

# TX SenseAbilities

A Bi-Annual Publication about Visual Impairments and DeafBlindness for Families and Professionals

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*TX SenseAbilities is a collaboration of the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Texas Health and Human Services Division of Blind Service (DBS)*





# Life After Graduation

Rachel Simpson, Family Engagement Specialist

***Abstract: A young woman who is a TSBVI graduate describes her experience since graduation.***

Keywords: advocacy, problem-solving

“Blessed” is the word that Kieara Maps uses to describe herself and her path in life. Kieara is a 2015 graduate of Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI). She describes TSBVI as her “first love,” a “safe haven,” and a place to be understood.

Kieara developed an interest in the culinary arts while in high school and decided to pursue a training program at Texas State Technical College (TSTC). She said that she learned a lot while at TSTC but ultimately decided to change her career goal.

Kieara now lives in Austin with roommates in a local apartment complex. She works as a substitute resident instructor at TSBVI, while studying public speaking and communications at Austin Community College. Kieara would like to use what she learns to serve as an advocate for people with disabilities, specifically people with blindness and visual impairment. She wants people with disabilities to know that they are important and have a role in society.

When asked what advice she has for parents of children with visual impairments, Kieara encourages parents not to “hold their kids back” by overprotecting them, as the parents

will not always be there to intervene. In addition, she would like to encourage parents to allow their children to make mistakes, so they can learn from their mistakes. She suggests that children also be allowed the opportunity to practice/develop problem-solving skills and learn to advocate for themselves.

I look forward to hearing more from Kieara as she continues her journey in life. To be continued ...



*Picture of Kieara Maps.*



# The Possibilities Are Endless

Amanda Bowdoin, Parent

***Abstract: A parent shares how her family finds opportunity for the Expanded Core Curriculum in her son's participation in athletic events.***

Keywords: Family Wisdom, DeafBlind, CHARGE syndrome, Expanded Core Curriculum, home life

Imagine being told by doctors when your child is born that there is no chance of your baby making it, he is going into renal failure, needs not one but two heart surgeries, followed by more than 25 surgeries over the last 11 years. Imagine, after nine months in the hospital, coming home with 24-hour nursing care, an oxygen tank, having a “trach” [tracheostomy] tube, and your baby having trouble gaining weight. Imagine, when your baby is 4 months old, being told by your insurance caseworker to “let him go and pull the plug.” Imagine having this baby along with a twin sister, and she also needs attention, love and support. Imagine all of that. Now, imagine 11 years later he is getting healthy, communicating with American Sign Language (ASL), walking with support and doing his first triathlon.

My son, JD Bowdoin, was born Sept. 13, 2005 with CHARGE syndrome. He had visual and hearing impairments (is considered DeafBlind) and needed breathing treatments every three to four hours and 24-hour nursing care. I was scared at the hospital and had to make some quick decisions with my husband. I knew he wanted a son and, no matter what, he had love for him that I had never seen. Today they

communicate through sign language and share the love of watching Texas Christian University (TCU) football and baseball.



*Picture of JD at an outdoor event.*

Last summer, JD learned to love the water and was part of the Ellis County Sting Ray Special Olympics Team. He won first place twice at the area meet in Rockwall, Texas. On Sept. 5, 2016, JD participated in a triathlon in Waxahachie, Texas. With assistance and lots of support, JD rode a raft for the swim, and I pushed him in a stroller for the bike and run portions. As a mother who loves to run and is always inspired because of JD's “not giving up”



motto, I got to swim with him and run the last part of the race. It was an emotional experience because, 11 years ago in the hospital, I was not sure what was going on with my twin babies. Today, all those worries and “what ifs” are a thing of the past and a full life is possible for him and his family.



*Picture of JD sitting in a bicycle trailer.*

In the educational setting, JD has specific goals that are supported through Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) and addressed in annual meetings. We were able to take the ECC into the classroom and push it outside the educational setting through a program known as Ainsley's Angels of America (<http://www.ainsleysangels.org/>). Ainsley's Angels' goal is to build awareness about the special-needs community through including them in all aspects of life, promoting awareness, providing education, and having them participating as active members in local communities. Ainsley's Angels does this by giving kids of all abilities across the United

States the opportunity to participate in races and events.

Our family's ability to participate in Ainsley's Angels was made possible with the help of Rick Phelan, who calmed my fears and worries and did the triathlon with JD. JD had so much support from coaches Kelly Rozier, owner of Buffalo Creek CrossFit in Waxahachie, and John Zabochnik, an Ironman competitor, as well as the Waxahachie Running Club and Triathlon Club. Some of the comments we heard about JD were how much he was smiling, clapping every time he saw a fellow runner and laughing every time Rick would go over the bumps.

In closing, I want parents to know that anything is possible, and there are people who want to run with your child and give them the smile you want to see. Today [the day of JD's Ironman competition] was an emotional day for my family and a day we will always remember.



*Picture of JD about to board an inflatable canoe.*



# Futures Planning Led Us to ‘Touch Base: Center for the DeafBlind’

Vivecca Hartman, DBMAT Vice President, Houston

***Abstract: The author shares her family’s experience in establishing a nonprofit organization to provide adult services specifically geared for people with DeafBlindness.***

Keywords: Family Wisdom, DeafBlind, adult services, teacher of students with DeafBlindness, intervener, person center planning, futures planning

As the parent of a child who is DeafBlind, you realize pretty early on that there is so much to learn! I recall the Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) years of therapists who visit your home to help you learn techniques to help your child develop. Wow! I am so grateful for those early learning years. (I do wish there had been early training about communication methods for the DeafBlind, because this is so vital to establish early. All members of the family need to get accustomed to, and be consistent with, the child’s learning from a reliable and repetitive communication method.) Then you hit the school years where you, as the parent, get to relay all that you know about DeafBlindness every time your education team changes — and also keep learning and sharing because there’s a lot to learn and share. Also, when you change schools, you have to be sure to politely share information with the administration and those around your education team to ensure they have the supports they need in their environment. Now, as we are approaching the ending years in the education system, we look to the future!



*Picture of Tanya sitting on the floor with three therapy dogs.*

In planning for life for your child after school, it is important to visit and be familiar with a wide variety of the adult programs in your area. It is important to plan visits and coordinate with various broader team members (e.g., Blind Children’s Program/Transition Program/Vocational Rehabilitation Program, school transition planning staff, school team members, waiver case managers, etc.) to go



with you on these visits to help in the planning of your child's future. Fortunately, I live in a large city with multiple options. However, as you may have guessed, none had any openings that were familiar with or prepared for a DeafBlind child.

After we spent a few years of visits and observing options, the discussions on the visits started turning into "if I had a choice, I would like a place that had X from that one place we observed and Y from another place." It was through this collaborative, ongoing discussion that, in a dream world, we would find a place that was understanding of DeafBlind time and communication needs as well as a place where our son could feel safe and independent. Additionally, it would need to be a place that had enough activities that he felt engaged but also where he could opt out of an activity that he was uncomfortable with. We would want friendships, comradery and healthy positive interactions with the people within the program and in the outside community as well. We wanted him to have some feelings of self-confidence and control of his day-to-day life, while having structure and safety built in.

Another family, the Khans, had similar ideas and a sense of urgency — their daughter's graduation was just a year away — so we all dove in head first! We all began researching options. We quickly realized that we needed to create a program ourselves to meet the unique needs of our young adults with DeafBlindness. Our first breakthrough was getting some legal support in forming the company documents. Then we prepared the application to become a tax-exempt charity, and that helped us solidify much of the plan. The Khan family had space for us to use, which was very helpful. We are also fortunate to have an awesome board consisting

of great people who have a wide variety of experience to guide us.

The result was that Touch Base: Center for the DeafBlind opened its doors on June 20, 2016!

It is an amazing place!



*Picture of Tanya and her intervener working with clay on a ceramics wheel.*

The very first day I was there to go over some paperwork with the coordinator, who was a teacher of the DeafBlind, she had to excuse herself to go assist with a client. That client happened to be my son. He was playing with a toy that snapped apart and broke, and his intervener was taking the broken parts to the trash. The coordinator recommended that the intervener explain to Christopher, my son, that



the toy had broken and was now trash and that the two of them take it to the trash together so that Christopher would learn more about what had happened. It was great advice because it made Christopher part of the process; he did not just sit, waiting, while things happened that he was unaware of. When they went to put the parts into the trash, the trash can was full. So there was the opportunity for an explanation about the trash being full, which led to Christopher's taking the trash out and putting in a new bag. This became his job from that point forward. I love it!



*Picture of Christopher, with his intervener, enjoying outdoor play equipment.*

Another day, I stopped in to see how things were going and found Christopher at the table having lunch with another client at his side. Their interveners were encouraging the clients to interact. Christopher was smiling and laughing because the other client was giving him cookies. That sure made him want to keep reaching for her hand!

We also plan for Touch Base to be a collaborative center where interveners can share ideas while working with their DeafBlind clients. This is an environment that welcomes feedback and encourages support of all parties. I want all our loved ones who are DeafBlind to have happy, fulfilling days while they continue to learn and communicate so they can be active within their community. We would certainly be happy to help others who live elsewhere start something similar in their community by sharing what we have learned in this process.

Here is the mission statement of Touch Base: Center for the DeafBlind: "For people with DeafBlindness, and those who support them, to build connections with the community, promote self-respect, improve communication and daily living skills, while creating moments of joy."

To learn more about Touch Base, please visit our website at [www.touchbasecenter.org](http://www.touchbasecenter.org).



# Texas Chargers: Our Family's Journey Finding a Community of Support

Jill Bradshaw, Texas Chargers Board Member, Parent, Austin Area

***Abstract: The author shares her family's experience finding resources and connections through the Texas Chargers family organization.***

Keywords: Family Wisdom, Texas Chargers, CHARGE syndrome, family leadership, resources, community connections

## What is CHARGE syndrome?

"CHARGE syndrome is a recognizable (genetic) pattern of birth defects that occurs in about one in every 9–10,000 births worldwide. It is an extremely complex syndrome, involving extensive medical and physical difficulties that differ from child to child. The vast majority of the time, there is **no** history of CHARGE syndrome or any other similar conditions in the family. Babies with CHARGE syndrome are often born with life-threatening birth defects, including complex heart defects and breathing problems. They spend many months in the hospital and undergo many surgeries and other treatments. Swallowing and breathing problems make life difficult even when they come home. Most have hearing loss, vision loss, and balance problems that delay their development and communication. All are likely to require medical and educational intervention for many years." (National Charge syndrome Foundation website 2012)



*Picture of Elise on the beach holding her hand up in the "I love you" sign.*

My daughter, Elise, was diagnosed with CHARGE syndrome in 2013, and we found ourselves immersed in a whole new world with endless questions. We knew nothing about the DeafBlind world or how to deal with the growing amount of medical diagnoses that were stacking up or where to start getting her the help and support we need. We left the doctor's office with more questions than answers and were completely overwhelmed.



We were fortunate that we found the Texas Chargers organization soon after my daughter was diagnosed. Through Texas Chargers, we were able to attend our first family conference a few months later and able to connect to local resources with other local families, which has helped us navigate this new world and make the most informed choices possible.

### **Annual Conference**

We attended our first Texas Chargers conference in 2013, when Elise was 9 months old. The annual conferences that Texas Chargers hosts take a lot of work from everyone involved, but the time spent has been invaluable to our family and it is hard to put into words how much we have appreciated these conferences.

The conferences bring in world experts on CHARGE syndrome who can answer questions that are at the top of my mind. Getting to spend time talking to these top researchers about our daughter has been invaluable. Some of the topics we have benefited from were information on how to approach and provide solutions to behavior, learning, communication and

development from a multisensory point of view. Every year as she grows, the various experts have all contributed to us making informed decisions as parents.

Providing support and resources is another important facet of the Texas Charger's mission. During the retreat, this support is provided through a variety of support groups and special informational sessions. During this time, the moms, dads, siblings, and grandparents of those with CHARGE meet to share and connect. The retreat is supported with resources from the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI), Texas School for the Deaf (TSD), the various Educational Service Centers (ESCs) of Texas, the Health and Human Services Blind Children's Program and Office for the Deaf and Hard and Hearing. These partners support with outreach and information, financial assistance, and many of them attend the retreat and conference, too. Their presence helps ensure families know not only what resources are available but how to obtain them.



*Picture of a group of children and youth in red T-shirts at the Texas Chargers conference.*



Each year at the conference, we celebrate a special Charger by awarding the “Star Charger” award to an individual with CHARGE. The Star Charger provides us with a presentation of life with CHARGE and ways for us to view the world through the “eyes” of a person with CHARGE. We are encouraged by their communication styles (often multimedia presentations with friends and families to put it all together), self-advocacy, and an incredible spirit. Every year, these incredible presentations inspire us all. It’s the highlight of many of our weekends because it’s the very essence of why we get together: to share and celebrate the unique life of someone living with CHARGE.

While parents attend sessions, Chargers and their brothers and sisters get to attend camp and have fun in a safe environment. Regardless of age or ability, they are kept busy with crafts, games, animals, movies, and time to socialize. Some of the kids’ favorite characters usually visit children take train rides and try horseback riding, and sensory activities are available. Then, one of the highlights of every conference is the social on Saturday night, where families relax, visit, and dance.

We look forward to the conference every year and also make it a priority to attend the national conferences, where a lot of the research on CHARGE syndrome is being funded and presented. Texas Chargers supports the national Charge syndrome Foundation and encourages families to get involved. We find support in both groups, as Texas Chargers is able to dive deep into Texas issues and resources facing families.

### **Connecting our Family to Local Resources**

As Elise grows, our family’s needs for support evolve and different questions become top of our minds. The continuing support we get from

Texas Chargers has had a huge impact on our finding the right medical, education, and community support that we need.



*Photo of Elise and Ivuk at Texas Chargers*

When your child has a rare disorder, it is uncommon to know other families with the same syndrome. Thanks to the website and the Texas Chargers Facebook group, we have been able to connect and form friendships with a whole community of other families who are in the same phases and working on the same goals at the same times. We sometimes have local playdates with other moms, where the kids get together and play.

Through other families, we have learned about specialists, educational options and camps and have received a lot of advice in real time as challenges come up. We are very fortunate to have this larger community of families who are willing to help.

### **Conclusion**

If you don’t have a support system as a parent, I encourage you to find one. If it doesn’t exist, I encourage you to create one. Starting small with a Facebook group and having small get-



togethers is one way to do this. TSBVI also has some great programs and training to help parents looking for support to connect or learn about how to start a group.

As life became a bit more normal for us and fewer medical concerns came up daily, I joined the board of the Texas Chargers two and a half years ago and serve as secretary. There are nine people on the board, in addition to lots of other parents who help volunteer. Our goal is that everyone has a shared amount of responsibility in making sure the conferences and other events and activities come together as planned.

If you have a child with CHARGE syndrome, I encourage you to get involved with Texas

Chargers, join our Facebook group, and if possible attend our 2017 Texas Chargers Retreat on November 3–5, 2017, in Camp Allen, Texas. Learn more at [www.texaschargers.org](http://www.texaschargers.org).



*Picture of Elise with her mother and father.*

## The Continuum of Decision-Making Supports and Protections for a Young Adult

Caroline Nelson, Parent, Austin Area

(Reprinted with permission from Texas Parent to Parent 2016 Fall Newsletter. If you have not had the pleasure of connecting with Texas Parent to Parent before, we invite you to do so by visiting their website at <http://txp2p.org>.)

***Abstract: In 2015, the 84th Texas Legislature passed two bills establishing supported decision-making. The author, a parent of a young man preparing for transition, shares four main factors that families and self-advocates should consider when developing an individual support plan.***

Keywords: Family Wisdom, transition, guardianship alternatives

Young adults on a typical developmental path don't immediately begin making every decision, and assuming every responsibility, the day after they turn 18. There are a variety of supports for



decision-making, both formal and informal, that parents of all young adults can consider, regardless of the young person's disability or level of independence. Decision-making supports can apply to medical, financial, educational and personal decisions.

There are four main factors to consider in order to make a meaningful support plan for your individual young adult with his or her own unique needs. The factors are autonomy, capacity, responsibility for consequences, and protection.

Think about the young person you support. How much decision-making autonomy is wanted and needed? How capable is the individual of predicting and taking responsibility for the consequences of decisions? Consider the capacity for meaningful decision-making or understanding the consequences of decisions. Is protection from undesirable consequences needed?

There are a variety of decision-making supports and tools to choose from, depending on the unique answers to these questions. These supports fall into four categories:

- Autonomous decision-making
- Joint decision-making
- Decision-making on behalf of the student
- Guardianship

### **Autonomous Decision-Making**

For a young adult with the most decision-making capacity and ability to handle the responsibilities and consequences that come with autonomy, parents may choose to put nothing formal in place, relying instead on parental leverage, or "power of the purse." An

example of this would be when the parent sets a boundary around paying college tuition or providing a car if their child chooses (or doesn't choose) a given course of action.

### **Joint Decision-Making**

For a young person who might benefit from help understanding decisions, interacting with professionals, and communicating wishes, but who ultimately has the capacity to make the final decision, a Supported Decision-Making Agreement or Power of Attorney might be appropriate. Both mechanisms assume capacity on the part of the student (including capacity to revoke the agreement or decide contrary to parents' wishes). These tools are permission-oriented. In other words, the young person gives the parent (or supporter) permission to assist with decision-making but does not give away the final decision. A joint bank account serves the same function in that it allows independent decision-making by the young adult but with the support or monitoring by the parent or joint account holder.

#### **Decision-Making on Behalf of the Student**

As we think more about the young person's capacity to make sound decisions or to deal with consequences, parents may consider mechanisms that do not allow their adult child access to certain types of decisions — in particular, financial decisions. Examples of these mechanisms could include becoming, or naming, a Representative Payee for Social Security benefits, or putting assets in trust with a trustee as decision-maker on behalf of the young person as beneficiary.

### **Guardianship**

The final category, guardianship, supports a young person who lacks capacity to make



meaningful decisions about adult needs and responsibilities. Unlike the other types of decision-making support, a guardianship removes the adult rights from the person and vests them in the guardian. A person under a guardianship (a “ward”) functions as a decision maker the way a minor (under 18 years old) does. Choices such as marriage, voting, entering into contracts, or making medical, financial or educational decisions ultimately are the guardian’s to approve. A young person

under a guardianship is also the most protected from the consequences of decisions made independently.

Each of these levels of support and protection can be changed as a young adult continues to mature. The most important thing is to consider your student’s unique decision-making and support needs as he presents today. There is no one right answer.

## Making the Switch to StarPlus: Here’s our Experience!

Debbie Wiederhold, Parent

(Reprinted with permission from Texas Parent to Parent 2016 Fall Newsletter. If you have not had the pleasure of connecting with Texas Parent to Parent before, we invite you to do so by visiting their website at <http://txp2p.org/>.)

***Abstract: A parent describes her positive experience switching from a Medicaid waiver program to StarPlus as her son reached age 21.***

Keywords: StarPlus, Medicaid waiver, Individual Service Plan

Our son has extensive medical expenses that have, until he turned 21, been covered by private insurance, traditional Medicaid through the Comprehensive Care Program (CCP), and the CLASS Medicaid waiver. (He did have MDCP previously, until his name came up on the CLASS waiting list, and we switched to the CLASS waiver.) Daniel requires private-duty nursing care and quite a bit of medical equipment for him to be able to live in the community and in his own (our) home.

Services end with the Medicaid Comprehensive Care Program (CCP) when your child turns 21.

I knew changes were coming with the introduction of StarPlus and had many days of angst about “giving up” CLASS because it took us seven years of “waiting” to finally get the waiver. I weighed the options over and over, talking with the CLASS case manager and the StarPlus intake coordinators. I also thought at the time that he would no longer have an option when StarPlus was rolling out for all of Texas this year, so I thought we



would just go ahead and do it when he transitioned from pediatric to adult care. Things have changed since that initial thought, and we have learned that individuals are able to keep their current waiver without switching. However, each individual's needs vary, and staying with the current waiver may be the best option for some and not for others. We had several meetings with both case managers from CLASS and StarPlus, even preparing a "mock" budget. But, in the end, StarPlus was the one that would provide the best care for our son. I think we made the right decision to go ahead and switch, given the CLASS restraints. (For example, our son uses a lot of private-duty nursing care. I still don't know of a nursing agency willing to sign up with CLASS as a provider; however, there are several nursing agencies that do take StarPlus.) Check with your insurance provider if your child or young adult family member requires nursing care for options.

Because services end with the Medicaid Comprehensive Care Program (CCP) when your child turns 21, and we were already looking at having to change some of Daniel's physicians due to his "aging out," we just added switching from CLASS to StarPlus in the mix. Luckily our son's pediatrician helped

with this transition as well, recommending an adult physician to transition to. He called and spoke with the physician, before even meeting Daniel, to make sure it would be a good fit, and it has been! We did not see a lapse in his coverage or care during the switch; it was a huge relief to know his nursing care would continue uninterrupted. We've already had two budget meetings since then with Daniel's StarPlus case manager. (You still have to have annual budget meetings and set up an ISP — Individual Service Plan — for each year, just like the other waivers.) The case managers are also required to check in with you several times a year, on the phone and in person, to make sure your child's needs are being met.

Our relationship with the StarPlus insurance provider has been a very good fit for us. They "go to bat" for items and services for Daniel and help ensure the best quality of care for him.

If you are facing similar decisions ahead, don't be afraid to ask questions. We are always in transition, and this is just another one to add to the list of many!



# The Visual World in the Eyes of a Blind Child

Jena Moffet

(Reprinted with permission from Tyler Lighthouse for the Blind.)

***Abstract: A woman who is blind describes how her family helped her to learn about the world around her.***

Keywords: audio description, concepts, visual stimuli

It is estimated that 40 percent of human sensory perception is visual. If you are sighted, you might think this would be bad news for a totally blind baby. But my loved ones found countless ways to let me see the world and develop visual concepts right along with my sighted peers. Whether it was colors, animals, changing landscapes and seasons, or intangibles like height and distance, they always found a way. If you are concerned that your visually impaired child will miss out on things, I give you the following examples from my own life to prove that her world will be as big and as interesting as you show her that it can be. Use any or all of the following ideas to give your child the world!

## Audio description

For most children, the world outside a moving car is a wonder of new sights. But for a blind baby, the trip could be an exercise in boredom. My parents made car trips into fascinating adventures. They told me about cows in the pasture, the changing colors of autumn leaves, new buildings under construction, and bumper stickers on cars. We rolled down the windows to smell hay and cow manure as we drove by the

pastures, flowers as we drove through woods, and oil and gasoline as we drove through cities. Very early in my life, I developed the concept that the world changes as you travel. On Thanksgiving morning, my mother told me about all the balloons in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. Through her voice, I gained all the excitement about those balloons, even though I could not see them for myself. Whether it is the inflection of your voice, or the descriptive words you use, you can bring the visual world to life for your blind child, even if he can't touch or hear the thing that's being described to him. If you can pair your descriptions with his other senses, that's even better.

## Concepts

Capitalize on a child's natural curiosity to show them how concepts are connected. One chilly drizzly afternoon, we drove past a bakery. I smelled something wonderful! My Momma told me they were baking bread. I learned that the bread we bought at the grocery store had to first be baked up fresh in that bakery before it was ever packaged and sold to us to make sandwiches. On a hot summer day, we were driving with the windows down when I heard cows. They were in their pasture home, mooing placidly. But I learned that those cows were milk



cows and that farmers milked them, put the milk in cartons, and sold it to the grocery store, where we would buy it and drink it. A child can learn a lot of things at once, if you help her connect the concepts. If she only ever saw milk in a cup, she might not know how it came to be there. But if she heard some cows, and had held a milk carton in her hand at the grocery store, you could easily use your words to build a bridge of concepts for her, concerning where milk comes from and how it gets to the cup.

## Visual Stimuli

Every person in my life was a treasure trove of information. I bought groceries with my Nanny. We touched peaches, bananas, oranges, potatoes, bags of dog food, coffee cans, and milk cartons. We heard the cash register, so she told me how it worked. We smelled all the scents in the grocery store, and she told me what each one was. That's how I learned that grocery stores were divided into aisles, and that aisles contained categories of items. We felt the chill of the freezer section, and I learned that meat, milk, fruits, and vegetables need to be stored in cold places. My Grandpa kept a garden every spring. I felt the dirt, the seeds, the growing vegetables and weeds, and the vegetables just out of the ground. I heard the sound of the tiller and learned from him that he used that tiller to turn over the soil, to get it ready for planting. I gained a strong sense of the way that food comes to us, from seed to prepared food. I stood behind the pulpit at my church next to my preacher, and it gave me a concept of what it must be like to look out into an audience and address a group. My uncle held me up one day so that I could touch the ceiling. It gave me a tangible concept of how tall a house could be. These instances may seem inconsequential, but each one built upon the others to give me a sense of myself in time,

in space, in relation to everything that was around me. I learned early that no person was too young or too old to teach me something about my world.

Translate visual information into other senses. Concerning clouds, my uncle told me they looked like they would feel like marshmallows or cotton and that they could change shapes. I imagined that God was finger painting with the clouds, rearranging them to his liking every day. When I was in school, and science taught me that clouds are made of gas, I just married the two concepts to realize that a thing could feel one way and look another. The correlation doesn't have to be perfect. It just has to give meaning to the world. For example, my living room walls are painted "peach linen." In my mind, this color becomes its own scenario in which I am at my Grandma's house with the windows open on a hot summer evening, sitting with my legs beneath freshly laundered cool sheets as I eat moist, fluffy peach pound cake. That scenario represents peach linen to me. It may not be what you would see visually if you came into my home, but it gives meaning to what would otherwise be a purely visual concept.

The smallest and closest things can be the most interesting. My very first VI teacher, Joyce, taught me that the world right outside my door could be fun. I held a ladybug. We petted my Grandma's cat and felt how she always found a patch of sun to stretch out in. I could feel that she would lie on her side with all four feet stretched out, and I noticed that she would turn her head and lick her paws or her flanks. That's where I learned how cats bathe. Sighted children pick up on these things automatically as they view the world around them. For the blind child, it is simply a matter of having the freedom to



explore and the confidence to question. Sighted friends and relatives can encourage this spirit of exploration by talking about what they see and hear around them.

## **Freedom of Movement**

I rolled down the grassy hill outside my Grandma's house, just because it was there and I could roll. I climbed up on chests and jumped off again. I spun in circles, for the sheer joy of spinning. I hung upside down over the back of the couch just to see what it would be like. I stomped in mud, splashed in water, buried my hands in sand, kicked my feet in gravel, and walked on bubble wrap.

Sometimes, in an attempt to keep a blind child safe, sighted caregivers discourage movement and exploration. It is essential to keep a child away from serious harm, but falling down a few times is a normal part of childhood, and the benefits of playing and feeling that freedom to explore far outweigh the costs.

## **Get into Stuff**

Whether it was the pots and pans in my Grandma's kitchen cabinet or things in my Momma's makeup bag or my Grandpa's toolbox, I was encouraged to check everything out. I held wrenches and screwdrivers in my hands, learned the difference between lipstick and foundation, and learned what was cooked in each pan. It may be temporarily messy for the parent, but the knowledge gain by the child will be priceless.

Visual experiences don't have to be off limits. In 1980, 3-D glasses were all the rage. You bought these cheap-feeling glasses, and you could watch 3-D movies on your television at home. I could see absolutely nothing with those glasses, but you'd better believe I had a pair! I sat right there in front of that TV with my brother who could see; we

watched Superman, my Mom made frozen pizzas, we drank Dr Peppers, and had a big time. I remember the experience, and it doesn't matter that I missed out on the visual aspects. I got an Atari 2600 for my eighth birthday. I was blind; I think my high score for Pac-Man was 26. But I played those video games right along with everybody else, I had fun, and most of all, I felt a part of things, right up there with my sighted friends who went to the arcade. If you emphasize the fun parts of an experience, and don't dwell on the visual aspects that a child is missing, the child will automatically do the same thing. It was a rare day that I ever felt left out as a kid, because my parents blessed me with the knowledge of how to look for what I had, instead of what I was missing.

## **Books Expand the World**

Everybody read to me, from my parents to grandparents to aunts and uncles. I learned so much about the world I couldn't see through stories. Whether a book is read by a loved one, in braille, or digital, blind children learn much about the way things appear visually through reading. No 1970s childhood would be complete without "Sesame Street" and Mr. Rogers. With help from my mom, Grover taught us about near and far, over and under, etc.

There is no right or wrong way. When you are trying to conceptualize a thing for which you have no foundation, your way is the right way. My perception of colors may be completely different from your experience of them as a sighted person. But it is worth noting that your experience may be completely different than your sighted sibling. The idea is to develop a concept that brings meaning to your world. I hope these ideas will help you to expand the world for the blind child in your life, so that the day will come when he makes a habit of doing so on his own.



# A Developmental Sequence for Teaching Tactile Skills

Ann Adkins, Education Specialist, TSBVI Outreach Program

***Abstract: This article is a follow-up to “The Development of Tactile Skills” published in the last issue of TX SenseAbilities. It describes the importance of following a developmental sequence for teaching the use of tactile skills and provides another way of thinking about the progression of skills needed to be a proficient tactile learner.***

Keywords: tactile skills, tactile learning, developmental sequence, Hierarchy of Tactile Skills, tactile development

In the previous issue of *TX SenseAbilities*, we published an article about the development of tactile skills (Fall/Winter 2016, <http://www.tsbvi.edu/fall-2016-issue/5263-the-development-of-tactile-skills>). The authors stressed the importance of providing appropriate tactile experiences for students at all stages of development and suggested some resources, materials, and activities to help in the instruction of tactile skills at each stage. They also explained the sequential nature of tactile learning and the importance of having students demonstrate mastery of each step in the Hierarchy of Tactile Skills in order. This hierarchy emphasizes the cognitive aspects of tactile learning, delineating the sequence of skills needed to move from the concrete skills of tactile exploration,

manipulation, and identification of real objects to the very abstract skills of discriminating braille symbols.

A new publication from the TSBVI Curriculum Department, *Nemeth at a Glance: A Math Resource, Grade-Level Chart, and Evaluation Tool* (Cleveland et al., 2017 <http://www.tsbvi.edu/store/ecom/index.php?action=ecom.pdetails&mode=nemeth>), includes an entire chapter on tactile skills and offers another way of thinking about the progression of skills needed by tactile learners. The authors share two different ways of thinking “in terms of both cognition and skill levels” (page 16), which are represented in the chart below. It may be helpful to examine both of these ways of thinking when determining a course of evaluation and instruction that will be most meaningful to specific students.



## Sequence of Tactile Skills Development

(Adapted from *Nemeth at a Glance: A Math Resource, Grade-Level Chart, and Evaluation Tool*, p. 16).

COGNITIVE SKILLS "The Hierarchy of Tactile Skills" from Concrete to Abstract	SENSORY SKILLS "Levels of Tactile Learning" Sensory Stages
1. Real objects	1. Awareness and attention
2. Object representations	2. Structure and shape 3. Part-to-whole relationships
3. Graphic representations: a. Two-dimensional objects b. Solid embossed shapes c. Outlines d. Raised lines (solid and broken)	4. Graphic representations
4. Symbols (letters and numbers)	5. Braille symbols

The chart above presents a side-by-side comparison of two different ways of thinking about the development of tactile skills. The information on the left side of the chart focuses on the cognitive issues related to tactile skills development, the Hierarchy of Tactile Skills described in the previous newsletter article (Adkins, Sewell & Cleveland, *The Development of Tactile Skills* <http://www.tsbvi.edu/fall-2016-issue/5263-the-development-of-tactile-skills>). The right side of the chart emphasizes "skill levels," delineating the physiological-sensory stages of development. It is adapted from the research of Barraga and Erin ("Visual Handicaps and Learning," 1992), and while some of these sensory stages parallel the Hierarchy of Tactile Skills (the areas of graphic representations and braille symbols), it breaks down the early sensory stages into more specific components:

- Awareness of and attention to objects — "the beginning level of tactual learning" (Barraga & Erin, page 80).
- Tactile determination of the structure and shape of objects — Barraga and Erin cite a 1987 study by Klatzy, Lederman, and Reed that found that students were able to identify specific

characteristics of objects in the following order: shape, hardness, texture, and size (page 79).

- Part-to-whole relationships - the necessity of developing an understanding of an entire object by "piecing together" information about the individual tactile components of the object, creating a "whole" out of the sum of its parts.

This third sensory stage requires that students build a "gestalt" of an unfamiliar object by exploring the object tactually and then using the information they've discovered to create an understanding of the object in its entirety. For additional clarification about the possible confusion and difficulty in this task, consider the ancient Indian fable about "The Blind Men and the Elephant." American poet John Godfrey Saxe (1816–1887) based his poem on the fable that was told in India many years ago ([http://www.constitution.org/col/blind\\_men.htm](http://www.constitution.org/col/blind_men.htm)), demonstrating "how our sensory perceptions can lead to some serious misinterpretations; especially, when the investigations of the component parts of a whole, and their relations in making up the whole, are inadequate and lack coordination (<http://wordinfo.info/unit/1/ip:20>). The goal, then, for VI professionals is to provide



instruction that helps students develop the concepts and skills necessary for making the “part-to-whole” connection. Barraga and Erin suggest using a task-analysis approach, presenting tactile information in small increments, within an orderly progression (page 78).

Although both of the approaches in the chart on The Sequence of Tactile Skills Development stress the importance of following a developmental sequence, it appears that there is a considerable leap from Barraga and Erin’s third sensory stage, part-to-whole relationships, to their fourth stage, graphic representations. The Hierarchy in the left column breaks down the area of graphic representations into four smaller categories of skills, illustrating that VI professionals would benefit from using BOTH developmental sequences in their approach to instruction. For more information and activities on the four areas of graphic representations, see the previous TX SenseAbilities article on “The Development of Tactile Skills” (<http://www.tsbvi.edu/fall-2016-issue/5263-the-development-of-tactile-skills>).

Cognitive skills and sensory skills are two of the important components of tactile skills development; motor skills is the third component. It is important to remember that ALL of the skills are equally important. Following a sequential progression of instruction, drawing from information on both sides of the chart, should allow for a smoother integration of skills — a task with which many of our students struggle. The information on motor skills from previous newsletter articles is also recommended (“Early Tactile Learning” and “The Development of Tactile Skills”), as is the webinar on tactile skills from the TSBVI Outreach Program (<http://library.tsbvi.edu/Play/12996>). It is hoped that suggestions from all of the sources can help

students become more proficient users of their tactile skills, reducing the evidence of splinter skills and decreasing some of the tactile issues observed in many struggling readers. The mastery of these skills is important for all tactile learners; they are crucial, however, for students who will become braille readers.

## References

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Saxe, John Godfrey. (1855). The Blind Men and the Elephant. Retrieved on January 31, 2017 from: <http://wordinfo.info/unit/1/ip:20>; [http://www.constitution.org/col/blind\\_men.htm](http://www.constitution.org/col/blind_men.htm) and [http://www.constitution.org/col/blind\\_men.htmlearning](http://www.constitution.org/col/blind_men.htmlearning).



# Let's Talk DeafBlind Eligibility: Frequently Asked Questions

Chris Montgomery, TSBVI DeafBlind Education Consultant, TX DeafBlind Project

***Abstract: This FAQ article answers basic questions about student eligibility as DeafBlind and when it is recommended for a student to have a DeafBlind label.***

Keywords: DeafBlind eligibility, DeafBlind, AI, VI, DeafBlind Child Count, DeafBlind Census

specified in subsection (c)(12) of this section;

There seems to be some confusion around the topic of determining a student's educational eligibility for DeafBlindness. It is a fascinating subject and one that we love to talk about here at the Texas DeafBlind Project. We have tried to assemble some common (and not so common) questions to help alleviate confusion and allow everyone a better night's sleep.

## **Question 1: What is the eligibility definition for DeafBlindness in the TEA Commissioner's/State Board of Education (SBOE) Rules Eligibility Criteria?**

§89.1040. Eligibility Criteria.

2) Deaf-blindness. A student with deaf-blindness is one who has been determined to meet the criteria for deaf-blindness as stated in 34 CFR, §300.8(c)(2). In meeting the criteria stated in 34 CFR, §300.8(c)(2), a student with deaf-blindness is one who, based on the evaluations specified in subsections (c)(3) and (c)(12) of this section:

(A) meets the eligibility criteria for auditory impairment specified in subsection (c)(3) of this section and visual impairment

- (B) meets the eligibility criteria for a student with a visual impairment and has a suspected hearing loss that cannot be demonstrated conclusively, but a speech/language therapist, a certified speech and language therapist, or a licensed speech language pathologist indicates there is no speech at an age when speech would normally be expected;
- (C) has documented hearing and visual losses that, if considered individually, may not meet the requirements for auditory impairment or visual impairment, but the combination of such losses adversely affects the student's educational performance; or
- (D) has a documented medical diagnosis of a progressive medical condition that will result in concomitant hearing and visual losses that, without special education intervention, will adversely affect the student's educational performance.



**Question 2: What are the benefits of assigning eligibility as a student who is DeafBlind?**

- A student with dual sensory impairment (e.g., DeafBlindness) can have very different educational needs than those with a single sensory impairment (AI or VI). It will be important for the student's team to think about questions of access from a combined sensory loss, or DeafBlind, perspective. Staff who are trained in a single sensory area may need additional support specific to DeafBlind educational assessment and programming strategies to develop an appropriate Individualized Education Program (IEP). For example, typical educational approaches for students with auditory impairment (AI) involve the use of vision as a compensatory strategy. For those students with a label of visual impairment (VI), compensatory approaches involve the use of hearing. Emphasizing the DeafBlind label can help to more clearly define the uniqueness of the disability.
- There are specific resources and unique services for students with DeafBlindness and their families. Without having the DeafBlind label, teams and families may not be made aware of information about the Texas DeafBlind Project, DeafBlind services through HHSC and the TWC, the National Center on DeafBlindness, the DBMD Waiver, Helen Keller National Center, or iCanConnect. (See answer to Question 6 for more information on resources.)
- Some families or students may identify as deaf/hard of hearing and not as a person with DeafBlindness. For example, a person with Usher syndrome may identify strongly with the deaf community and culture. They may lack

important information about their visual impairment and its implications. While it is very important to be sensitive to these issues, the DeafBlind label can help the education team identify resources and strategies around counseling, braille instruction, tactile sign, orientation and mobility, and other supports that may be beneficial to the student and family.

- While either DB or AI/VI are acceptable labels, it is recommended that DeafBlind (DB) be selected and then ranked in the primary position by the IEP committee. (See answer to Question 5 for additional information.)

**Question 3: Does the DeafBlind label qualify a student for additional services that the AI/VI label does not?**

Generally speaking, a student qualifies for the same services, regardless of whether they have an AI/VI label or a DB label. All students with both VI and AI eligibility will be counted on the DeafBlind Child Count (formerly known as the DeafBlind Census) and can access the support of the TX DeafBlind Project.

**Question 4: Why is the student with mild dual sensory impairments considered DeafBlind?**

According to SBOE rules, a student with DeafBlindness is one who:

- (C) has documented hearing and visual losses that, if considered individually, may not meet the requirements for auditory impairment or visual impairment, but the combination of such losses adversely affects the student's educational performance;" (emphasis added).



- The TSBVI DeafBlind Project affectionately calls this “the third way.” The question to consider is whether the combined effects of the mild vision and hearing losses affect educational performance. Do these combined sensory deficits affect the student’s ability to gather information and participate in the instructional environment? If so, to address this problem, the child may need accommodations, special technology, or unique strategies that require professionals with a background in dual sensory loss to participate in assessment and program development.
- If a student qualifies as DeafBlind under the eligibility criteria section C, a Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (TVI), as well as a Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (TDHH), will participate in the student’s Admission, Review and Dismissal (ARD) meetings. This means the professionals with training in these types of sensory losses will be involved in programming for this student. Among other things, they are needed to address optical and amplification devices, accommodations that ensure appropriate access to information, and the development of IEP objectives, which address self-advocacy and effective use of sensory devices. They will need to consider the combined impact of the mild sensory losses when designing programming.
- IDEA Count: The U.S. Department of Education (ED) is required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to report to Congress annually on the number of children receiving special education, by disability category, for ages 3–21 years. The count must be unduplicated — that is, children can only be counted in one category, regardless of the number of disabilities they experience (<http://www.afb.org/Section.asp?SectionID=3&TopicID=138&DocumentID=3350>). For this count, the primary ranking is the only one reported to the federal government for IDEA data collection. Therefore, unless the DeafBlind label is stated as the primary disability, it will not be recorded on this count. This information is used in policy development. Since DeafBlindness is the rarest of the low-incidence groups, it is important to be sure this information is not missed. Policy makers may not see the separate DeafBlind Child Count that OSEP collects from the state DeafBlind Projects.
- DeafBlind Child Count: The Texas Education Agency (TEA), Division of Special Education, is required to report annually on individuals, 0–21 years of age, who are DeafBlind in Texas. This information, collected by state DeafBlind Projects, informs the National DeafBlind Child Count recorded by OSEP. The DeafBlind Child Count collects different information than the IDEA count and provides information that is used for regional and statewide planning to develop funding and appropriate services for infants, children, and youth who are DeafBlind. Students with both the DeafBlind and the combined AI/VI eligibility labels are reported on the DeafBlind Child Count. Using either the AI/VI as primary/secondary (i.e., first and second) or DeafBlind as primary is best

**Question 5: Why is it recommended that DB always be ranked as the primary disability?**

Students with DeafBlindness should be reported on two separate counts each year. The first is the U.S. Department of Education IDEA count. The second is the DeafBlind Child Count, which is collected by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).



practice. There is no impact on funding or services either way.

**Question 6: What information on community and state services resources for DeafBlindness is provided for the parents and student?**

Due to the low incidence of DeafBlindness, information is often not included in the typical resource packets distributed by school professionals regarding vision loss and deafness.

It should be noted that there are specific resources and unique services for students with DeafBlindness and their families. This includes information about the Texas DeafBlind Project, DeafBlind services through HHSC and TWC, the National Center on DeafBlindness, the DBMD Waiver, Helen Keller National Center, and iCanConnect. The Texas DeafBlind Project has assembled a resource guide for parents

and students with DeafBlindness, see “Texas Family Resources on Deafblindness,” which is available for download at

<http://www.tsbvi.edu/images/Texas%20Family%20Resources%20on%20Deafblindness.pdf>

**Question 7: If the Texas DeafBlind Child Count is due before the Full Individual Evaluation (FIE) process of assessing vision and hearing is complete, should the child be reported?**

Yes! Students for whom vision and hearing loss are suspected, but who have not yet been tested, may be reported on the DeafBlind Child Count and will remain there for one year. During that year, evaluation of their sensory functioning should be completed. Technical assistance related to appropriate assessment techniques is available from the Texas DeafBlind Project at the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

## Suggested Resources for New TVIs & COMS: Adding to and Maintaining Your Instructional Toolbox

Ann Adkins, Education Specialist, TSBVI Outreach Program

***Abstract: This article begins a new series of newsletter articles describing important resources for VI professionals, especially those who are new to the field of visual impairments. Additional resources will be added in each issue with links for accessing those materials.***

Keywords: resources, materials, teacher of students with visual impairments (TVI), certified orientation and mobility specialist (COMS)

After conversations with many new Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (TVI) and Orientation and Mobility Specialists (COMS), as



well as questions from more experienced members of our field, TSBVI Outreach and members of the TX SenseAbilities staff would like to begin an ongoing series of articles highlighting resources that are important for all of us to have in our educational and instructional toolboxes. This will be an ongoing series of articles, so if you don't see your favorite book or reference, please let us know. We welcome feedback from our readers!

There are two important new publications that we'd like to highlight in this edition of *TX SenseAbilities*:

**1. Keys to Educational Success: Teaching Students with Visual Impairments and Multiple Disabilities**

This is "the comprehensive guide on visual impairments and multiple disabilities that (VI) teachers have been looking for!" ([www.afb.org/store](http://www.afb.org/store)). It provides programming strategies to address the very diverse needs of a population that can be challenging, so it is also an important reference for special education teachers, educational team members, and administrators. It includes information about assessment, IEP development, instructional planning, and the roles of team members in relation to students with visual impairments and multiple disabilities, with key information on communication skills, literacy, orientation and mobility, behavior intervention, social skills, assistive technology, independent living skills, early childhood, and transition. (paperback — \$64.95; online — \$38.95; ebook — \$45.95)

Sacks, S.Z. & Zatta, M.C. (Eds.). (2016). *Keys to Educational Success: Teaching Students with Visual Impairments and Multiple Disabilities*. New York, NY: AFB Press.

<http://www.afb.org/store/Pages/ShoppingCart/ProductDetails.aspx?ProductId=978-0-89128-551-9&ruling=Yes>

**2. Nemeth at a Glance: A Math Resource, Grade-Level Chart, and Evaluation Tool**

This new book from the TSBVI Curriculum Department supports the teaching and transcription of the Nemeth braille code. It is a practical resource and quick reference that will facilitate Nemeth instruction and improve the quality and quantity of accessible mathematics materials for students who use braille. A sequence for the introduction of Nemeth symbols, arranged by approximate grade level, is included, as well as a matching evaluation of Nemeth reading and writing skills. Additional information is provided on important topics related to math and Nemeth Code instruction, including the tactile skills needed for math (and other subjects as well!), concept development, early numeracy, the importance of collaboration among team members, braille formatting, and examples of using Nemeth Code within UEB. (\$60)

Cleveland, J., Bean, J., Bird, M., Kelley, S., O'Brien, S., Osterhaus, S., Sewell, D., & Torrence, G. (2017). *Nemeth at a glance: A Math Resource, Grade-Level Chart, and Evaluation Tool*. Austin, TX: Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Some other crucial references for all TVIs and COMS (new or "experienced"):

**1. ECC Essentials: Teaching the Expanded Core Curriculum to Students with Visual Impairments**

*ECC Essentials* is the first comprehensive book on the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) for teachers working to meet the unique learning needs of their students with visual impairments. It



focuses on the education of children and adolescents in the Expanded Core Curriculum by providing the rationale, suggestions, and strategies necessary to implement instruction in all nine areas of the ECC. Each area of the ECC is addressed in a separate chapter, written by leading professionals in the field. Chapters also address teaching the ECC in general education settings, aligning the ECC with state standards, and integrating the ECC into the home and community. (paperback — \$64.95; online — \$38.95; ebook — \$45.95)

Allman, C. B., & Lewis, S. (Eds.). (2014). *ECC essentials: Teaching the expanded core curriculum to students with visual impairments*. New York: AFB Press.  
<http://www.afb.org/search.aspx?action=results&q=Ecc%2bessentials&in=main>

## **2. 2015 Guidelines and Standards for Educating Students with Visual Impairments in Texas**

This free document is the “go-to” resource for all things related to providing services for students with visual impairments, including those with additional disabilities and/or DeafBlindness, in Texas. The primary purpose of this document is to provide decision-makers, including school administrators, educational staff and family members, with a set of guidelines and standards by which they can determine the quality of their programs serving students with visual impairments. It addresses legal issues and programming concerns, including eligibility criteria, evaluation issues, the Expanded Core Curriculum for Students with Visual Impairments (ECC), instructional requirements (including appropriate instructional time, accommodations, and modifications), roles, service delivery options, placement issues, and caseloads. Links to legal

information and important resources are provided, and the entire document can be downloaded from both the TSBVI website and the Texas Education Agency (TEA) page of state guidelines for students with sensory impairments. It is recommended that VI professionals carry a print copy of this document with them as they endeavor to address the diverse needs of their students.

<http://www.tsbvi.edu/attachments/EducatingStudentswithVIGuidelinesStandards.pdf> and [http://tea.texas.gov/Academics/Special\\_Student\\_Populations/Special\\_Education/Programs\\_and\\_Services/Sensory\\_Impairments/Sensory\\_Impairments/](http://tea.texas.gov/Academics/Special_Student_Populations/Special_Education/Programs_and_Services/Sensory_Impairments/Sensory_Impairments/)

## **3. Expanded Core Curriculum for Students with Visual Impairments (ECC): Resources for Evaluation and Instruction**

Another new resource from the TSBVI Curriculum Department, this book is a compilation of resources for both evaluation and instruction in all nine areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC). It is divided into sections for each ECC area and includes charts that list books, articles, websites, etc., that can be helpful for evaluation and/or instruction in that specific ECC area. A key is provided to indicate the intended population for each resource. Each ECC area also includes a section of general and professional resources, and a flash drive is included with the purchase of the print copy of the book. The flash drive includes all the information in the book and provides direct links to the resources. It will also allow for the updating of the resource information and the addition of new materials as they become available. (\$50)

Adkins, A. & Sewell, D. (2016). *Expanded core curriculum for students with visual impairments (ECC): Resources for evaluation and instruction*.



Austin, TX: Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

<http://www.tsbvi.edu/store/ecom/index.php?action=ecom.pdetails&mode=ecc>

COMING SOON! Look for the new update of *Foundations of Education: Instructional Strategies for Teaching Children and Youths with Visual*

*Impairments*. The American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) is working to release an update to the original groundbreaking textbook, an essential resource for VI professionals since 2000. We'll include that information, along with other important references, in future editions of *TX SenseAbilities*.

## An Administrator's Guide to Evidence-Based Practices for Students with DeafBlindness

Matt Schultz, TSBVI DeafBlind Education Consultant, TX DB Project, and  
Kate Moss Hurst, TSBVI Outreach Statewide Staff Development Coordinator

***Abstract: This article provides a guide to aid administrators in addressing issues and practices related to students with DeafBlindness. It specifically focuses on Individualized Education Program (IEP) development and instruction for students with DeafBlindness.***

Keywords: DeafBlindness, "general education curriculum," access to general curriculum, alignment to academic standards, IEPs

Students who are DeafBlind present a unique challenge to families, schools, and communities. Despite their designation, they represent an extremely heterogeneous population. Given their relatively small size in number, as well as their diversity, curriculum and instructional arrangements must remain flexible.

- *Curriculum Access for Students with Low-Incidence Disabilities: The Promise for Universal Learning*, p. 52, Richard M.

Jackson, National Center on Accessing the General Curriculum, 2011.

Based on the interpretation of "general education curriculum" set forth in this letter, we expect annual IEP goals to be aligned with state academic content standards for the grade in which a child is enrolled. This alignment, however, must guide but not replace the individualized decision-making required in the IEP process. In fact, the IDEA's focus on the individual needs of each child with a disability is an essential consideration when IEP Teams are writing annual goals that are aligned with state academic content standards for the grade in which a child is enrolled so that the child can



advance appropriately toward attaining those goals during the annual period covered by the IEP.

- Guidance document, United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, Nov. 16, 2015, Yudin, M. & Musgrove, M. <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/memosdccltrs/guidance-on-fape-11-17-2015.pdf>

## Discussion

What are the evidence-based practices that can guide decision-making when developing the IEP and providing instruction for students with DeafBlindness?

- Inclusion of IEP team member or consultant (teacher of DeafBlind, education service center consultant, or state DeafBlind project consultant) who is knowledgeable about the impact of DeafBlindness and also about specialized communication methods and instructional approaches to assist with assessment, instructional planning, and program implementation. (Ferrell, Bruce, and Luckner, 2014)
- Appropriate assessment that utilizes both standardized and informal assessments that include functional vision and hearing evaluation, preferred learning channels, orientation and mobility skills, communication skills and concept development, cognitive development, social and emotional development. (Ferrell, Bruce, and Luckner, 2014)
- Appropriate assessment and instruction in the nine areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum (2015 Guidelines and Standards for Educating Students with Visual Impairments in Texas, p. 23), which includes:
  - assistive technology
  - career education
  - compensatory skills
  - recreation and leisure
  - orientation and mobility
  - sensory efficiency
  - independent living
  - social skills
  - self-determination
- Collaboration of all team members in conducting assessment and ongoing evaluation, developing the IEP, developing and providing instruction, modification of the general curriculum, and documenting progress. (Fundamental Classroom Conditions to Enhance Learning Experiences for Students who are Deaf-Blind, Gloria Rodriguez-Gil, 2009)
- Appropriate modifications to the general education curriculum to address conceptual gaps due to combined vision and hearing loss.
- The development of meaningful communication that is accessible to the child and effective for interaction with others through instruction that is:
  - focused on bonding and developing interactions and routines for expanding the frequency and functions of communication (Hagood and Moss, 1995).
  - embedded into every activity, provided in the context of natural environments, and complemented with ample opportunities for social interaction (Ferrell, Bruce, and Luckner, 2014).
- Small-group or individualized instruction to allow the child to fully access information, engage in the lesson, and receive feedback. (Parker et al., 2012; Riggio, 2009; Riggio & McLetchie, 2008)
- Systematic and child-guided instructional approaches such as the van Dijk Curricular



Approach or Nielsen's Active Learning Approach. (Ferrell, Bruce, and Luckner, 2014)

- Access to appropriate assistive technology such as alerting devices, low-tech devices (e.g., calendar systems, Little Room, cane), and high-tech devices (e.g., braille display, switches) to support communication, orientation and mobility, participation in content-area instruction, and life skills. (Ferrell, Bruce, and Luckner, 2014)
- Assessment and programming that address behavioral concerns recognizing the impact of communication on behavior as well as etiological specific impact on behavior. (Ferrell, Bruce, and Luckner, 2014)
- Support from qualified intervention and communication professionals (e.g., interveners, tactile interpreters) to access instruction and participate in school activities. (Ferrell, Bruce, and Luckner, 2014)
- Utilizing an interagency transition planning process such as personal-futures planning to capture strengths and needs of the individual and to plan for natural and paid supports for all aspects of adult living. (Ferrell, Bruce, and Luckner, 2014)

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## NEWS AND VIEWS

# Developing New Distance Education and Training Resources at TSBVI

William Daugherty, Superintendent, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

***Abstract: Distance learning technology and other innovations implemented by TSBVI are supporting the needs of teachers and learners with visual impairment around the state.***

Keywords: distance learning, website, visually impaired students

the most widely used resources of their type in the world.

Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) has an interesting history of small side projects going on to become important and far-reaching resources used by visual impairment professionals and families statewide, nationally and internationally. The TSBVI website ([www.tsbvi.edu](http://www.tsbvi.edu)), and the dozens of publications that have come out of the TSBVI Curriculum Department, are good examples of initiatives that started with a very limited scope by TSBVI teachers, who mostly had other, full-time jobs, but saw a need and filled it. None were experts about websites or about producing curricular materials, but it soon became apparent that there was a tremendous need for these types of resources. The school wisely began to devote staff and funding to these efforts and to reach out to others around the state to draw upon their expertise for some amazing collaborations. Today, the TSBVI website and curricular publications are among

The ever-changing landscape of how digital media and technology are used for learning was recognized years ago at TSBVI as a trend to which the school needed to respond. In keeping with the usual practice, a small group of educators and media specialists who had many other responsibilities began putting on webinars and filming various experts in the school's studio to be shared with the state. The school soon recognized it needed outside expertise and dedicated personnel to first play catch up and then to begin to innovate. The Texas Legislature responded to TSBVI's request for additional funding, and an amazing team of technology and media specialists joined with the existing group to lay the foundation of how we will produce, manage and distribute content moving forward.

In this edition of *TX SenseAbilities*, the article by TSBVI Short-Term Programs principal Sara



Merritt shows where the school is headed in providing new resources that will make the content of these programs available to students and their teachers without their having to come to Austin campus. In most situations, the student and teacher will be participating side by side. There are obvious benefits to this arrangement because it helps the teacher better support the student as the new learning is put to use in the local school. The Statewide Outreach Media Team now has videographers, a digital archivist, and web-based learning specialists. This group will use our campus expertise, national and international experts, and the many talents found in the school districts and regional service centers across Texas to develop first-class media products for professionals and families alike.

Put another way, these new media and technology-based learning products and services are “the next big thing” at TSBVI. Within a few years, there will be something for everyone interested in the education of students with visual impairments and something to address all of the incredible range of learner characteristics represented among the 10,000 or so students in Texas. And here is something the readers of *TX SenseAbilities* should know if they don’t already: Virtually everything TSBVI does is in response to stakeholder input. What teachers, orientation and mobility specialists, parents, advocates, and students statewide tell TSBVI they need forms the basis of the school’s initiatives. This latest initiative will grow and get better year after year with your input and your willingness to work with TSBVI to ensure that all service delivery and learning gaps get the attention they deserve.

## The Blind Children’s Vocational Discovery and Development Program

Tammy Martin, Program Manager, Blind Children’s Program

***Abstract: In this article, Ms. Martin reviews the services provided by the Blind Children’s Program.***

Keywords: Health and Human Services (HHS), Blind Children’s Vocational Discovery and Development Program, individual training, blind, visually impaired

The Blind Children’s Vocational Discovery and Development Program (Blind Children’s Program) moved from the Department of

Assistive and Rehabilitative Services to the Health and Human Services Commission on Sept. 1, 2016. This move will allow the program to work with other programs across the HHS system to make sure those in the Blind Children’s Program get all the services they need. Your blind children’s specialist will work with you and your child’s educational and



medical team to make sure your child reaches their full potential.

Your child's specialist wants to learn about your child. They want to know their strengths, habits, likes and dislikes, and areas where they need additional support. Your child's specialist wants to learn about the barriers keeping your child from reaching goals. Your specialist will talk with other service providers on your child's team. This might include classroom teachers, a teacher of the visually impaired, an orientation and mobility specialist, other therapists (private and educational), doctors and anyone else who has valuable input evaluating your child's strengths and areas of need.

After the assessment, you and your specialist will develop a Family Service Plan tailored to meet your child's needs. As new barriers and needs are identified, you and your specialist will adjust the plan. No two children are alike and no two Family Service Plans will look alike. The plans may include the following:

### **Individual training**

These services might be provided by the blind children's specialist or by other service providers in the community. Services might include teaching your child nonvisual techniques for completing a specific task such as making their bed or making brownies, arranging access to piano lessons to improve braille skills, or arranging dance lessons to strengthen social skills.

### **Developmental equipment and/or developmental toys**

Children need hands-on experiences to understand the world around them and master tasks. It is important they have access to

developmental equipment and toys for concepts development and skill acquisition.

### **Group Skills Training**

The Blind Children's Program offers training in a group setting for your child and other family members. Learning new skills and strengthening emerging skills happen best when your child is having fun. Group Skills Training offers an excellent chance for families to meet and network with one another.

### **Educational Support**

Your blind children's specialist can review your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals, help you prepare for the Admission Review and Dismissal (ARD) meeting, and will often attend the ARD with you. The specialist will work closely with your child's educational team and help support their educational goals at home and in the community.

### **Case Management Services**

Families need a wide variety of services. Your specialist will work with you to ensure that you can find additional services through other service providers, including:

- Medical
- Social
- Educational
- Vocational
- Other appropriate services as needed

The blind children's specialist has many roles, including:

- Case manager
- Counselor
- Trainer
- Service provider
- Team member



Your specialist values the partnership they have with you and always wants you to be an active participant in designing and developing services. They want you to speak up and

contact them when you have questions, concerns and joys to share. Thank you for the privilege of being a part of your child's team.

## Transfer of Vocational Rehabilitation Services to the Texas Workforce Commission Expands Opportunities

Cheryl Fuller, Director of Rehabilitation Services Division and Interim Director of Blind Services Division, Texas Workforce Commission

***Abstract: In this article, Mrs. Fuller provides information about the transition of certain programs from the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services to the Texas Workforce Commission.***

Keywords: disability, Vocational Rehabilitation, Blind Children's Vocational Discovery and Development Program, Independent Living, Texas Workforce Commission, Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities, Texas Workforce Solutions, Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services

On Sept. 1, 2016, vocational rehabilitation (VR) services and staff were transferred to the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) from the former Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS). These services, which help Texans with visual and other disabilities prepare for, obtain, retain and advance in competitive employment, were transferred as the result of legislation passed during the 84th Texas Legislative Session.

Staff from TWC and DARS worked together to ensure a smooth transfer of services for VR

customers. Texas Workforce Solutions network is made up of TWC, 28 workforce development boards and service-providing partners. The addition of VR services to Texas Workforce Solutions will benefit Texans with disabilities. Benefits include access to more employment-related training, education and support services, and expanded employment opportunities and initiatives.

TWC's Texas HireAbility campaign (<http://www.twc.state.tx.us/partners/texas-hireability>) is one of these new initiatives. Launched in October in partnership with the Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities and the Texas Workforce Solutions network, the campaign's goal is to raise awareness about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities and highlight their contributions in the workplace through educational materials.



TWC's VR and Independent Living Services for Older Individuals who are Blind programs continue to coordinate with the former DARS programs that transitioned to the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC). These programs include the Blind Children's Vocational Discovery and Development Program and the Independent Living (IL) Services Program. The two agencies are developing additional strategies to ensure consistent and ongoing collaboration between the programs. The strategies will include opportunities for the agencies to receive feedback and suggestions from customers and other stakeholders.

Stay up to date about the VR transition by visiting the DARS Program Transition webpage at <http://www.twc.state.tx.us/news/department-assistive-rehabilitative-services-program-transition>.

For questions about VR services, visit the Vocational Rehabilitation Services webpage (<http://www.twc.state.tx.us/jobseekers/vocational-rehabilitation-services>) or contact a customer service representative at 800-628-5115 or [customers@twc.state.tx.us](mailto:customers@twc.state.tx.us).

## What's New in Braille Math?

Cyral Miller, Director of Outreach Programs, TSBVI

***Abstract: Efforts to train staff in Nemeth Code across Texas.***

Keywords: UEB, Nemeth Code, braille, math

For a year now, braille news has been dominated by the impending switch from English Braille American Edition (EBAE) to Unified English Braille Code (UEB). Teachers all over the country have been busy taking classes online and in groups, universities have begun offering UEB braille lessons in their personnel preparation classes, and the move is on!

On Nov. 2, 2012, the United States members of the Braille Authority of North America (BANA) voted to adopt UEB to replace EBAE in the United States. Part of the proclamation is below:

As of the implementation date in 2016, UEB, Nemeth, Music, and the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) will be the official codes for use in the United States. BANA is providing guidance on how to incorporate the Nemeth Code into UEB context with the intent that the Nemeth Code will continue to be integral to braille in the United States. The document Provisional Guidance for Transcription Using the Nemeth Code within UEB Contexts is available as PDF and BRF files on the BANA website at [www.brailleauthority.org/ueb.html](http://www.brailleauthority.org/ueb.html).

The Texas Transition to UEB Committee created a statewide plan (available at



<http://www.tsbvi.edu/texas-ueb-transition-plan>).

Discussion by the group as the plan was developed included recognition that new resources were needed to help increase Nemeth skills for both professionals and students. What has been available dates from back to the 1970s and badly needed updating. This effort has had several prongs:

- *Nemeth at a Glance: A Math Resource, Grade-Level Chart, and Evaluation Tool* recently was published by the TSBVI curriculum department. It is a terrific new resource that includes a grade-level chart to quickly scan and find needed math symbols as they are introduced in school and a new assessment of both reading and writing Nemeth skills. There are sections to help ensure that numeracy and tactile skills are appropriately addressed as part of mathematics literacy and many tips and strategies as well as example problems.
- There have been seven workshops across the state, serving professionals in 12 of the 20 ESC regions, that were introductions to the *Nemeth at a Glance*. Participants got early release versions of the book, too!
- An online course as a refresher in Nemeth that follows the same outline as the *Nemeth at a Glance* is in development with Dr. Derrick Smith as the author and the “voice” of the course. This

will be posted on the TSBVI website under On-the-Go Learning and available to be taken in part or whole for free.

- Other ESCs have also offered training on Nemeth and in several regions there has been specific training for transcribers to ensure they use quality braille for tactile graphics, including how to incorporate Nemeth Code into the UEB context. TSBVI Braille Boot Camps have been offered for the past several years on campus and at regional service centers and include training on production of quality braille production following BANA guidelines.
- Pat van Geem and Susan Mattson O'Brien worked for the past two years to develop an online course in braille transcription that includes tactile graphics production. We are so saddened by Pat's recent death and look forward to his legacy being carried forward in this new course that he worked on literally throughout his last days. Susan Mattson O'Brien will continue to provide this training.

For more training resources on Nemeth, check the braille authority website at <http://www.brailleauthority.org>, the TSBVI website, and your regional ESC website. The good news is that more is available than ever before.



# TSBVI Short-Term Programs: New Distance Learning Offerings

Sara Merritt, Principal for TSBVI Short-Term Programs

***Abstract: In this article, Sara Merritt gives an overview on the new types of TSBVI's Short-Term Programs offered using distance technology.***

Keywords: TSBVI, Short-Term Programs, distance learning, blind, Visually Impaired

Short-Term Programs (STP) is now offering online instruction directly to students via distance learning technologies. This means students from across the state get specialized TVI instruction without leaving their home communities. STP has created three different types of distance learning classes to meet student needs.

## **Distance Learning Courses (self-paced)**

Distance Learning (self-paced) online courses are interactive learning experiences for students who are blind or have visual impairments. The students take the class from a computer in their local community. Students work through content individually and at their own pace. Students still have opportunities to ask questions of the teacher and collaborate with other students through learning activities in Google Classroom. Students who participate must be referred to the "Distance Learning" class by their TVI.

## **Distance Learning Classes (real-time)**

Distance Learning (real-time) classes are interactive learning experiences for students who are blind or have visual impairments. The students take the class from a computer in their local community. Students work through content

with an instructor in real time. This instruction can be presented to groups or to individuals through video conferencing software. Students who participate must be referred to the "Individualized Instruction" class by their TVI.

## **Distance Learning Classes-Blended**

Distance Learning-Blended classes are a combination of real-time learning experiences either through videoconferencing or face-to-face classes and self-paced instruction through Google Classroom. This type of instruction may be presented to groups or individuals. This type of class may be provided to foster student growth after a face-to-face class or in conjunction with online "Distance Learning" courses. Students who participate must be referred to the "Distance Learning" class by their TVI.

Our first class (which is self-paced and was released in Fall 2016) was the *Introduction to the Orion TI-84+ Graphing Calculator*. Nineteen students are currently enrolled in this class. The class is fully accessible using a screen reader and is fully audio-described and captioned. We used animation software to create avatars of our teachers, and the students have really enjoyed the game-like format. It's important to note that the goals of the class are to introduce students to the calculator, not to teach secondary math. The class is taught by a TVI, not a certified secondary math teacher. For help with



challenging math concepts, please talk with your math teacher.

The second class, also self-paced, that we released was Google Classroom and VoiceOver. We found that students across the state were encountering obstacles using this tool in their core classes. We plan to release a similar class on using JAWS and Google Classroom in the near future.

Currently, our courses are only available to students who are Texas residents so we can

monitor the success of the class, implement any needed changes, and document the number of students who are accessing this service statewide. We are exploring ways to share these classes with the community at large.

We are excited about the opportunity to serve more students via distance learning and online instruction. If you have an idea for a distance learning class for students, please contact Sara Merritt at [merritts@tsbvi.edu](mailto:merritts@tsbvi.edu) or 512-289-3476.

The possibilities are endless!

## TSBVI Outreach Program Honors Texas Fellows Recognizing VI Professionals in their Role as Recruiters

### 2015-2016

Texas Fellow	Candidate
Kandice Burke	Jennifer Gillispie
Marcia Hopkins	Jennifer Brown
Charlotte Simpson	Cindy Holifield
Janiel Hayes	Irma Garza
Deborah Thompson	Kelly Bevis Woodiel
Tashia Ellington	Heather Gill
Shelly Gonzales	Katie Nash
Lonnie Fortner	Judy Martinez
Cindy Warnick	Cassidy Sherwood
Kandice Burke	Michelle Peacock
Danika Spake	Alecia Jarrett
Ann Adkins	Heather Ballard

### 2016-2017

Texas Fellow	Candidate
Laura Hampton	Heather Haga
Catherine Edwards	Pamela Castillo
Kelli Thompson	Christi Osborne
Laura Coughlin	Stephanie Anderson
Jill Cribbs	Kim Faulkner



The Texas Fellows program acknowledges the individual recruiters (Texas Fellow) and welcomes the new VI professionals (Candidate) to the field. You are eligible to be a Texas Fellow if you were a significant person in the candidate's recruitment. Candidates must have started training after May 15, 2016.

Texas Fellows and Candidates receive the following recognitions:

- The names of the Texas Fellows and the candidates are published in *TX SenseAbilities* for one year.

- Texas Fellows and the Candidates receive special acknowledgement at all statewide TSBVI-sponsored activities.

AND

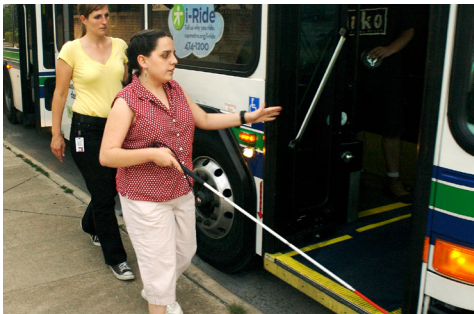
- One of TSBVI's most popular publications
- OR
- Registration assistance for an upcoming TSBVI-sponsored conference.

For more information about the Texas Fellow Program or working as a VI professional, contact Mary Shore at [shorem@tsbvi.edu](mailto:shorem@tsbvi.edu) or 512-206-9156.





# TEACH BEYOND THE CLASSROOM



**Do you value collaboration and working one-on-one with students?**

**Consider working with students with visual impairments.**

## **Teachers of students with visual impairments (TVI):**

- Teach students of all ages, birth through high school.
- Evaluate use of vision and its impact on learning and functioning.
- Support instruction in academic skills and functional skills.
- Link with families, teachers, and community agencies.
- Evaluate and teach assistive technology, such as magnifiers and personal braille devices.
- Teach adaptive strategies for social, daily living, recreation, and leisure skills.
- Increase students' independence through self-advocacy and self-determination.

## **Certified orientation and mobility specialists (COMS):**

- Teach students of all ages, birth through high school.
- Evaluate use of vision and its impact on learning and traveling.
- Teach spatial concepts for purposeful movement.
- Teach skills for safe and efficient travel, including skills needed by young children and those with multiple impairments.
- Teach adaptive technology (e.g., long cane, auditory GPS device).
- Increase students' independence through self-advocacy and self-determination.

## **What do I need to know about training?**

TVIs	O&Ms
General or special education certification required	Bachelor's degree required, but not teacher certification
Take 6 courses plus an internship	Take 8 courses plus an internship
May apply for tuition stipend	May apply for tuition stipend
Enjoy support from a TVI mentor	Enjoy support from an O&M mentor
Take courses through distance learning options	Take courses through a combination of distance learning options
Obtain Texas certification in visual impairment	Obtain national certification in orientation and mobility

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<https://hhs.texas.gov/services/disability/blind-visually-impaired/blind-childrens-vocational-discovery-development-program>

1-877-787-8999



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