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Deaf-Blind IEP Eligibility

There may be misunderstanding of whether a student should be considered eligible for Special Education under the category of “Deaf-Blindness.” This document serves to clarify the issue and to guide IEP teams.

According to the Illinois State Board of Education, “**Deaf-Blindness** means concomitant hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with **deafness** or children with **blindness**.” This definition is vague and implies that there is a specific type of program for children with dual sensory loss.

(<https://www.isbe.net/Pages/Special-Education-Disability-Areas.aspx>)

The combined vision-hearing loss for students eligible for this category does not have to be a complete loss. The sensory loss for most eligible students, in fact, includes students with combined mild vision and hearing losses, students with additional disabilities and students doing grade level academic work ([National Child Count | National Center on Deafblindness](#) (nationaldb.org)). See the chart at the end of this document for more specific information.

Prior to IDEA, federal laws created national and regional centers (“model-centers for deaf-blind children”). However, *A briefing paper regarding authorization of The Education of the Handicapped Act, Title VI, Part C*. (1989) recommended the following:

FULL RANGE OF PROGRAM OPTIONS

“Add language that specifies that all children and youth with deaf-blindness are eligible for services and assistance and that this eligibility is not dependent upon the child receiving educational services in a particular kind of program option. Children and youth with deaf-blindness have the right to free access to a wide range of educational placement options.”

Students with dual sensory loss are eligible for all needed services regardless of disability category. The disability category does not drive programming. However, children who are DeafBlind are unique in their needs and it is often appropriate to represent these needs by considering the disability category of “Deaf-Blindness” on the IEP. A decision to apply the disability category of “Deaf-Blindness” does not require the student to be placed in any specific program, or to have instruction provided by a teacher who is licensed in Deaf-Blindness.

Current regulations define Deaf-Blindness in a very narrow sense. The Alice Cogswell and Anne Sullivan Macy Act, (House Resolution 5748) supports better identification of students with a sensory disability of deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind, or visually impaired. Illinois subscribes to this more accurate definition of students with Deaf-Blindness.

(<https://www.isbe.net/Documents/guidance-16-04-cogswell-macy-act.pdf#search=cogswell>)

A few reasons to consider Deaf-Blind versus other category if it is appropriate:

1. The combination of sensory loss creates a unique disability, beyond the “adding” of vision and hearing loss.
2. Assuming that sensory loss is included in MD, OHI, or a non-sensory category leads to misunderstandings by staff who mistake access issues for cognitive or behavioral issues.
3. If a student moves or changes programs, needs are less clear to receiving staff.
4. Families may miss opportunities for networking and mentoring, such as the National Family Association for the Deaf-Blind (<https://nfadb.org/>).
5. There are specific opportunities for many persons (ICanConnect <http://www.icanconnect.org/how-to-participate/illinois>) and for transition-aged individuals who are Deafblind. Definitions of Deafblindness may differ with those programs. Examples include: ICRE-Wood, Helen Keller National Center.

| | ← Degree of Hearing → | | | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Degree of Vision ↓ | Normal Hearing | Hard of Hearing (mild-moderate) | Deaf (severe to profound) | Progressive Loss | Auditory Neuropathy |
| Normal Vision | Normal for Both | Hearing Impaired | Hearing Impaired | Depends on Degree | Hearing Impaired |
| Low Vision (best corrected to 20/70) | Visually Impaired (VI) | Identified as DB | DB | DB | DB |
| Blind – (legally, light perception, field loss, totally) | VI | DB | DB | DB | DB |
| Progressive Loss | Depends on Degree | DB | DB | DB | DB |
| CVI | VI | DB | DB | DB | DB |

Credit for chart: [MaryAnn Demchak](#); University of Nevada, Reno; mad@unr.edu April 2018

Image Description:

Table with 7 rows and 6 columns.

The top row has arrow lines facing right and left with the words “Degree of Hearing” in between.

Second row reads: Degree of Vision (with an arrow line pointing downward); Normal Hearing; Hard of Hearing (mild-moderate); Deaf (severe to profound); Progressive Loss; Auditory Neuropathy

Third row reads; Normal Vision; Normal for both; Hearing Impaired; Hearing Impaired; Depends on Degree; Hearing Impaired

Fourth row reads: Low Vision (best corrected to 20/70); Visually Impaired (VI); Identified as DB; DB; DB; DB

Fifth row reads: Blind (legally, light perception, field loss, totally); VI; DB; DB; DB; DB

Sixth row reads: Progressive Loss: Depends on Degree; DB; DB; DB; DB

Seventh row reads: CVI; DB; DB; DB; DB