school-aged children from throughout Texas were identified on the 1999 Texas Deafblind Census. Due to the low incidence of this disability, these students are generally unique among the population of students with developmental disabilities within a given community. Most districts understandably build programs and hire staff targeting the majority of children with disabilities in their particular area, without planning programs for students with unusual needs.

### **Assessment**

From the beginning, the school system often finds its resources in deafblindness to be inadequate. Assessing the skills of these children can be difficult since assessment instruments are generally not normed for this population. It is often impossible to adapt these materials to test children with deafblindness without negating the test's validity.

Another problem in assessing skills and providing instruction to children with deafblindness is the difficulty in engaging them and drawing them outside of themselves. The need to feel safe in a world that alternately "comes at you" or "disappears in thin air" often sends these children inside themselves. They may be unresponsive during testing unless they are working with someone with whom they have bonded.

### **Unique Instructional Strategies**

Instruction for students with visual impairments usually relies heavily on information received through the auditory channel. For example, a child with visual impairments learns to use sounds to supplement whatever visual information is present in order to identify places and things and move from place to place. However, a child who is also deaf can not use this technique to compensate for vision problems. For this reason, the ability to identify things, or even to be aware of things that are beyond arm's reach, is greatly reduced.

Similarly, instruction for a child who is deaf or hard of hearing relies heavily on the use of vision. For example, language development and instruction for students who are deaf or hard of hearing can involve sign, fingerspelling, speechreading, or spoken language. Accessing and understanding instruction depends on the ability to clearly see the hands and faces of other signers or the lips of other speakers. Even a child with a mild visual loss faces difficulty in trying to gather complete information.

Because instructional strategies for students who are blind or deaf are in many cases based on supplementing one sense with the other, those strategies are often ineffective for students who are deafblind. Working with a student who is deafblind requires the use of strategies that

are different from the strategies used with students who are either blind or deaf, not simply a combination of those strategies.

### **Travel and Exploration of the Environment**

Children with deaf-blindness have difficulty learning through observation or independent exploration. As a result, they are likely to have an experiential and conceptual base that differs significantly from typical children, or children with other disabilities.

A student's ability to become oriented within an environment and to travel through it independently is deeply affected by deafblindness. For example, a student with the single disability of a vision impairment is taught to use hearing to determine where he is or orient to the area he is approaching. Auditory techniques may not necessarily be safe or effective if a child has even a mild hearing loss. Alternate strategies for teaching a child to use different environmental cues are needed for students with dual sensory impairments.

Without enticement from sights and sounds, a child with deafblindness may also be less likely to explore and interact with the world. This has great impact on cognitive and social development, as well as language.

### **Adaptive and Assistive Devices**

Children with deafblindness use a variety of adaptive/assistive devices. Knowing how to use and keep this equipment in working order is no small accomplishment. For example, a child may use one or all from a list of devices including a hearing aid, an FM auditory trainer, glasses, a monocular, and a cane. Students may use a vibrating alarm clock or braille watch.

Communication devices range from a low-tech picture book to a high-tech braille notetaker or computer. The child and staff must all be trained to use these devices.

### **Access to Information**

When the eyes and ears distort or omit incoming information altogether, a child may only perceive and comprehend fragments of any situation or experience. Children with deafblindness have difficulty learning through observation or independent exploration. As a result, they are likely to have an experiential and conceptual base that differs significantly from typical children, or children with other disabilities. Students who are deafblind must be supported in filling the information gaps that continuously result from sensory losses. They require additional time with carefully engineered "hands on" activities to access information that other children pick up incidentally from other people, objects, and the environment.

### **Communication**

Communication is one of the main areas which is critically affected by deafblindness, and is usually the highest priority in their educational programming. These children's communication systems typically contain a variety of forms which can include signals, tactile sign language, object symbols, tactile symbol systems, Braille, and many others. Each child's system must be individually designed and used with a high degree of consistency across the day. The development of good communication strategies and systems for students with deafblindness frequently requires training for those working with the child since few have preparation for or experience with this population.

Each child's [communication] system must be individually designed for him and used with a high degree of consistency across the day.

### **Behavior**

To address the underlying cause of these behaviors, one must have an understanding of the ongoing effects of sensory deprivation and an ability to modify the child's instruction to offset these effects while building additional skills.

Frequent stress and frustration that may be experienced by children due to the effects of deafblindness can result in behavior that becomes either withdrawn and passive or volatile and potentially combative. Additionally, abusive or disruptive behavior may serve as the only effective communication strategy for a child who does not know more acceptable ways to communicate. To address the underlying cause of these behaviors, one must have an understanding of the ongoing effects of sensory deprivation and an ability to modify the child's instruction to offset these effects while building additional skills.

### **Additional Disabilities**

Many children have other disabilities along with deafblindness, so consideration must be given to different or additional needs and strategies for support. For example, a combination of factors may cause children to dislike being touched, limiting their ability to gather information tactually. Some medication can affect vision and hearing. Ongoing medical problems may make vision or hearing loss progressively worse.

### **Consistency and Routine**

Children with deafblindness learn best when information is presented in a consistent fashion from person to person, place to place, and over time. Using consistent activity routines with many opportunities for practice and repetition is essential. This places some additional burdens on the staff, who must work together closely in order to provide consistency and coordinate support. Planning time as a group is critical. Additionally, information and input from the family is vital to a well-coordinated program.

### **Roles in the Educational Team**

Typically, staff who may serve a child with deafblindness include: teacher of the visually impaired; teacher of the hearing impaired; orientation and mobility instructor; intervener; classroom teacher (general education and special education) and instructional aide; behavior specialist; diagnostician; and often occupational and physical therapists as well as other related service staff such as a speech/ language therapist and audiologist. Often finding adequate time for the staff and the family to meet together, share information, and plan is quite difficult. This may result in communication breakdowns, not only between the staff and family, but also between the various staff members. To further complicate a difficult situation, each year new staff may become involved with the child.

Children with deafblindness learn best when information is presented in a consistent fashion from person to person, place to place, and over time.

### **Professional Expertise**

Most educational staff have had few if any prior opportunities for specific training in the area of deafblindness. It is rare to have a teacher certified or explicitly trained in deafblindness within a local school district. There is no recognized certification or endorsement through the Texas Education Agency in the area of deafblindness. There is only one university program in Texas offering course work specific to the area of deafblindness. Furthermore, because there are few jobs specifically in the area of deafblindness, the state's ability to utilize these graduates as well as recruit trained individuals from other states is greatly reduced.

Often districts can not meet the unique learning needs of a child with deafblindness without additional training to make appropriate program modifications. In order to design and provide

the necessary modifications and supports, most school districts look to outside consultants on deafblindness to provide training to their staff through an inservice model. Districts may utilize assistance from the Regional Deaf-Blind Specialists located at each of the Education Service Centers, or Texas Deaf-Blind Outreach at the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Austin. Texas Deaf-Blind Outreach is a training project funded by the Texas Education Agency through a Federal IDEA grant on deafblindness.

## **Conclusion**

Although children with deafblindness present unique challenges to those who are charged with providing them appropriate education, it is important to state that these children can learn. If these children and the educators working with them are given the proper supports, they can make terrific strides. Using appropriate strategies and proven models of support can enable a student who is deafblind to make the most of educational opportunities and be prepared for an enjoyable and productive life.

## **How Interveners Differ From Other Typical Support Staff**

Different job titles are used to describe staff members who support students receiving special education services. The "intervener" is a title exclusively used for a paraprofessional who specifically supports a student with deafblindness. Due to the unique nature of support needed by a child who is deafblind, the responsibilities, expectations, schedule, and training of an intervener differ from what is more commonly seen in other special education staff assignments.

### **Contrasting an intervener with an instructional aide**

1. The intervener is trained in communication and support strategies unique to students with deafblindness.
2. Because the intervener must have specialized knowledge and skills to implement the IEP of an individual student who is deafblind, the intervener must be released from duties to participate in training related to deafblindness. This may encompass training provided on-site, and workshops held off-campus, as well as out of town.
3. The intervener's primary responsibility is to implement the child's IEP by providing access to information, materials, and environments. The intervener may not be pulled to perform other duties (lunchroom or bus duty, substituting for other aides or teachers who are absent, etc.) if it interferes with implementing the IEP.
4. Because the intervener receives training to perform specialized tasks, and students who are deafblind have difficulty trusting and understanding new people, the intervener must not be considered interchangeable with other paraprofessionals when making duty assignments. One intervener consistently works with a student across different settings, and over a long period of time.
5. The intervener is present and participates in all staffings and IEP meetings related to the child with deafblindness. This may involve preparing reports, as well as participating in discussions when the team formulates and evaluates programming.
6. The intervener needs scheduled preparation time which may be used for: observation of general education classes to prepare for the inclusion of the student; making or purchasing adaptive materials; lesson planning; reviewing and recording data; preparing reports; reviewing training materials; or meeting with related service staff and IEP team members.

### **Contrasting an intervener with a sign language interpreter**

1. A child with deafblindness may or not need the services of a certified interpreter, based on factors such as language ability, instructional arrangement, and IEP goals. For example, a student who uses sign fluently in an academic program requires an interpreter, while a student whose use of sign is emerging is served appropriately with a staff member proficient in sign, but not necessarily certified. Some students with deafblindness use communication forms other than sign altogether, such as speech or tactile symbols.

Please note: In cases when a certified interpreter is required, the student's needs related to deafblindness may require the use of skills and strategies in addition to those of a typical interpreter in order for the child's IEP to be fully implemented. In these cases, an interpreter with additional training, skills, roles, and responsibilities is acting as an intervener.

2. Rather than relying on one uniform communication form or language, such as sign, an intervener must know the individual student's unique communication system. Students who are deafblind may use sign, tactile sign, speech, braille, picture symbols, tactile symbols, objects, gestures, signals, or some combination of these and other communication forms. The intervener must be well versed in the student's individual forms of communicating both receptively and expressively.
3. When a student who is deafblind uses sign language, it may be modified from sign typically used for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Signs may need to be presented within a few feet from the student in order to remain within the his or her visual range. The signs used may need to be reduced so they can be entirely seen within a very narrow visual field. The student may need to receive sign tactually. Signs may need to be paired with other communication forms for clarity. Making these modifications may be unfamiliar to a typical interpreter.
4. A student with deafblindness may miss a significant amount of environmental information in addition to what is being said by others. For this reason, the intervener does much more than interpret what is being said. The intervener supplies additional information about what is happening around the student.
5. Because a student who is deafblind misses significant environmental information, he or she may not have as complete a conceptual understanding of topics being discussed as someone who has complete use of one or both distance senses. Consequently, the intervener supplies conceptual background information to supplement what is being said in class.
6. An intervener must be familiar with basic orientation and mobility strategies such as sighted guide, and take responsibility for assisting the student in moving from place to place when necessary.
7. Students who are deafblind have difficulty trusting and understanding new people, so interveners are not interchangeable. One intervener consistently works with a student across different settings, and over a long period of time.
8. The intervener is present and participates in all staffings and IEP meetings related to the child with deafblindness. This may involve preparing reports, as well as participating in discussions to formulate and evaluate programming with the team. Interpreters do not typically have this role.

9. In contrast to a typical interpreter, the intervener needs preparatory time which may be used in the following ways: observation of general education classes to prepare for the inclusion of the student; making or purchasing materials; lesson planning, reviewing and recording data; telephone follow-up related to the student's needs; preparing reports; reviewing training materials; or meeting with related service staff and IEP team members.

## **Who Should Have an Intervener?**

The foundation of appropriate educational support for a student with deafblindness is a strong IEP that addresses unique needs related to deafblindness and outlines necessary instructional modifications. The question of using an intervener should be addressed by examining the student's progress with the IEP and the ability of available personnel to supply appropriate modifications within any potential instructional arrangements being considered.

The nature of supports and modifications necessary for an individual student with deafblindness to benefit from instruction are based on two things:

the needs of the individual child; and

the potential for the child to access instruction within available educational settings and instructional models.

An intervener is a staff person designated to provide direct support to a student with deafblindness for all or part of the instructional day. The intervener supports the existing service delivery model in implementing the student's IEP. The decision to use an intervener is based on the level of support a student currently needs to effectively participate in his or her instructional environment. Additionally, if a student with deafblindness requires extensive and novel modifications to the existing educational model, the services of an intervener can be used to simplify the process for the other members of the educational team.

The question of an intervener should only be addressed after the child is assessed, the IEP is developed, and the available service delivery options are reviewed.

The following considerations will assist school districts and families in deciding the level of instructional support that would be most helpful in the child's learning process.

### **Variables in deciding appropriate level of support with regard to individual student needs:**

1. Social/emotional needs of the child. Example: Some children with deafblindness have extreme difficulties in relating to or responding to people in general. They may become accustomed to isolation when reduced sensory information separates them from others. In such cases, a child may turn inward and withdraw from human contact, or in some cases become combative when another person approaches. Some seem to recognize a few, but not most of the people who interact with them. Sometimes limiting the number of staff who work with the child is helpful. Giving a child the opportunity to build a strong relationship with one person can provide a base for gradually accepting others.
2. Degree and complexity of sensory loss. Example: If a child is completely without sight and has a hearing loss that causes great distortion of sound, he or she relies heavily on the sense of touch to gain information. In this situation, a person to carefully guide the student through hands-on experience with new activities is frequently needed.
3. Student's overall instructional profile. Example: Can the student learn in a group none/some/all of the time? Does the child require a high degree of consistency in learning that prohibits numerous people working with the student on the same task? Does the

student need to become comfortable with a particular task or lesson taught by one person, before others can begin to provide support on the same lessons?

### **Variables in deciding the need for additional support with regard to educational settings and resources:**

1. Existing special education services are appropriate for the other children with disabilities on the campus, but not a good match for the one child with deaf-blindness in the district. Example: The child with deafblindness is in a classroom with one teacher and ten teenagers who read on a 5th grade level, can learn in a large group, and go alone to some general education classes. The teacher feels that she cannot serve the child with deafblindness without additional staff.
2. The programming recommended by the IEP committee places such demands on the staff for inservice training and material adaptation/preparation, that the IEP is at risk for not being implemented. Example: The child is served by eight people who are unfamiliar with van Dijk methodology, calendar systems and adaptive listening devices, all of which play a large role in her programming. The amount of inservice it would take to build adequate skills across the group is prohibitive in light of their other duties. The calendar system will take hours to develop and no one has time or is really sure how to start.

### **Suggested Job Description**

#### **Position:**

Intervener for Student with Deafblindness

An intervener is a staff position designated to provide direct support to a student with deafblindness for all or part of the instructional day as determined by the student's Individual Educational Plan (IEP). The decision to designate an intervener is based on the level of support needed by a student to participate effectively in his/her instructional environment(s) as described by the IEP. The intervener works cooperatively with parents and a variety of direct service providers and consultants including: classroom teachers; teachers of children with hearing impairments, visual impairments, or severe disabilities; speech therapists; occupational and physical therapists; orientation and mobility instructors; and other professionals as well as paraprofessionals.

#### **Rationale:**

A child who is deafblind needs to have the opportunity to develop a personal relationship with a person who will consistently be available to interpret the world for the child. The child must have continual access to a person who communicates effectively so that the individual can develop a sense of trust and security that will enable the child to learn. Many students with deafblindness require extensive and novel modifications to an existing educational model. The services of an intervener can be used to individualize the process. An intervener serves as a bridge to the world for a child who has deafblindness.

#### **Qualifications:**

Experience with and/or desire to work with students with sensory impairments. Must be willing to participate in ongoing training in the area of deafblindness.

Reports to: Appropriate administrative staff

#### **Supervises:**

None

## **Responsibilities:**

The intervener assists a student with deafblindness to actively participate in activities and provides a supportive and effective environment in which the student can learn. The intervener provides this service within the guidelines of the school, as set forth in its policies and procedures. The intervener works under the direction and supervision of the classroom teacher, and participates as a full educational team member in developing and implementing the student's IEP.

## **Specific Duties Include:**

- The Intervener's specific duties will be individualized according to the needs of the child and the profile of the current educational placement. Typically, duties may include:
- Has the primary responsibility to provide direct support to a student with deafblindness during all or part of a school day as part of an educational team, and as indicated in the student's IEP;
- Follows the student's IEP and the modifications and instructional techniques recommended by related service staff;
- Become proficient in students' individual communication methods and strategies;
- Creates instructional materials as needed;
- Accompanies and supports the student during community-based instruction;
- Visits or provides instruction in the student's home as deemed appropriate by the IEP committee;
- Maintains communication between home and school, and keeps a daily log of information about the student and his or her activities;
- Participates in IEP meetings and student staffings;
- Participates in the assessment of the student and in the preparation of IEPs, progress reports, behavior plans, data collection, and other documentation for program monitoring;
- Participates in site-based, regional, and statewide training in the area of deafblindness;
- Works to attain proficiency in all items listed on the "[Intervener Portfolio Summary](#)" self-assessment;
- Serves as a resource to other staff on issues related to deafblindness.

## **Work Attitudes:**

- Feels comfortable working in close physical proximity to students while frequently using touch to communicate with and instruct students who are primarily tactile learners;
- Demonstrates emotional maturity, stability, ability to perform under stress, and frustration tolerance;
- Shows ability to exercise good judgment, cooperation, tact, and discretion in dealing with the student, family, and others;
- Shows interest in developing additional knowledge and skills;
- Follows team decisions, established policies and procedures, and designated lines of communication and authority.

## Important Issues for Schools Using an Intervener

### Roles of the educational team

1. Because the intervener should receive special training on issues related to the education of a student with deafblindness, he or she becomes a valuable member of the educational team. Through the course of close daily contact with the student, the intervener also becomes an expert on communication and support for the individual student. For this reason, professionals from certain disciplines may want to seek information from as well as collaborate with the intervener in some situations. At first, these professionals may be unfamiliar or uncomfortable with this role while working with a paraprofessional. All members of the team should learn about interveners and plan how to best make use of the intervener's unique qualifications and position.
2. The intervener will be working as part of a transdisciplinary team, which will be needed to plan an appropriate program for a student with dual sensory impairments. This team might include the intervener, the student and family, general and/or special education teachers, consulting/related service staff, general education administrators, special education supervisor, etc.
3. This team should include professionals such as a teacher of the visually impaired, orientation and mobility specialist, and deaf educator, as well as therapists based on any additional disabilities or needs.
4. The intervener is a critical part of the team, and should be included in team planning. Since the intervener usually is the consistent person across educational environments, he or she is in a unique position to both provide and disseminate information about the student. The intervener will be responsible for carrying out recommendations made by consulting professionals, and making continuous adaptations to lessons throughout the day. For this reason, the intervener must meet directly with team members on a regular basis.

### Support and Supervision

1. A decision must be made about who will be the intervener's direct supervisor. This may not be obvious if the student changes classrooms or settings during the day. Possible supervisors might include the classroom teacher, resource teacher, special education coordinator, counselor, etc. Lack of a clear chain of supervision can make the intervener feel powerless and unsupported.
2. The intervener will need on-going support in implementing modifications, obtaining adaptive aids, coordinating with the educational team, interpreting recommendations from consulting staff, brainstorming activities and strategies, finding training opportunities, and many other situations throughout the school year. This would also include emotional support during difficult or frustrating periods. This support could come from a variety of sources, but because the intervener is often isolated, he or she should know where to go when in need of any of these kinds of support.
3. The position of intervener may be unique on a campus or in a district. This intensifies the feeling of isolation. For that reason, it is helpful if the intervener has the opportunity to be in contact with other paraprofessionals serving in this role at other locations. Texas Deaf-Blind Outreach at Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired offers annual meetings or workshops with strands designed for interveners.

### Training

1. The intervener will need specialized skills and knowledge in order to effectively do his or her job. "Intervener Portfolio Summary ", a document developed to plan training in Texas, can provide guidance in assessing an intervener's skills and training needs. The skills needed center around communication forms used by the student and providing meaningful access to information from the environment.
2. Training can be provided through a variety of sources, and in a variety of formats. Each regional Education Service Center has designated Deaf-Blind Specialist. This person should be able to inform the district of upcoming training opportunities. Workshops and consultation may be available locally. Other workshops sponsored by Texas Deaf-Blind Outreach may be available on a regional or statewide basis. Some training materials are available in print or video.
3. The district should expect to set aside some funds to provide access to training for the intervener. Some financial assistance is available from Texas Deaf-Blind Outreach to facilitate training an intervener working with a student listed on the Texas Deafblind Census.

### **Intervener Certification**

1. In Canada there are university training programs providing coursework leading to certification for interveners. No formal system of certification currently exists in the USA. However, several states are taking steps toward formalizing intervener preparation. College credit courses for interveners are offered or planned in Minnesota and Utah. Ski\*Hi Institute in Utah has produced an extensive intervener training manual and has mandatory attendance at monthly intervener training courses funded by the state.
2. Plans have been made to allow interveners in Texas to access coursework from other states through distance education. Colleges in Texas may in the future offer classes such as these. In the future it may be possible for districts to locate skilled individuals certified to be interveners for students with deafblindness. Until that time, Texas Deaf-Blind Outreach, the regional Education Service Centers, and school districts must work together to provide numerous in-service opportunities to ensure that interveners have the skills needed to work effectively with students who are deafblind.

### **The Intervener's Schedule**

1. The intervener's schedule is based on the needs of the student. An intervener should be available to the student whenever necessary to insure that the IEP is implemented and the student has access to the information present in the environment. This may be for all or part of the school day as decided by the IEP committee, based on the nature of the educational settings and activities called for in the IEP.
2. The intervener's work schedule should include time for planning as often as necessary. For example, the intervener needs time to gather and assemble modified materials. Additionally, time may be spent meeting with other members of the educational team, accompanying team members on home visits, and recording data for the team's review.

### **Broadening the Student's Social and Support Circle**

1. Unlike traditional models in which staff make efforts to fade, giving way to natural support in the classroom and other school environments, in many situations it may be inappropriate for the intervener to fade. The intervener is the communication link between the student and others in the environment. When others are unfamiliar with the student's

language or other communication forms, the intervener must be close at hand to interpret.

2. Because it is necessary for the intervener to be so closely involved in interactions, there is danger that the intervener will become a barrier to social exploration for the student. The intervener must be aware that his or her role is to facilitate interaction by acting as a bridge between the student and others, rather than insulating the student from peers, other professionals, and community members.
3. The intervener should attempt to expand the student's allies among other professionals by providing information about deafblindness and facilitating communication.

### **Financial Considerations**

1. Because an intervener may be a necessary support for students who are deafblind, school districts should consider the number of students identified on the deafblind census when planning budgets.
2. Interveners require specialized skills and training to be effective. Consistency, or lack of employee turnover, is also a concern since students who are deafblind have issues with trust and unique learning styles. For this reason, districts should consider a salary step that will aid recruitment and retention of quality interveners.
3. Interveners have a unique role with a low incidence student population. Training needed may not be available locally. Districts should be prepared to budget or seek funds for on-going training opportunities for the intervener. One source of financial assistance for intervener training is Texas Deaf-Blind Outreach
4. Interveners frequently need supplies to make materials for curricular adaptations so the student can have access to instruction. These may be common items (such as velcro strips for making tactile symbols), or more unusual items (such as a potted plant for a student to explore tactually while the rest of the class learns through pictures and lecture.) The intervener should have access to a supply budget to provide these adaptive materials.

### **Substitutes**

1. Students who are deafblind need consistency in order to trust, understand, and communicate effectively with a person providing support. For this reason, interveners should not be reassigned or pulled for alternate duty without good cause.
2. However, the role of the intervener requires him or her to be away from regular duties from time to time. For example, interveners need to attend IEP planning meetings and training.
3. For times that the intervener must be away from the student, an appropriate back-up plan must be in place. Someone else in the school, or a readily available substitute, should receive training in the student's communication style and support needs. The alternate(s) should be trained and introduced to the child by the intervener, especially when trust and bonding is an issue.

### **Administrative Checklist**

#### **When Assigning an Intervener**

Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Intervener: \_\_\_\_\_

The following considerations should be addressed before the intervener begins working with the student.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. The intervener's skills have been assessed, and an individual training plan developed for the intervener. (See "[Intervener Portfolio Summary](#).")
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The chain of supervision is clear, and all members of the student's educational team are aware of their own roles, and the role of the intervener.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. The intervener knows where to go for all kinds of support and assistance when needed.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. The intervener has a schedule which accommodates the student's needs, and provides the intervener with time to plan and meet with other team members as often as necessary.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. The intervener has access to funds for needed instructional materials.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. There is a procedure for the intervener to gather and share information with other people and broaden the child's base of support.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. The intervener is familiar with procedures to collect data and demonstrate the child's progress.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Adequate back-ups have been identified, oriented, and made available for times the intervener is not present.

### **Bibliography of Additional Materials on Interveners**

Alsop, L. (Ed.). (in press). *Understanding Deafblindness: Issues, Perspectives, and Strategies*. Logan, UT: Ski-Hi Institute.

This two volume manual is a comprehensive training resource designed for interveners and families of children with deafblindness. Among the twenty-four units on topics related to deafblindness, "The Intervener" covers training needs, responsibilities, attitudes, and effective strategies for working with children.

Alsop, L., Blaha, R., & Kloos, E. (2000). *The Intervener in Early Intervention and Educational Settings for Children and Youth With Deafblindness*. Monmouth, OR: NTAC.

This NTAC Briefing Paper was developed and reviewed by people from throughout the country, and provides the first national statement on the use of interveners in schools and early intervention settings. Available online through [DB-LINK](#) at 1-800-438-9376.

*Deafblindness and the Intervener* (1998) Logan, UT: Utah State University.

This videotape shows interveners working with students who are deafblind, and has interviews with parents, educators, administrators, and interveners. Available from Hope Publishing, Incorporated; (435)752-9533; [www.hopepubl.com/](http://www.hopepubl.com/).

Henderson, P. & Killoran, J. (1995). Utah Enhances Services for Children Who Are Deaf-Blind. *Deaf-Blind Perspectives*, 3(1), 3-6.

This article focuses on the needs of students with deafblindness, and advocacy leading to legislation providing funds for intervener services in Utah.

Watkins, S., Clark, T., Strong, C., & Barringer, D. (1994). Effectiveness of an Intervener Model of Services for Young Deaf-Blind Children *American Annals of the Deaf*, 139(4), 404-409.

In this study, interveners were shown to help children develop interactive behaviors instead of isolated, defensive, or self-stimulatory behaviors. Quantitative and qualitative data support the effectiveness of intervener services for young children who are deaf-blind.

You and Me: A Five Part Video Series About Educating Children Who Are Deaf-Blind. (1995). Monmouth, OR: Teaching Research.

Though this video uses the term "interpreter-tutor", the function of the support model used is parallel to an intervener. The video shows an intervener working with a student who is deafblind in an inclusive setting.