



## NATIONAL FAMILY ASSOCIATION FOR DEAF-BLIND

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**Our Mission:** NFADB exists to empower the voices of families with individuals who are Deaf-Blind and advocate for their unique needs.

**What we believe:** NFADB believes individuals who are Deaf-Blind are valued members of their communities and should have the same opportunities and choices as others in the community.

**Our Position:** Children who are deafblind need a multidisciplinary team that includes qualified personnel with deafblind expertise to provide a free and appropriate education. The team should collaborate to offer a consistent individualized education program (IEP) that meets each student's unique needs throughout their school years. Qualified personnel includes a Teacher of Students who are Deaf-Blind (TDB), DB-trained interveners, certified orientation and mobility specialists, and related service providers with training specific to this population. NFADB supports state and federal efforts to recognize the importance of these personnel in our children's educational programs.

**Definition of Deaf-Blind:** Deaf-Blindness involves combined vision and hearing loss to the extent that neither of these senses can compensate for lack of the other. Deaf-Blindness creates an inability to access both visual and auditory information about people and things in the environment necessary for learning, communication, and overall development. It is a very isolating condition.

**Where are we now:** Our children who are deafblind are often served by a large team of teachers, related service providers and paraeducators who are frequently unfamiliar with our children's needs. Often they are teachers of students who are visually impaired or deaf and hard of hearing who have no training in deaf-blindness. But the skills required to teach a child who is deaf-blind must address the nature of the combined sensory loss, which is different from addressing each sense separately. Families begin each school year educating school personnel the best they can, rather than having knowledgeable professionals from the school be responsible for delivery of an appropriate educational plan. It can take months to educate the team members on the impact of deafblindness. As a result, too many of our children fail to achieve their educational potential.

A full understanding of the impact of sensory loss is necessary to evaluate students with both hearing and vision impairment, and to develop an appropriate educational program. This is why **certified teachers of students who are deafblind** (TDB) are essential team members for our children. A TDB can provide both direct and collaborative consultation services to improve communication skills, focus on sensory efficiency, develop literacy skills, teach the use of specialized technology, and design meaningful educational activities.

When sensory impairments make it difficult for some of our children to access and stay engaged in instruction, **trained interveners**, in partnership with TDBs, can help ensure that deafblind-specific instructional accommodations and strategies are used consistently. These paraeducators ensure that the IEP is implemented as designed, support access to educational environments, and make sure accessible materials are provided throughout the day.

Many of our children who are deafblind need the services of related service providers such as certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists, speech/language providers, and others. Those providers must have training on appropriate strategies that will be effective with our children, since so many traditional materials rely upon visual and auditory senses.

With both a TDB as a member of the team, an intervener who knows how to support daily instruction as needed, and trained related service providers, our children will be able to learn, and not have to wait for the team to discover which instructional strategies will work.

#### **Common Consequences of Not Having a Team of Qualified Personnel:**

- Our children who are Deaf-Blind will waste years of school as unqualified personnel fail to implement appropriate programming.
- Our children who are Deaf-Blind will not learn when instructional materials are not matched to their needs.
- Our children who are Deaf-Blind will not have access to their environment and therefore will miss out on learning opportunities.
- Our children who are Deaf-Blind will not have access to communication with their peers and community and will not learn to communicate.
- Our children who are Deaf-Blind will not develop socially acceptable behaviors.
- Our children will not have a knowledgeable champion within the educational team with the ability to educate the team on the unique needs of our children with dual sensory loss and therefore parents have to carry that entire burden.

#### **Where we should be:**

Students who are deafblind require a team who work together to meet complex educational needs. That team must be trained on the impact of sensory impairments

and supported to develop and implement appropriate instructional strategies throughout the school day, extending into the home.

### **Benefits of having a team of qualified personnel:**

- Our children who are Deaf-Blind's education will equip them to achieve to their fullest potential.
- Teachers of Students who are Deaf-Blind will educate our child's team about the unique needs of our children with dual sensory loss rather than parents carrying that burden.
- Our children who are Deaf-Blind will have a team ready to teach them at the start of the year.
- Our children who are Deaf-Blind will have people who will recognize and support their communication, social and emotional development.
- Our children who are Deaf-Blind will live a life with a future, goals, and purpose.

### **What you can do:**

- Promote efforts in your state to recognize the need for both interveners and Teachers of Students who are Deaf-Blind
- Co-Sponsor the Cogswell-Macy Act

### **Resources:**

[Cogswell-Macy Act](#)

[NFADB Advocacy](#)

[Advocating for Qualified Personnel](#)

[Council for Exceptional Children Teacher Competencies: Deafblindness](#)

[Council for Exceptional Children Intervener Competencies](#)

[What is an Intervener?](#)

[OSEP Letter to McDowell, 08/02/2018](#) (addresses current use of interveners as determined by IEP teams) <https://www.cec.sped.org/~media/Files/Standards/Paraeducator%20Sets/Specialty%20Set%20%20%20Special%20Education%20Paraeducator%20Intervener%20for%20Individuals%20With%20Deafblindness%20PDBI.pdf>

[Increasing Recognition and Use of Intervenors: State Success Stories](#)

[OHOA Module: The Role of Intervenors in Educational Settings](#)

Parker, A. T., & Nelson, C. (2016). Toward a comprehensive system of personnel development in deafblind education. *American Annals of the Deaf*, 161(4), 486–501.