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***DRAFT* 2022 SUMMARY OF PROFESSIONALS IN VISUAL IMPAIRMENT IN TEXAS**

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

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Introduction

Since 1996, the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) has been conducting an annual survey of the Visual Impairment (VI) professionals in Texas. The term “VI professionals” includes teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs) and certified orientation and mobility specialists (COMS). Individuals functioning in both roles are referred to as “dually certified.” This report provides information about the results of the survey conducted in September 2021.

In order to assess the characteristics of and need for VI professionals in Texas, data was collected from the 20 Education Service Centers (ESCs), two Texas university personnel preparation programs and TSBVI. Data from TSBVI include VI professionals who provide direct services in the Comprehensive Programs and those who provide statewide training, short-term services, and leadership via the Outreach and Short-Term Programs. More information about how data were collected is included in the Appendix of this report.

Executive Summary

The **total number of VI professionals**, including leadership positions, **decreased** from 973 to 935, a loss of 38 individuals.

- The number of **part-time TVIs decreased** by 15 individuals while **full-time TVIs decreased** by 21 individuals in 2022, bringing last year’s total of 679 to **643 or 569 FTEs** (decrease of 28.5 FTEs).
- There are **305 COMS** providing direct service, equaling **253.5 FTEs**. The total **decreased** by 8 individuals. Thirteen individuals increased in the full-time category while a decrease of 21 was seen in the part-time category.
- **Eighty-one VI professionals are dually certified**, providing both TVI and O&M services. This is an increase of 6 individuals from the previous year.
- **Approximately 22%** of the total number of VI professionals serving students are **contract service providers**, same as last year.

Cultural diversity of VI professionals showed both signs of growth and decline.

- The number of **VI professionals who are African-American decreased** by 23, from 76 to **53**, or a 30 percent decrease.
- The number of **VI professionals fluent in Spanish increased** by 16, from 99 to **115**.
- The number of **VI professionals who are Hispanic increased** by 24, from 126 to **150**, while **Asian American decreased** by 2, from 9 to **7** in 2022.

Attrition in the previous year **increased** from 48 to **63** individuals. ESC consultants anticipate that 109 TVIs and 46 COMS, or **15% of existing VI professionals**, will retire or otherwise leave the field over the next 3 years.

The number of students with visual impairments decreased in 2022, only the third decrease on record.

- In 2022, the total number of students reported to the *Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments* was **10,639**, 254 fewer students than registered in 2021.
- Although there were fewer students registered in 2022, only 2 ESCs reported a decrease in caseloads. TVI caseloads increased in 13 regions and remained the same in 4 regions; O&M caseloads increased in 11 regions while 5 regions remained the same.

The **total number of university students statewide** entering VI and O&M certification programs at Stephen F. Austin State University and Texas Tech University **decreased by 13%**, and **90 completed** their program in 2022.

- There are **172 future VI professionals** in a program leading to certification as either a TVI or COMS. One hundred eleven students are working toward their TVI certification and 61 are enrolled in an O&M program.
- **Ninety individuals** (62 TVIs and 28 COMS) **completed a VI certification program in 2022**, an increase of 38% from 2021.
- **Sixty-three percent of students** enrolled in SFASU and TTU TVI and O&M certification training programs **receive funding support** for coursework, a decrease of 9% from 2021.

Anticipated Need for VI Professionals

- It is projected that Texas will need up to 57 additional full-time equivalent TVI new positions and 44 full-time equivalent COMS new positions by 2025 to accommodate **student growth alone**.
- Texas is estimated to need an additional 155-166 full-time equivalent TVIs and 67-78 full-time equivalent COMS in the next 3 years to replace those who are likely to leave the field **and** respond to anticipated student growth.
- If the university TVI program completion rates continue to reflect those over the last 3 years, the number of newly certified TVIs (144) **would fall below the range of anticipated need**.
- Presuming that orientation and mobility students continue to find challenges in completing their programs, and the number of completers continues at the same rate over the next 3 years (60), **it is likely that the need for a minimum of 67 new COMS by 2025 will not be met**.

Characteristics of VI Professionals in Texas

The survey asked about the number of individuals *functioning* as VI professionals. While many professionals may hold certification as a teacher of students with visual impairments (TVI) or as an orientation and mobility specialist (COMS or O&M specialist), this report summarizes

data on those with a *current job assignment* as a TVI or COMS. Although some VI professionals hold *both* TVI and O&M certifications, only those professionals whose current job assignment includes **functioning** in both roles are considered dually certified for this report.

It is important to note that most VI professionals are not classroom teachers; they are primarily itinerant specialists in visual impairment who work in a variety of schools, community settings, and homes. In addition to direct services, they also provide critical consultations to other team members about the functional impact of specific visual impairments on students in a range of settings, and ensure that appropriately modified materials are available. Additionally, they must travel to their students and provide instruction in the home, school, and community environments. Understanding the difference between classroom teachers and VI professionals is crucial when assessing the current and future need for specialists in visual impairment (Correa-Torres & Johnson Howell, 2004).

Number of VI professionals in Texas

The number of VI professionals decreased by 4% in the Fall of 2022. The majority of the decrease was seen in those providing TVI services.

This information is being collected annually for 26 years. Over the years, the number of VI professionals has increased with an occasional drop. In 2022, there was a decrease of 38 VI professionals (935) compared to 2021 (973) representing a decrease of 25.6 full-time equivalents (FTEs). This is, by far, the largest drop of VI professionals. In 2020, the field experienced a drop of 29 VI professionals due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A similar decrease in numbers was reported in 2017 (-18 individuals) and another in in 2013 (-26 individuals). In all three cases, the totals increased significantly the following year. This trend will likely continue and the field will continue to grow; however, it is important to consider that the 2022 *Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments* identified a decrease of 254 students, a 2% decrease in the student population (TSBVI, 2022) compared to the previous year. This is likely due to a continued decrease in student enrollment statewide as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The graph that follows displays the changes in the number of VI professionals over ten years, from 2012-2022.

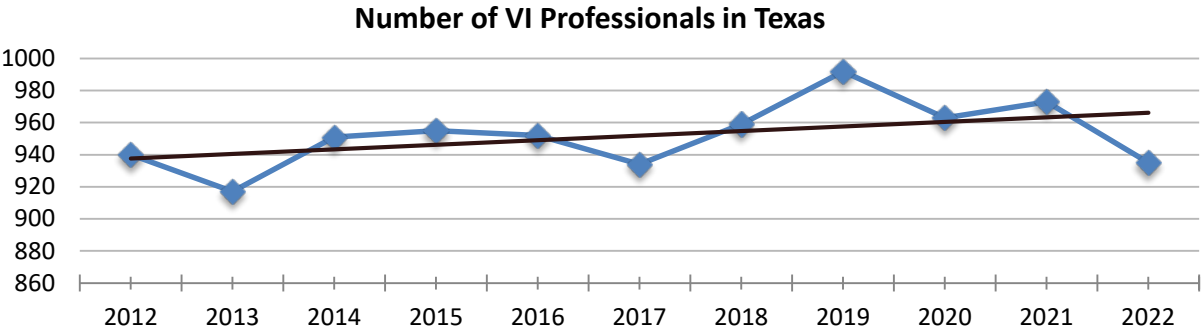


Table 1 below provides further details about VI professionals in Texas within the last 3 years. The term “individuals” includes both full- and part-time VI professionals. The full-time equivalent (FTE) data adjusts for the part-time VI professionals, including those who are dually certified.

Table 1: Total VI Professionals Statewide

	2020		2021		2022	
	Individuals	FTE ²	Individuals	FTE ²	Individuals	FTE ²
ESC leadership ¹	25	21.1	26	21.6	29	21.5
TSBVI statewide ¹	30	25.8	30	27	25	20.5
VI and O&M service providers (adjusted for dually certified professionals)	908	840	917	848.5	881	829.5
Total VI professionals	963	886.8	973	897.1	935	871.5

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

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

Direct-service providers

The total number of direct-service providers in 2022 was 881 individuals or 871.5 FTEs (adjusted for dually certified professionals). There are currently 643 TVIs and 305 COMS providing services to students with visual impairments across the state.

Below are data regarding full and part-time direct-service providers. The term “direct-service providers” includes teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs), certified orientation and mobility specialists (COMS), and dually certified personnel who work with students on a regular basis, and/or are the teacher-of-record for issues related to visual impairments. This category does not include those who provide vision-related leadership, technical assistance, or statewide services at ESCs or TSBVI through the Short-Term Programs and Outreach Programs.

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. The reference to “full-time” and “part-time” refers to the total employment of the VI professional. Individuals who work part-time 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 educational cooperatives that employ TVIs on a full-time basis.

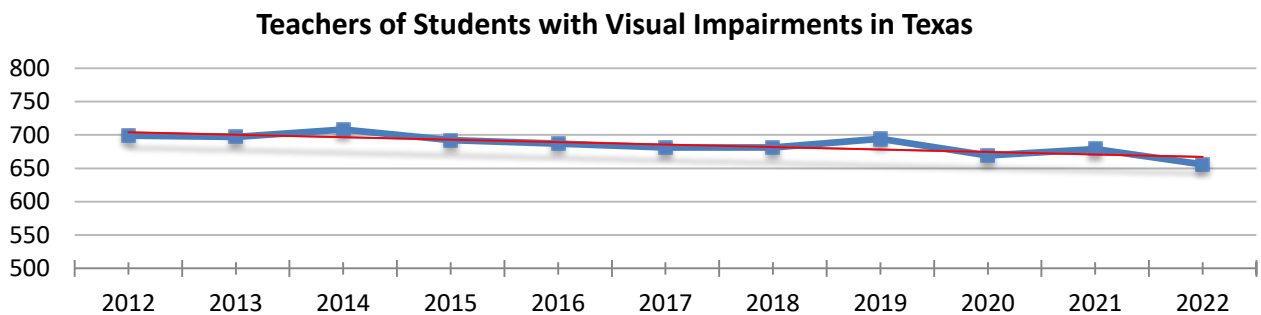
For the purposes of this survey, professionals who are certified *and* employed in both visual impairments and orientation and mobility (dually certified) are counted as a part-time TVI and a part-time COMS. These specialists are embedded in both TVI and COMS data. Specific information on dually certified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

Table 2: Direct-Service Providers: Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (TVIs)

	2020		2021		2022	
	Individuals	FTE ¹	Individuals	FTE ¹	Individuals	FTE ¹
Full-time TVIs	511		516		498	
Part-time TVIs	158		163		148	
Total VI staff	669	590	679	597.5	643	569

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

As the table above indicates, the total number of *individuals* (full and part-time) who work as a TVI decreased by 36 this year and by 28.5 FTEs.



Except for a steep decrease in 2022, the graph above shows the absence of significant increase, and at times a decline, in the total number of TVIs across the state. The graph below shows the full and part-time TVI totals over recent years. A decrease in the availability of TVIs in 2022 seems to follow a reduction of 254 students as identified by *Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments*.

Full- and Part-time TVIs

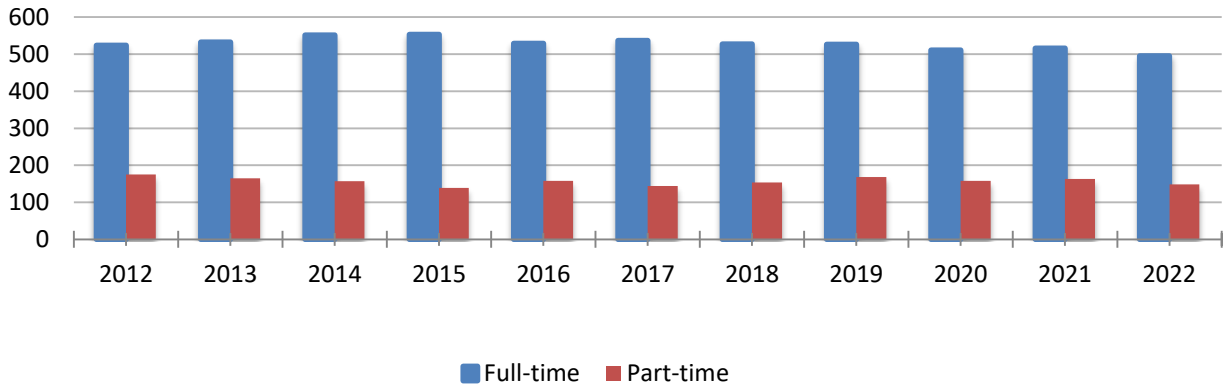


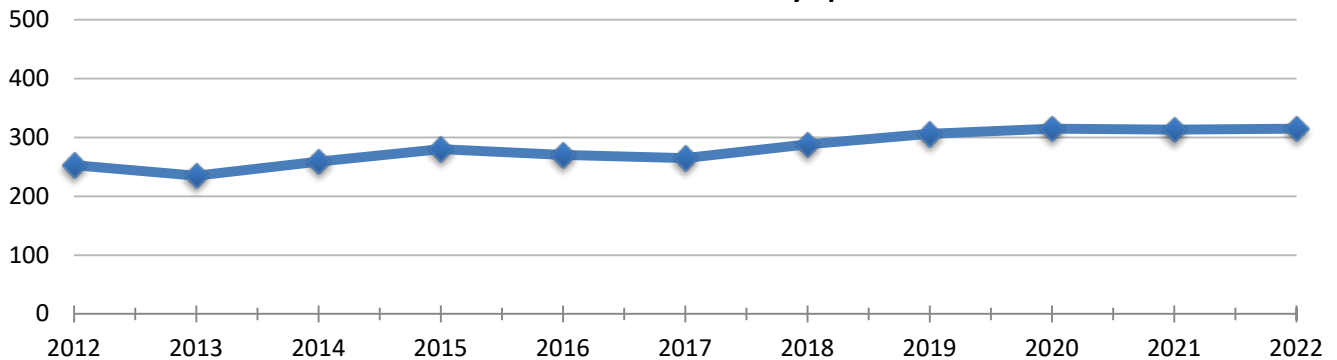
Table 3: Direct-Service Providers: Orientation and Mobility Specialists (COMS)

	2020		2021		2022	
	Individuals	FTE ¹	Individuals	FTE ¹	Individuals	FTE ¹
Full-time COMS	185		189		202	
Part-time COMS	130		124		103	
Total O&M staff	315	250	313	251	305	253.5

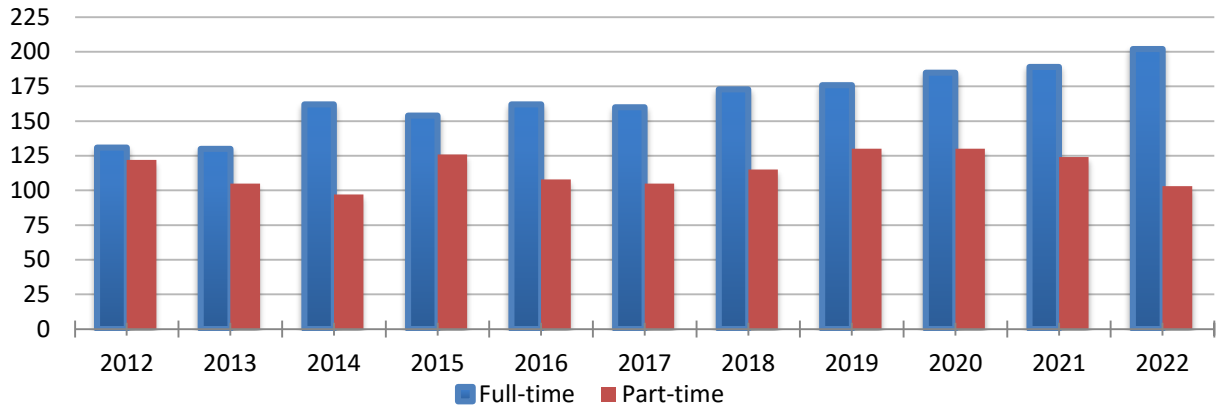
¹ FTE = part-time x .5 + full-time for all charts

As noted in Table 3 above and the graphs that follow, the total number of O&M specialists decreased this year by 8 individuals while the number of FTEs increased by 2.5. Growth was seen in the full-time category; however, the part-time category lost a total of 21 service providers.

Certified Orientation & Mobility Specialists in Texas



Full- and Part-time COMS



All initial evaluations of students with visual impairments must include an O&M evaluation by a certified O&M specialist in the home, school and community setting per TEC 30.002. This year the *Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments* reported that 69% of all students with a visual impairment in Texas have been evaluated by a COMS and 39% are receiving orientation and mobility services. Although not unexpected due to the drop seen in the number of students with visual impairments overall, the data also indicates that for the second time within the past three years, there is a decrease in the number of students who have received an O&M evaluation as well in the number of students receiving O&M services.

The number of students with visual impairment has decreased since 2020. In 2022, 4,186 students received O&M services, a decrease of 251 students within the past two years. However, it is projected that student growth will be 1.8% in the next three years. Therefore, increasing the number of COMS FTEs across the state is essential in order to ensure that all students have access to an O&M evaluation and receive needed orientation and mobility services.

Part-time service providers

There are 282 part-time VI professionals serving students with visual impairments in Texas. Both the number of part-time TVIs and part-time COMS decreased in 2022.

It is important to note that employing part-time VI professionals has advantages and disadvantages. Advantages include supporting districts with a small number of students with visual impairments to meet their local needs. Part-time VI professionals 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. In addition, part-time VI professionals may either be employed by the district on a part-time, contractual basis for VI-only purposes, or may be hired full-time with duties unrelated to visual impairments.

Disadvantages include logistical challenges in meeting the needs of the students. Due to other commitments and/or responsibilities, part-time staff members are at risk for not being able to

provide the full caseload management or comprehensive array of services necessary for even small caseloads.

Part-time contract employees may not function as full members of the collaborative educational team if their service hours are limited to only direct hours by the hiring district or co-op, as is frequently the case. It may be hard to carry out collaborative consultation to the degree needed if service delivery time is limited. Without time for collaboration, these VI professionals may not be able to adequately ensure that other team members have the training to assist with generalization of skills learned from the VI specialist (TSBVI, n.d.).

Contract service providers

Twenty-two percent of TVIs and COMS in Texas are contract service providers.

Many VI professionals work for school districts throughout the state as contract service providers on either a part-time or full-time basis. According to ESC consultants, 206 VI professionals serve in this manner. The overall decrease in contract service providers is 3% or 6 contractors when compared to last year. The number of contract TVIs decreased by 10 while the number of contract COMS increased by 4.

In Texas, contract service providers continue to work for charter schools or private staffing companies. Some of them are retired VI professionals returning to the field. Within the past few years, the most significant increase in the number of contract service providers was seen in 2021 and 2020. It should be noted that VI professionals who serve as private contractors may be difficult for ESC consultants to accurately report on for the purpose of this document since these service providers may not be directly affiliated with a school district or regional co-op arrangement.

Dually certified VI professionals

Eighty-one individuals are functioning in a dually certified role in 2022, providing both VI and O&M services to Texas students. This is the third highest total ever reported.

Dually certified VI professionals are those who are certified and function both as a COMS and as a 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* as a TVI and an O&M specialist.

Table 4: Dually Certified Professionals

	2020	2021	2022
Dually certified	76	75	81

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. 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. An administrator must understand the challenges faced by these professionals to ensure that neither area is slighted.

Direct services provided by ESCs

Each regional education service center (ESC) provides an array of services to school districts and for some, that includes direct TVI and O&M services. There are currently 346 students served directly by the ESCs.

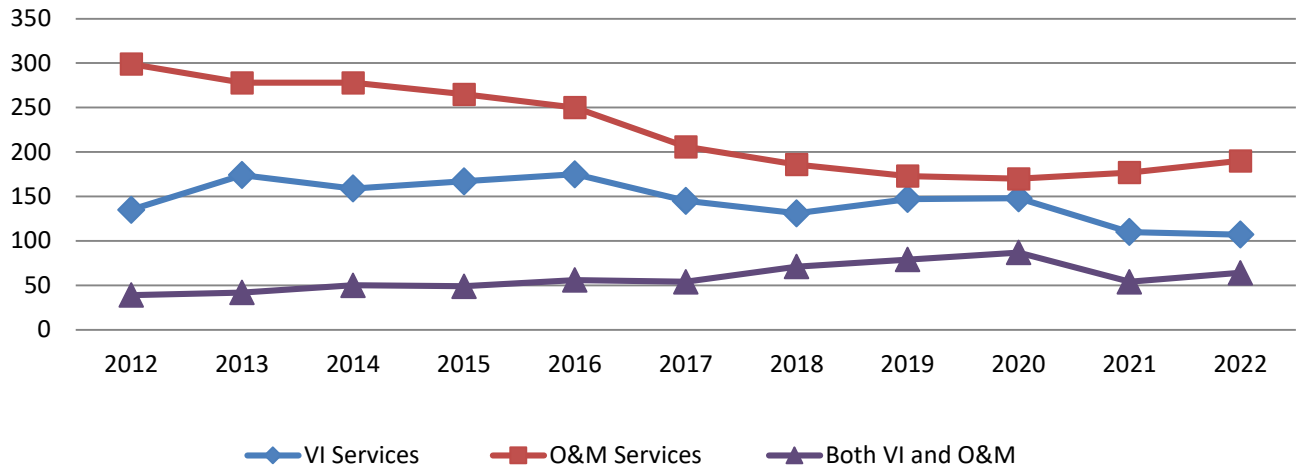
ESCs are a *major* part of the state’s infrastructure that ensures access to high quality VI services. Regional specialists in visual impairments are critical players in the provision of technical assistance, leadership, workshops, and specialized materials for VI professionals, families, and students. They also assist TVIs and 89 braille transcribers within the state in braille production. They act as a vital source of 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 education service centers.

In the regions where direct services are provided, the ESC staff members are listed on the student’s individualized education program (IEP). ESCs are providing more direct services overall this year. Currently, 8 ESCs provide services to students for either VI services, O&M services or both. Table 5 reflects the number of students receiving direct services from the ESCs. In 2021, there was an increase of 13 students receiving O&M-only services while the number of students receiving VI-only services and both VI and O&M services decreased.

Table 5: Students Receiving Services from ESCs

	2020	2021	2022
VI-only services (4 regions)	148	110	107
O&M-only services (7 regions)	177	190	175
Both VI and O&M services (3 regions)	87	54	64
Total	412	354	346

Students Receiving Services from ESCs



The provision of direct 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, the local districts' capacity to meet the needs of their students is a primary one. The increase in local COMS staff likely explains the decrease in O&M services from ESCs over the majority of the past decade.

Overall perceptions of caseloads

More than half (65%) of the ESCs reported an increase in caseloads for both their TVIs and COMS.

Since 2010, this survey also asked about ESC specialists' perceptions of overall regional changes in caseloads. The survey did not ask about specific districts or how many districts within a region experienced a change. The VI ESC consultants were asked to use their professional expertise in their estimates.

Table 6: VI ESC Consultants' Perception of Regional Overall Changes in Caseloads

2022 Caseloads	TVIs	COMS
Increases	13	11
Decreases	2	1
No significant change	4	5
Unknown	1	3

This year, 13 of the 20 education service centers (ESCs) reported increased caseloads for TVIs and 11 shared that caseloads had increased for their COMS. Two regions had a decrease in their TVI caseloads and one region had a decrease in the COMS caseloads. Others reported that caseloads in their region did not have significant changes. Much like last year, the overall increase in caseloads might be related to the intense educational needs of the

students. This year, the number of posted positions increased by 24 to a total of 60 compared to 32 in 2021: twenty-four TVI, 1 COMS and 2 dually certified positions were added.

Cultural diversity

Texas saw an increase in the total number of VI professionals who are Hispanic, and a decrease in the number of VI professionals who are African-American and Asian American.

Texas is a diverse state and requires a diverse workforce to serve its citizens. This survey asks about African-American, Hispanic, and Asian-American VI professionals in relation to services provided. It also queries the number of VI professionals fluent in Spanish. The results from the survey is as follows:

Table 7: Culturally Diverse VI Professionals

Hispanic VI Professionals

	2020	2021	2022
TVIs	76	84	89
COMS	26	33	41
Dually certified	6	9	20
Total	108	126	150

Spanish-Speaking VI Professionals

	2020	2021	2022
TVIs	72	68	73
COMS	23	25	29
Dually certified	9	6	13
Total	104	99	115

African-American VI Professionals

	2020	2021	2022
TVIs	44	49	33
COMS	26	27	20
Dually certified	0	0	0
Total	70	76	53

Asian-American VI Professionals

	2020	2021	2022
TVIs	7	6	5
COMS	4	3	2
Dually certified	0	0	0
Total	11	9	7

This year, the number of VI professionals who are Hispanic increased by of 24 (11 dually certified, 8 COMS, and 5 TVIs). This reflects a significant increase within the past three years, including the number of Spanish-speaking professionals. They represent 12% of the professionals in the field who are fluent Spanish speakers. The number of TVIs and COMS who are African-American decreased by 23 individuals (16 TVIs and 7 COMS) from the previous year. From 2020 to 2022, the total number of African-American VI professionals had decreased by 17 individuals (11 TVIs and 6 COMS). The number of Asian-American VI professionals also decreased by 2 this year. ESC consultants and TSBVI staff were also asked to provide the number of Native American and Caucasian VI professionals working in their region/school. Data provided this year showed that the majority of VI professionals in Texas

are Caucasian and only one VI professional is Native American. Recruiting and retaining ethnically and culturally diverse educators continues to be an important goal in Texas to reflect the student demographics.

VI professionals who have a visual impairment

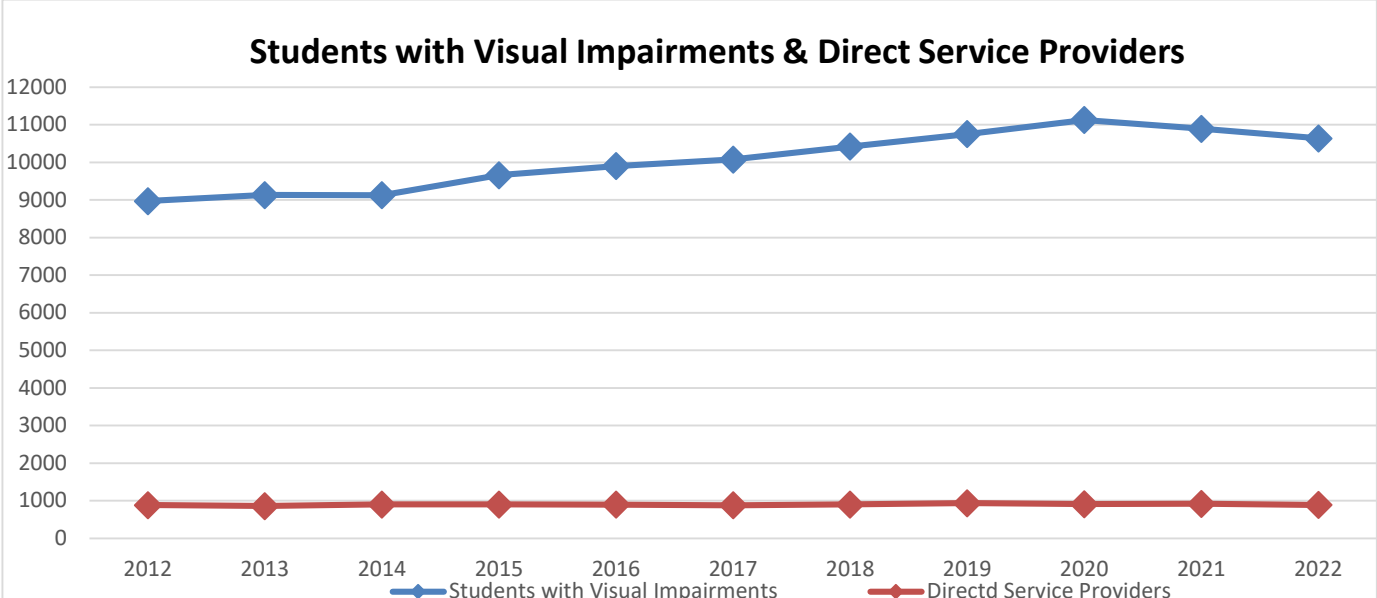
Currently, twenty-six VI professionals who are blind or visually impaired provide VI/O&M leadership or direct services to students in Texas.

The ESCs were asked how many VI professionals within their regions have a visual impairment. In 2022, they reported that a total of 26 VI professionals in Texas are blind or have a visual impairment. This number remained the same as in 2021. This includes direct service providers and TSBVI statewide consultants.

Growth in Population of Students with Visual Impairments and Impact on VI Professionals

In January, 2022 there were 10,639 students with visual impairments in Texas, a decrease of 252 students. This is the second significant drop in the number of students with visual impairments on record. The decrease coincides with the COVID-19 pandemic as school districts across the state reported a decline in student enrollment overall. This continued to be an unusual year as Texas typically sees a steady increase in the number of students with visual impairments each year. Although the state experienced another decrease in 2022, data collected since 2012 project that the student with visual impairment population will increase by an average of approximately 1.8% per year over the next 3 years for a total of 11,415 students by 2025.

Below is a graph that displays the growth in the number of students with visual impairments and the number of direct service providers (TVIs and COMS) over a 10-year span. Texas has generally seen an increase in students each year with a slight drop in 2014 and again in 2021 and 2022. The largest amount of growth was in 2015, with a 5.8% increase in the number of students.



Impact on teachers of students with visual impairments

It is projected that Texas will need approximately 46 additional full-time equivalent TVIs (or 57 individuals) by 2025 to accommodate student growth alone.

Statewide, much like the previous year, the student-to-teacher ratio was 18 students per TVI full-time equivalent (FTE) position. Looking back over the past 10 years, caseloads have averaged 16 students per TVI FTE. If this average ratio is applied to the number of expected new students, it is projected that Texas will need approximately 46 additional FTEs by 2025 to accommodate student growth. However, given that only 77% of TVIs are full-time, it will take more individuals to meet the expected need of 46 FTEs. If the current average ratio of full- to part-time teachers continues, the number of TVIs needed to total 46 FTEs will be closer to 57 individuals.

Impact on O&M specialists

It is projected that Texas will need a minimum of 33 additional full-time equivalent (44 individuals) orientation and mobility specialists to meet expected student growth over the next three years.

Information about students with visual impairments is collected each January and includes information related to orientation and mobility services. The 2022 *Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments* indicated that the percentage of students who were receiving O&M services is approximately 39%, a decrease of 1% from the previous year. It is anticipated that by 2025, 4,749 students will be receiving O&M services, an additional 563 students.

Statewide, the average student-to-COMS ratio is 17 students per FTE in 2022, which also reflects the average ratio seen over a 10-year period. Using this average to help predict need, by 2025 Texas will need an additional 33 full-time equivalent (FTE) orientation and mobility specialists 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 2022, 66% of COMS were employed full-time compared to 60% in 2021. 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 individual O&M specialists needed to result in 33 FTEs is likely to be closer to 44 individuals.

Variance in growth of students with visual impairments and O&M services

It is unknown how many of the projected 11,475 students with visual impairments may need O&M services by 2025.

The gap in the average growth rate of students (1.8% per yr.) and the lack of change typically seen in O&M average caseloads remains a concern. This year, 39% of the total number of students received O&M services. This indicates a decrease of 1% or 141 students when compared to last year. The number of students who will be eligible to receive O&M services over the next three years is a challenging number to try to anticipate given that as of January 2022, 31% of current students had not been evaluated by an O&M specialist.

Attrition

It should be noted that the attrition data collected in this survey specifically addresses those who have left the field. The data do not include those who move from school employment to private contractual work, change districts, or retire and re-hire in the same or a different district.

Attrition increased by 15 individuals in 2022. Specifically, the ESCs reported that 50 TVIs, 11 COMS and 2 dually certified VI professionals left the field. This year’s attrition total of 63 individuals is among the highest reported by the ESCs, with 54 VI professionals leaving the field in 2012 and 49 in both 2014 and 2020.

The VI field’s attrition rate in 2022 (6%) remains significantly lower at about half of the annual attrition rate of certified teachers as a whole for the state. Although the VI field includes O&M specialists who do not have to be a certified teacher, this comparison is still a good indicator of the high commitment VI professionals have to their field and the students they serve. In addition, VI professionals in Texas have the added benefit of being paired with a trained, experienced mentor. Support is also offered at both the region and statewide level through education service centers and the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Outreach Programs. All of these factors may help explain the lower attrition rate in Texas for VI professionals compared to other teaching fields.

Table 8: Actual Attrition within the Past Year (1-Year Attrition)

	2020	2021	2022
TVIs	35	37	50
COMS	8	8	11
Dually certified	6	3	2
Total	49	48	63

Attrition Factors

Students with visual impairments are a low-prevalence and extremely diverse population. VI professionals are critical to student learning, therefore, a change of just one VI professional in a single district can have a dramatic effect on the annual yearly progress of their students.

Retention of VI professionals is of critical concern. Unlike other disciplines, even in other high-need subject areas, when a VI professional is unavailable, often there is no one else in the district with the specific expertise needed to assess and meet the unique educational needs of students with visual impairments.

Factors that consistently impact recruitment and attrition of general and special education classroom teachers influence VI professionals as well. Administrative support, workload, working conditions and support in their new role are among attrition factors reported in the most current research. Additional considerations unique to the attrition and retention of the VI professional are:

- VI professionals have a unique skill-set and can be difficult to find.
- TVIs make up less than 0.2% of certified teachers in Texas and O&M Specialists are an even smaller group. Consequently, most administrators and educators are unaware of the VI field and the specialized services that a VI professional provides.
- Most VI professionals are mid-career professionals and are likely to have shorter careers in their second field.

In 2022, the attrition rate for VI professionals is 6%, an increase of 1% from 2021. This might appear to be a small change; however, the loss of 63 individuals this year can have a critical impact on students with visual impairments as there is a limited number of qualified individuals to replace them.

Projected 3-year Attrition

ESC consultants project that, overall, 143 VI professionals will leave the field within the next 3 years.

Projected attrition data is valuable for predicting and preparing for the VI professionals needed in the near future. VI consultants at the ESCs are the best and only source for information on future attrition for VI professionals. Gathering accurate data regarding a VI professional's retirement plans can be challenging. In general, VI consultants at the ESCs 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. Others may retire from their job, but take another contractual job in another district. Historically, projection totals are below actual attrition, especially for TVIs. ESCs tend to project that a higher number of COMS will leave the field than actually do, and this year was no exception. In 2020, ESCs estimated that 40 COMS would leave the field by 2022 and 40 ended up leaving this year. Ninety-two TVIs were predicted to leave as well; instead, 129 TVIs left this year.

Individuals who function as dually certified have both VI and O&M expertise. Projecting the attrition of dually certified personnel appears to be especially difficult with a reliable degree of

accuracy. This is a fluid group. Based on district need, an individual may function as dually certified one year but not the next. The information below includes individuals who are dually certified in both categories (and cannot be added). The “Overall” data reflects all VI professionals and has been adjusted for dually certified VI professionals. It is important to note that the data addresses individuals who will leave the field. The data do not include those who move from school employment to private contractual work, change districts, or retire and re-hire in the same or a different district.

Table 9: Projected 3-Year Attrition

Projections made in:	2020	2021	2022
TVIs¹	100	85	109
COMS¹	29	23	34
Overall¹	129	108	143

¹Projections by ESC consultants reflect job expertise, not assignment. As a result, TVIs and COMS include data for dually certified staff and cannot be totaled. “Overall” includes all VI professionals and is adjusted for dually certified VI professionals.

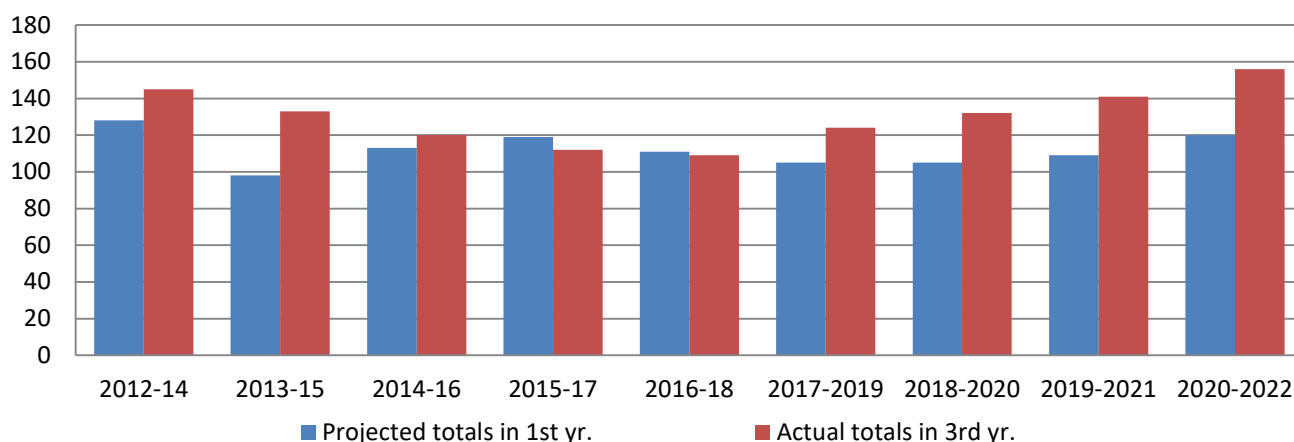
In 2022, VI consultants at the ESCs estimate 143 VI professionals will leave the field over the next 3 years, a loss of 109 TVIs and 34 COMS. The projected number of TVIs estimated to leave is the highest total in 10 years. If the 143 total is proven to be correct, we can expect that 15% of *existing* VI professionals will retire or otherwise leave the field prior to 2025.

Projected vs. Actual Attrition

VI professionals at the ESCs are the best and only source for statewide information on attrition over the past year and projected attrition over the next three years.

Although ESC projections are the most accurate source available, real attrition has often been underestimated. As illustrated in the graph below, ESC-estimated three-year attrition numbers are typically under the actual totals; however, projections were extremely close to the actual number of VI professionals who left the field between 2016 and 2018. Looking at the 3-year time frame, in 2020 it was projected that 120 people would leave the field by 2022. The field actually lost 156 VI professionals this year, a difference of 36 individuals. This is the largest gap in the most recent projected vs. actual attrition data. In 2019 and 2021, the field lost 23 and 21 additional individuals respectively.

Projected versus Actual Attrition



Anticipated Need

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 (Table 10 and the graph that follows) are data from each of these areas. The expected student growth of 836 students over the next 3 years should be kept in mind when considering the anticipated need for VI professionals who will serve them.

Posted positions

This year the number of existing vacancies, after all typical hiring had been completed, increased significantly from 32 to 60.

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 2022. These data were collected in September and reflect 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.

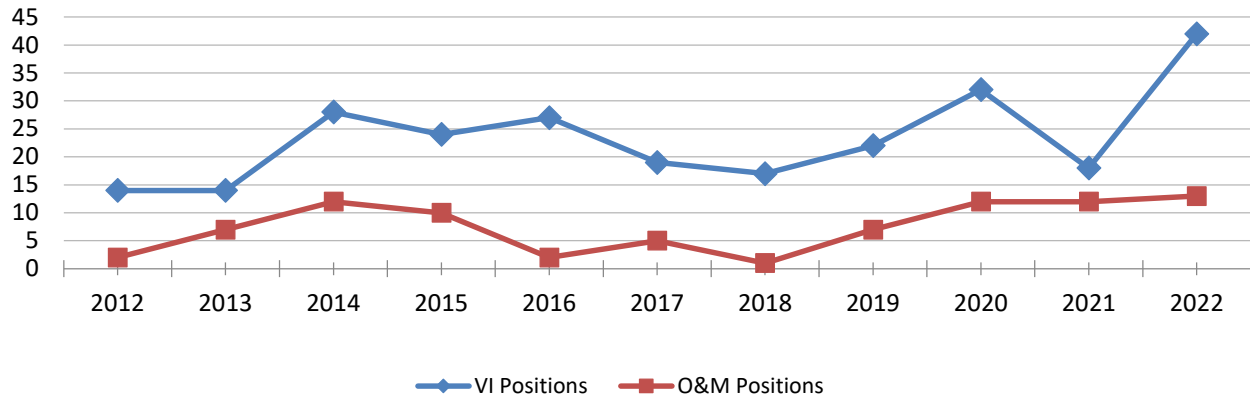
Table 10: Posted Positions

	2020	2021	2022
TVIs	32	18	42
COMS	12	12	13
Dually certified	3	2	5
Total	47	32	60

Previous formal and informal data indicates that vacancies alone are not a strong indicator of actual need. The reasons vary. Many administrators will identify a need and encourage an

existing educator to become VI certified rather than post a vacancy. Likewise, the need for a private contract TVI or O&M position may not necessarily be posted.

Posted Vacancies for VI Professionals



Recommendations by Knowledgeable Professionals

The projected need for additional COMS continues to grow with ESCs estimating a long-term need of 104 additional COMS and 201 TVIs by 2025.

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 based on projected student growth and how many staff are expected to leave the field. The survey asked about projected need, not about positions available.

There are two ways to assess the shorter- and longer-term projected needs: either by job assignment or by professional expertise. The terms “TVI” or “COMS” 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.

Functioning as a dually certified VI professional primarily reflects district need and therefore is a job assignment and not a unique discipline. Dually certified assignments are also very fluid and vary from year to year. For the purposes of this section of the report, the data reported will be by professional expertise, not by job assignment. Understanding need by expertise informs future training and funding needs. **Dually certified VI professionals function as part-time TVIs and part-time COMS. As such they will be added to both areas as part-time TVIs and O&M specialists.

Projected Shorter- and Longer-Term Need for VI Professionals

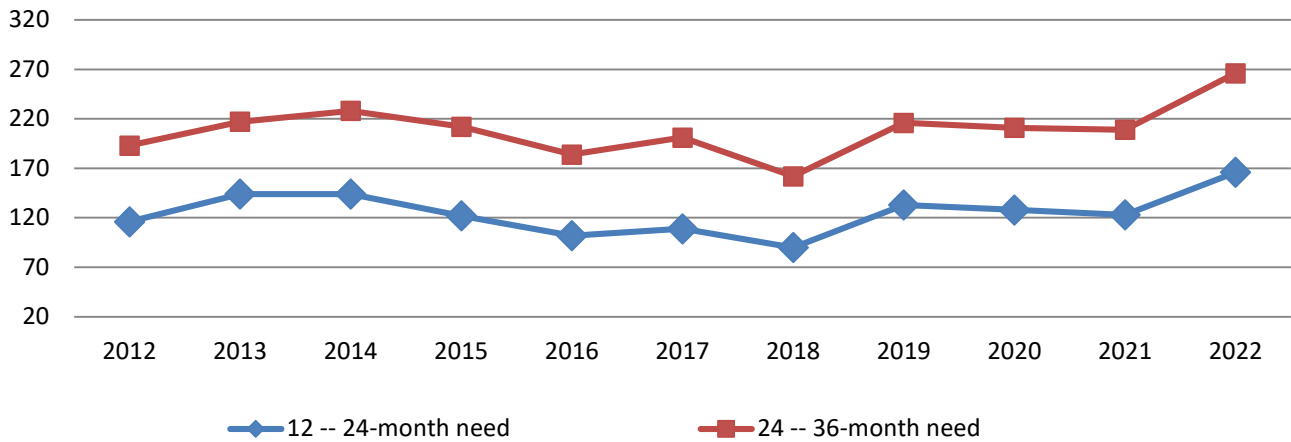


Table 11: Projected Short-Term Need: 12–24 Months

	2020	2021	2022
TVIs¹	99	90	119
COMS¹	47	52	67
Overall¹	128	123	166

¹ Projections reflect job expertise, not assignment. As a result, “TVIs” and “COMS” include data for dually certified staff in both categories and cannot be totaled. “Overall” includes all VI professionals and is adjusted for dually certified VI professionals.

Table 12: Projected Longer-Term Need: 24–36 Months

	2020	2021	2022
TVIs¹	159	152	201
COMS¹	87	88	104
Overall¹	211	209	266

¹ Projections reflect job expertise, not assignment. As a result, “TVIs” and “COMS” include data for dually certified staff in both categories and cannot be totaled. “Overall” includes all VI professionals and is adjusted for dually certified VI professionals.

Both the projected short-term and longer-term need for VI professionals went up this year. Totals increased with ESCs projecting a need for 166 VI professionals within one to two years and 266 within the next three years. The ESCs’ long-term need estimation peaked in 2019 at 216 and has stayed close to that total in 2020 and 2021. Given the anticipated student growth, the projections by the ESCs went up this year both for TVIs and COMS.

Discussion of Projected Need and Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (TVIs)

Texas is projected to need between 155 and 166 TVIs in the next 3 years to accommodate both attrition and student growth.

As discussed in the Growth of Students with Visual Impairments and Impact on VI Professionals (pages 14-15), Texas will need between 41 and 50 additional TVIs to meet the anticipated growth in the number of students with visual impairments.

In addition to meeting the needs related to expected demographic increases, Texas will need to replace TVIs who leave the field. It is projected that 109 individuals with VI expertise (TVIs and dually certified professionals) will leave the field prior to 2025.

Combining projected growth and attrition, Texas will need between 156 and 166 new teachers of students with visual impairments in the next 3 years to replace those who are likely to leave and respond to anticipated growth. The ESC projection of 201 TVIs needed in that time period falls well above this range.

Table 13: Projected Need and TVIs

Number of TVIs needed to meet student growth	46 - 57
Number of TVIs needed due to attrition	109
Total FTE needed by 2025	155 - 166

In the Fall of 2022, 111 people were seeking VI certification through a university program in Texas. Forty-five were working under an emergency permit. Consequently, these TVIs are already working with students and included in this count as TVIs. If the university TVI program completion rates continue to reflect those over the last 3 years, the number of newly certified TVIs (144) ***would fall below the range of anticipated need.***

Discussion of Projected Need and O&M Specialists

Texas is projected to need up to 78 additional O&M specialists over the next three years to accommodate both attrition and student growth.

The projected need for orientation and mobility specialists (COMS) increased slightly in both the longer-term category and short-term need. It is important to consider the following factors when estimating the future need for O&M specialists:

- * TEC 30.002 requires that initial evaluations of students with visual impairments include an O&M evaluation.

- * Approximately 31% of current students with visual impairments have not had an O&M evaluation to determine whether they need O&M services.
- * Currently, there are no reliable statistical projections on the percentage of students with visual impairments who will need O&M services *at any given time*.

Table 14: Projected Need and COMS

Number of COMS needed to meet student growth	33 - 44
Number of COMS needed due to attrition	34
Total FTE needed by 2025	67-78

As discussed in the Growth of Students with Visual Impairments and Impact on VI Professionals (pages 14-15), Texas will need between 33 and 44 additional O&M specialists to meet the anticipated growth in the number of students with visual impairments.

Regional VI consultants project that 46 people with O&M expertise (O&M specialists and dually certified professionals) will leave the field by 2025. If the expected student growth is combined with the 3-year projected attrition and based on statewide average student-to-teacher ratios, it is likely that Texas will need between 67 and 78 additional full- and part-time O&M specialists over the next 3 years. The projected longer-term need of 104 made by the ESC consultants, who know their regions best, falls well above this range. It is imperative for districts to ensure that all students with visual impairments receive an initial orientation and mobility evaluation and consideration by an O&M specialist of their need for an evaluation every three years. Only then can the educational team members be assured that those who need O&M instruction are receiving it.

In 2022, a total of 28 students completed an O&M program, an increase of 11 students from the previous year. This was the largest increase since 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic halted orientation and mobility internships and prevented students from completing their program and the certification process in 2020. Similar circumstances likely held students back again in 2021 as the pandemic continued to restrict some internship placements. Presuming that orientation and mobility students continue to find challenges in completing their programs, and the number of completers continues at the same rate over the next 3 years (60), ***it is likely that the need for a minimum of 67 new COMS by 2025 will not be met.***

Enrollment 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 orientation and mobility specialists. In fact, SFASU's undergraduate O&M program is the only one of its kind in the country. Both schools support and provide courses for VI and O&M students using a combination of distance-learning and face-to-face courses.

The combination of distance-learning options and supportive funding has had a major impact on the number of VI professionals in Texas. Enrollment increased substantially with the development of distance-learning options in 1998 and proved to be essential during the COVID-19 pandemic.

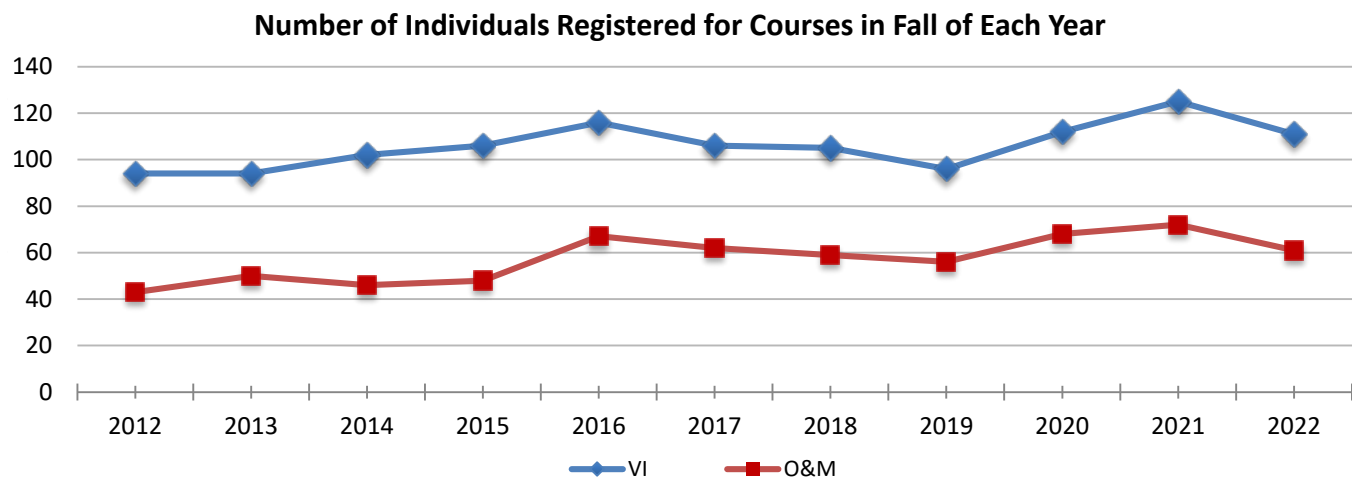
Students Registered in Texas Programs

The total number of Texas students registered for courses leading to VI or O&M certification decreased in 2022.

As noted in the chart below and graph that follows, a total of 172 students were registered for courses leading to certification in 2022. The total number of students decreased this year in both the VI and O&M programs: 14 in VI and 11 in O&M. One hundred eleven individuals are seeking VI certification and 61 are en route to O&M certification. This data continues to reflect both a growth in awareness of the VI field and an increase in knowledge of the preparation programs available in Texas that lead to VI and O&M certification.

Table 15: Number of Students in Training Programs

	2020	2021	2022
Visual impairments	112	125	111
Orientation and mobility (incl. undergraduates)	68	72	61
Total	180	197	172



Students completing Texas certification programs

Sixty-two individuals completed VI training and 28 completed their O&M program in 2022. This increase in completers is a positive step forward after the decline seen over the last 3 years.

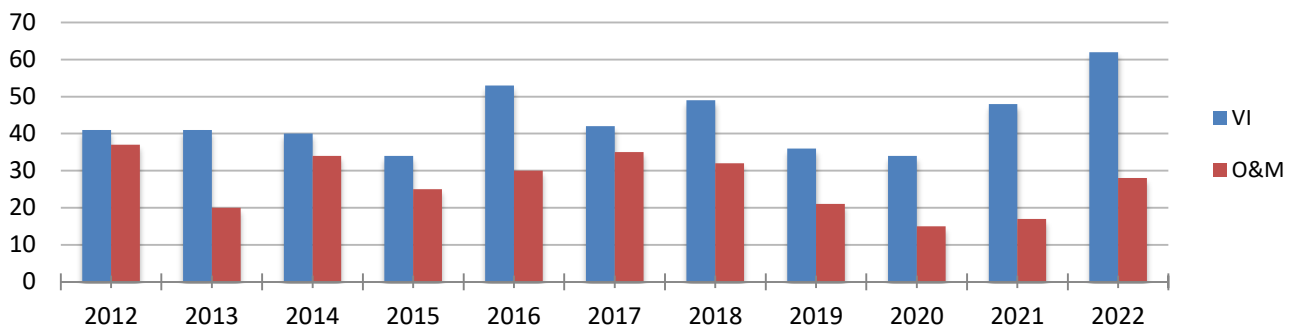
As can be seen in Table 15 and the graph below, over the past year, a total of 90 Texas residents completed their certification programs. This 38% increase is made up of graduates of both the TVI and O&M program. The number of TVI and O&M program completers increased by 14 and 11 individuals respectively. It should be noted that unlike students seeking VI certification, who may be eligible to work as a TVI under an emergency permit before completing their program, COMS candidates must complete their entire program and obtain certification before they can start working as an O&M specialist in Texas public schools. This is especially important to consider during the COVID-19 crisis when orientation and mobility students may be unable to complete their internships, their university programs and, essentially, the certification process that would allow them to support the growing number of students eligible for orientation and mobility services.

In addition, O&M certification is a national certification and valid in any state. It is also applicable for all age groups, not just for the birth through twenty-one population served by the public school system in Texas. It is hoped that school districts will be able to consistently hire graduating O&M specialists, otherwise positions could be filled outside of education and/or the state.

Table 16: Number of Individuals Completing Certification Programs

	2010	2021	2022
Visual impairments	34	48	62
Orientation and mobility (incl. undergraduates)	15	17	28
Total	49	65	90

Number of Individuals Completing Certification Programs



University students receiving financial assistance in Texas certification programs

A lower number of students enrolled in the SFASU and TTU VI and O&M training programs received financial support through Texas grants.

In 2022, 63% of students in personnel preparation programs (VI Certification and O&M) received financial assistance. Sixty-seven percent of those in the TVI certification programs and 33% students enrolled in the O&M programs received assistance. Tuition support continues to be a strong incentive for enrollment, especially considering that gaining a certification to work with students with visual impairments does not typically lead to an increase in salary.

Table 17: Percentage of Students Receiving Support through Texas Grants

	2020	2021	2022
Percentage of students receiving TX stipends	70%	72%	63%

While enrollment in the VI and O&M university programs decreased in 2022, it should be noted that stipends continue to support most of those enrolled, and funding will remain an essential factor in the training of new TVIs and COMS. In addition to the need for continued funding for student tuition going forward and as the university programs continue to grow to meet statewide shortages, there is also a need for increased program operation funding, particularly funds to hire additional full-time faculty to improve program quality and meet teacher candidate needs.

Summary

This report reviewed characteristics of and indicators of need for VI professionals. In September 2022, Texas had 935 individuals (871.5 FTEs) providing vision-related services, either directly to students or in a leadership and/or technical-assistance capacity. After adjusting for dually certified professionals (81), there are 881 individuals providing direct service either on a full- or part-time basis. The total includes the following **full- or part-time individuals**:

- 643 teachers certified in visual impairments (TVIs) or 569 FTEs; a decrease of 36 individuals or 28.5 FTEs this year.
- 305 certified orientation and mobility specialists (COMS) or 253.5 FTEs; a decrease of 8 individuals and an increase of 2.5 FTEs from 2021.
- 81 dually certified professionals, an increase of 6 individuals from 2021 and is the highest total on record.

In addition, there are:

- 54 regional or statewide leadership or technical-assistance specialists; approximately 47.5 FTEs.
 - 29 individuals or 21.5 FTEs are at the regional education service centers (ESCs)
 - 25 individuals or 20.5 FTEs are at the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired either in Outreach or Short-Term Programs

With a current total of 29, the number of individuals providing leadership and technical assistance at the ESCs increased by three individuals in 2022. The time available to assist districts and families decreased slightly; ESCs reported 21.5 FTEs this year and 21.6 in 2021.

The total number of VI service providers available to serve students in 2022 decreased to 881 individuals (adjusted for dually certified professionals) from 917 in 2021. The number of individual TVIs decreased by 36 (28.5 FTEs). The number of COMS decreased from 313 to 305 individuals as 31% of the current number of students with a visual impairment are still in need of an O&M evaluation.

The VI field saw an increase in the number of VI professionals who are Hispanic (+24) and fluent in Spanish (+16). The number of VI professionals who are African-American decreased by 23. VI professionals who are Asian-American decreased by 2 individuals. One VI professional is Native American. Although there were indications of growth in the cultural diversity of the VI field in 2022, continued efforts to expand diversity to reflect the student demographic are still needed.

This report uses a knowledgeable informant model and considers the recommendations of the VI specialists at the regional ESCs to be the best indicators of real need in Texas. These professionals have extensive knowledge of their districts and region. ESC estimates continue to indicate a growing need for additional VI professionals over the next three years. Specifically, their projected longer-term need overall for VI professionals is 266 (adjusted for dually certified professionals). This is an increase of 57 individuals in the longer-term need of 209 made by the ESCs last year.

An examination of **attrition, projected attrition**, student population growth and need within the past year continued to yield striking results. This year's attrition total is the highest reported by the ESCs, 63 individuals, which is the 5-year average of 48.6 (from 45) and the 10-year average of 44.2 across all VI professionals.

The **projected 3-year attrition** is estimated at 143, or 15% of all VI professionals. This is the highest number seen over the last two years, with the increase projected including TVIs (+23 from 2021), COMS (+11) and those who are functioning in a dually certified role (+1). Although

the regional VI consultants are the best predictors for attrition and we have seen the projected vs. actual attrition gap almost close in the past, even they have significantly underestimated attrition for VI professionals over the past several years. Therefore, it is likely that as retirements are realized, attrition over the next 3 years will continue to be a pertinent factor in planning for an adequate number of VI professionals.

A long-term examination of growth patterns predicts that the number of students with visual impairments needing services will continue to increase by at least 1.8% each year, or by 836 additional students over the next three years. It is expected that Texas will have at least 11,475 students with visual impairments by 2025. Therefore, Texas could see a need for 57 additional full-time equivalent TVIs and 46 full-time equivalent COMS by 2025 to **accommodate student growth alone.**

Considering the average projected increase in the statewide student population each year in addition to anticipated attrition, Texas could see a need for **155-166** additional full-time equivalent TVIs and **67-78** full-time equivalent COMS by 2025. Although falling into the lower end of the range, the longer-term need estimated by the ESCs closely parallels these projections for both TVIs and COMS.

Clearly, based on student growth and projected attrition, Texas has a growing need for VI professionals. University certification programs are working diligently to meet that need. In 2022, the statewide total number of students entering VI and O&M certification programs at Stephen F. Austin State University and Texas Tech University decreased by 25 students (14 in TVI programs, 11 in O&M programs) to a total of 172 individuals. Sixty-three percent of students are receiving financial support. Ninety students (52%) *completed* their university programs (62 in VI and 28 in O&M). This increase (16%) is good news considering that the total number of those completing VI and O&M programs *dropped* by 14% in 2020 and 30% in 2019. The decline in those completing their programs in 2020 can certainly be related to challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite an increase in the number of students completing both the TVI and O&M programs this year and in 2021, the trend of an imminent shortage of new VI professionals continues across the state. Please refer to the Executive Summary on page three for more information.

Appendix

Methodology

The annual survey of VI professionals in Texas 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 education 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.

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 the 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.

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. Individuals who work part-time but in multiple districts are considered “full-time VI professionals.” 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 employs both full- and part-time VI professionals. Full-time professionals are those who work at least .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 (24% of the TVIs and 41% of the O&M specialists).

When relevant, information about full-time equivalent (FTE) positions is also presented. The number of 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.

For the purposes of this survey, professionals who provide both O&M and VI services (dually certified) are counted as part-time TVI 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 TVI and O&M tables as part-time professionals. This results in a variance between the data listed in the Statewide Totals table (Table 1) and the combined totals of the Direct-Service Provider tables (Tables 2 and 3). 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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