



Determining the Need for an Intervener in Educational Settings

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Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
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An intervener is a related service provider who provides direct support to a student who is deafblind for all or part of the instructional day. The intervener receives training in communication methods and sensory accommodations that are needed for an individual who is deafblind to access information in various learning environments. The intervener supports the existing service delivery model, collaborating with the student's team to implement the student's IEP.

Most students who are deafblind need to develop a bond and a trusting relationship with a consistent communication partner in a predictable environment in order to progress to higher-level learning. For many students who are deafblind, this trusted communication partner is the intervener.

Teaming is essential in the success of this model. Classroom teachers and other professionals on the instructional team provide the supervision, direction, and support that are necessary for interveners to be effective in their role. An intervener should never carry out their duties independently; they should function as an integral part of the student's instructional team.

Primary roles of the intervener

The intervener can support the child in a variety of roles that can include (but are not limited to):

- **Facilitating access to environmental information:** The intervener helps provide environmental information typically obtained through vision and hearing, which may be inaccessible or incomplete for the individual who is deafblind (Alsop, 2002).
- **Supporting communication development:** The intervener assists in the development and use of receptive and expressive communication skills for the individual who is deafblind (Alsop, 2002).
- **Fostering a trusting, interactive relationship:** The intervener cultivates and maintains a trusting and interactive relationship that supports the social and emotional well-being of the individual (Alsop, 2002).
- **Encouraging and supporting social connections and participation:** The intervener provides support that enables a student to form and build relationships, expand social connections, and actively participate in activities, promoting inclusion and engagement. Additionally the intervener plays a key role in facilitating interactions with peers, teachers, and family. The intervener can help bridge communication gaps and promote social engagement and emotional well-being.

- **Providing sensory information:** The intervener describes and interprets the student's surroundings through touch, movement, or spoken or signed explanations, depending on the student's remaining sensory abilities.
- **Encouraging exploration:** The intervener guides and supports the student's safe exploration of their environment, helping them interact with objects, people, and spaces that they might otherwise miss.
- **Developing conceptual understanding:** The intervener explicitly reinforces concepts that are usually learned incidentally through vision and hearing, providing direct hands-on experiences to support understanding.
- **Promoting independence:** Interveners are trained to *do with and not for* students with deafblindness, with the long-term goal of developing independence and interdependence, rather than dependence. Interveners help children build self-advocacy skills, promote social interaction, and encourage safe risk-taking to develop confidence.

More information on the roles and responsibilities of the intervener, teacher, and administrator using this model of instruction can be found on this website and in the booklet [Interveners in the Classroom: Guidelines for Teams Working with Students Who Are Deafblind](#). (Alsop, et al, 2007)

Is an intervener needed for your student?

This document is designed to help the IEP team determine whether an intervener is an appropriate support for a student who is deafblind in a school setting. It is intended to guide the IEP team in a discussion about the individualized support needed to provide the student with full access to the educational experience including:

- the supports the student is currently receiving
- how those supports are being implemented
- identification of any additional supports the student may need

The team should also determine who will provide these supports, considering whether an intervener may be necessary or whether someone on the team is able to provide this type of support.

Step I: Complete, Update, and Review Assessment Data

In order to use this guide effectively, student assessment in critical areas must have been completed or updated to reflect the impact of being deafblind on instruction. Critical areas may include, but are not limited to:

- Vision and hearing, including the degree, complexity, and impact of sensory losses
- Orientation and mobility
- Expressive and receptive communication
- Concept development
- Self-help and daily living skills
- Adaptive technology
- Behavior and safety concerns
- Social and emotional needs

In order to get a comprehensive understanding of the student's access needs, and to ensure you have all of the necessary information to continue with this document, please review the following article: [10 Issues to Always Consider When Intervening for Students with Deafblindness](#) by David Wiley, Texas Deafblind Outreach

In addition, complete the following evaluation tool: [Assessment of Deafblind Access to Manual Language Systems \(ADAMLS\)](#) by Robbie Blaha & Brad Carlson (2007).

Have all critical student assessments been completed, updated when needed, and reviewed?

Yes: Use assessment information when answering the questions found in this document.

No: Complete, update, and review assessments before completing this document.

It is critical that appropriate issues related to being deafblind are fully considered and addressed during the evaluation process. Thus, the questions and considerations throughout the remainder of this document will highlight and clarify issues that the team should focus on when reviewing assessments and making instructional decisions. These questions and considerations will address the deafblind-specific accommodations and modifications that may be needed to support the student's full access to instruction. They will also be helpful in guiding current and future evaluations.

Step II: Questions about the Student who is Deafblind

The decision by the IEP team to provide intervener services is based on the level of support a student who is deafblind needs in order to gain access and effectively participate in all of the student's educational environments. The team should discuss how to address all identified issues.

A variety of supports and strategies may be creatively employed by the team to address the student's individual needs. In some cases, training an intervener in deafblind specific knowledge and skills may be the most appropriate, effective, and efficient way to meet those needs.

The questions in the following table can assist the team in determining how to address the supports needed related to the student who is deafblind. If the team answers "yes" to any of the questions 1-11 below, continue to Step III.

Questions about the Student who is Deafblind

- 1. Does the student need assistance to effectively detect, gather, or prioritize information from communication partners and the surrounding environment?**

- Yes
- No

If yes, how will this access issue be addressed, and by whom?

Questions for consideration:

- *Does the student recognize and identify manual markers?*
- *Is the student able to read facial expressions and facial grammar?*
- *Does the student know when a question is asked or does the student need you to tell them you asked a question?*
- *Does the proximity of a communication partner need significant modification in order for the student to communicate effectively?*
- *Is the student able to receive information (both instructional and non-instructional) from a distance typical of their peers?*
- *Do you find the need to point out things in the environment in order for the student to notice them?*
- *Is the student able to filter through content to determine what is most important?*

2. Does the student rely on the sense of touch or near vision to gain information, to the extent that the student is unable to reliably get information that other students get from a distance?

Yes

No

If yes, how will this need be addressed, and by whom?

Questions for consideration:

- *Does the student miss information happening around them (incidental learning), such as conversation between peers, environmental cues, someone entering the room, or other situations that involve incidental learning?*
- *Does the student know what the teacher is referencing when they point or say "this"?*
- *Does the student use tactile methods of communication? (tactile sign language, tactile symbols, hand tracking, touch cues, haptics, Protactile sign language)*
- *Does the student need a reduced distance to receive visual information?*

3. In a group instructional setting, is it difficult for the student to gather information or follow a discussion?

Yes

No

If yes, how will this need be addressed, and by whom?

Questions for consideration:

- *Can the student take notes while receiving instruction?*
- *Can the student follow the pace of instruction?*
- *Can the student follow speaker changes in a group discussion without missing information?*
- *Is the student impacted by the number of students in the classroom and their positioning? (ex. Student may need to be in a small group and require the students to be positioned in a semi-circle in order to follow discussion.)*

4. Does the student use equipment or adaptive aids, but not efficiently or effectively enough to keep up with the pace of the instruction being given?

Yes

No

If yes, how will this need be addressed?

Questions for consideration:

- *Is the student able to independently organize and manage their instructional equipment in all of their environments throughout the day? (ex. CCTV, augmentative communication, laptop, iPad, FM/DM, or other assistive technology devices.) This can include:*
 - *switching between pieces of equipment during a lesson.*
 - *transporting equipment between classes.*
 - *knowing which piece of equipment to use for which task.*
 - *knowing where equipment is charged and stored and being able to get this done efficiently.*
- *Is the student able to independently use and troubleshoot their instructional equipment?*

5. Is the student unable to orient themselves to the environment or move to different learning environments without assistance?

Yes

No

If yes, how will this need be addressed?

Questions for consideration:

- *In addition to the Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist's services and recommendations, does the student need ongoing support to orient and travel safely?*
- *Does the student require enriched environments that promote movement and exploration?*
- *Does the student need touch cues or haptics in order to understand information regarding travel?*
- *Does the student require focused attention on body awareness and how they relate to the space around them?*

6. Does the student rely on communication methods not generally used or understood by many of the student's communication partners (teachers, staff, or peers)? Consider all the various environments the student accesses throughout the entire school day (e.g. classroom, gymnasium, outside, hallway, cafeteria, and other school environments).

- Yes
- No

If yes, how will this need be addressed?

Questions for consideration:

- Does the student use tactile sign language, tactile symbols, picture symbols, sign language, adapted signs, object symbols, or another augmented communication system?
- Does the student have a limited group of communication partners that clearly understand them?
- Does the student need assistance in order to have their communication attempts be understood by peers and adults?
- Is the student able to communicate with peers independently, especially during unstructured time such as recess, lunch, or passing periods?
- Does the student become frustrated with other communication partners who do not understand them?

7. Does the student often need individual intervention by a trained or knowledgeable support person in order to communicate effectively, either receptively or expressively?

- Yes
- No

If yes, how will this need be addressed?

Questions for consideration:

- Does the student need pre-teaching or re-teaching of vocabulary for lessons?
- Is the student able to communicate (receptively and expressively) with a variety of communication partners (peers and staff)?
- Outside of targeted instruction, does the student need on-going support in developing their expressive and receptive language in order to effectively communicate?

8. Does the student need a high degree of consistency in strategies and communication systems, so that working with numerous people during the day causes the student confusion and frustration?

- Yes
- No

If yes, how will this need be addressed?

Questions for consideration:

- *Does the student become frustrated or confused by subtle differences in routine, such as using different vocabulary, hand placement, natural differences in how a communication partner communicates?*
- *Is the student able to understand differences in tone, body language, facial expressions, in a variety of situations?*
- *Is the student able to independently gather information from a variety of people about what is happening, what other people are doing, other people's expectations, and what to expect?*
- *Is the student able to independently manage their time so that they are able to complete all assigned tasks within the given time frame?*
- *Does the student need shortened assignments in order for them to complete the task?*
- *Does the student show signs of frustration or distress when they are unable to finish a task completely?*
- *Does the student need assistance in order to decrease moments of distress, regulate their emotions or support their sensory needs?*
- *Does the student require support in order to foster feelings of success, independence, connectedness, and safety?*

9. Due to sensory isolation, does the student have difficulties in trusting, bonding with, or relating and responding to a variety of people?

- Yes
- No

If yes, how will this need be addressed?

Questions for consideration:

- *Does the student need support to increase social connections with peers?*
- *Does the student need support to initiate age-appropriate peer interactions?*

- *Does the student have difficulty forming new relationships with either peers or staff?*
- *Does the student have access to ongoing sensory information in order to feel connected and secure enough to learn and explore with multiple people?*

10. Because of sensory differences, is the student unfamiliar with certain common information, so that in order to fully understand concepts or common references used in instruction or conversation, the student frequently needs more explanation than that given to other students?

Yes

No

If yes, how will this need be addressed?

Questions for consideration:

- *Does the student need the concepts, typically learned incidentally, explicitly taught (social skills, concepts about the world, contextual understanding (humor and sarcasm), or other areas that peers typically learn through their hearing and vision)?*
- *Does the student need explicit instruction on grammar and language typically learned incidentally?*
- *Does the student have conceptual gaps? If yes, do they need:*
 - *assistance prioritizing content?*
 - *one-on-one support or hands-on experiences to help fill in those gaps?*
 - *modified curriculum?*
- *Does the student have difficulty gathering complete information of developmentally appropriate concepts?*
- *Does the student require modified pace or reduced assignments?*
- *Is the student able to independently anticipate and complete the beginning, middle and end of each activity in order to ensure the student experiences feelings of closure?*

11. Is the student unable to access the same information as classmates who are not deafblind?

Yes

No

If yes, how will this need be addressed?

Questions for consideration:

- *If yes, how can the team ensure equity of access for this student?*
- *What are the next steps in supporting the student in accessing their education?*
- *What are the needs of the student s educational team in order to meet the needs of the student outlined within this section? (continue to the next section)*

Step III: Questions about the Instructional Team

Answering the questions in the next table will help the IEP committee decide if the needs identified above can be supported in the proposed or current instructional arrangement, or if additional strategies or personnel are needed.

Questions about the Instructional Team

1. Does the student s need for effective deafblind specific intervention strategies and communication methods require additional education and training for staff members?

- Yes
- No

Question for consideration:

- *If numerous staff need training, would it be more efficient to concentrate training on fewer specialized individuals?*

Consider: Students need consistency throughout their day. Consistency may be attained by involving fewer individuals with specialized training, who could bridge communication and access between the student and the rest of the educational team within the student s school day.

2. Does the specialized educational programming recommended through assessment and the IEP create a need for an additional trained support person?

- Yes
- No

Before answering this question, consider the following examples. Please note, this list is not comprehensive; there may be other examples not listed that the team should consider:

- **Proximity:** Due to other demands in the classroom, does the instructor find it difficult to remain in close enough proximity so the student can maintain visual, auditory, or tactile access to instruction?
 - **Pace:** Due to the needs of other students, does the instructor find it challenging to adjust the pace of instruction, so the deafblind student has enough time to get understandable information through either modified communication, tactile or close-vision exploration?
 - **Communication Modality:** Do any instructors have difficulty or unfamiliarity with the student's preferred communication modes (e.g. tactile symbols, sign language, tactile sign)?
 - **Adaptations:** Does existing staff find it challenging to schedule time for deafblind specific material adaptation and equipment maintenance (e.g., communication aids, low vision devices, hearing devices,) or other specialized tools?
 - **Other** (explain).
-

Question for consideration:

- Look back at the 11 questions within Step II.

Consider: Is an additional trained support person needed to meet the needs outlined above?

3. Is it challenging to limit the number of individuals working with the student so that the student can form trusting relationships?

- Yes
- No

Consider: It is difficult for students who are deafblind to form trusting relationships. In some cases, it is important to limit the number of individuals working directly with the student in order to foster strong and trusting relationships.

4. Is it challenging to provide the support identified with the individuals that comprise the child's team?

- Yes
- No

Consider: Does the child's current team have the ability to consistently and thoroughly provide the additional support identified through this process?

Many team members have other responsibilities; for example, a paraprofessional who is assigned to more than one student, or an interpreter who has to facilitate communication for students who have varying communication needs. Does the team need to consider adding an intervener to consistently and thoroughly provide all the supports that were identified?

5. Is it challenging for the team to have a consistent approach with the student due to the large number of individuals working with that student?

- Yes
- No

Consider: Multiple changes of educational staff within a school day can prohibit consistency in communication and relationship development.

6. Is it challenging for the team to provide necessary background information and fill-in the context to help the student fully understand instruction and conversation across all settings?

- Yes
- No

Consider: The student may need pre-teaching and re-teaching of concepts in order for the student to be an active participant in real-time instruction. In order to ensure active participation and learning, the student will need to have multiple opportunities for confirmation, anticipation, motivation, meaningful conversation, inquiry, and reflection within all of their activities throughout the school day. The following are explanations of these concepts:

- **Confirmation:** Provide clear, consistent feedback to acknowledge the student's actions, responses, and efforts.
- **Anticipation:** Establish routines that allow the student to predict and anticipate what comes next, helping to reduce their stress.
- **Motivation:** Provide activities that are engaging and motivating for the child. Incorporate the student's likes and interests when designing activities in order to capture their attention and encourage active participation.
- **Meaningful Conversation:** Regular opportunities for meaningful interaction about the concepts being taught are critical.

Conversations with peers and staff should be purposeful, giving the student the opportunity to share their thoughts, ask questions, and participate in discussions that help them understand the concept, while building communication partnerships and social connections.

- **Inquiry:** Provide opportunities that encourage curiosity and exploration by offering hands-on experiences.
- **Reflection:** Offer the student opportunities to reflect on their experiences, activities, and progress throughout the day. This helps build language skills, expand the student's conceptual knowledge, and strengthens connections with others.

Step IV: Determine the Need for an Intervener

Now that you have completed Steps I-III, you are ready to use that information to inform a discussion and support a recommendation about the need for an intervener for the student who is deafblind. Regardless of whether the team decides an intervener is necessary, any items marked "yes" in Steps II and III above should be reviewed to determine how the identified needs will be addressed.

Is an Intervener Needed?

Is an individual with specific knowledge and skills in deafblind specific strategies needed for all or part of the educational day to ensure that the student can access information, effectively communicate and connect with all peers and professional personnel, and actively participate in all of the student's educational environments?

- Yes
- No

Consider: Review the overall information gathered above regarding the needs of the student and the needs of the instructional team in order to make this decision.

- **If the team determines that an intervener is recommended,** it should be noted in the Supplemental Aids and Services section of the IEP.
- **If the team determines that an intervener is not needed,** the items marked "yes" in Steps I and II still need to be considered. The team should discuss, determine and document how those needs will be addressed.

Resources

[IEP Quality Indicators for Students with Deafblindness](#) is a tool designed to help educational teams develop appropriate IEPs for students who are deafblind. Completing this document will guide the team to ensure the IEP meets all of the unique needs of an individual who is deafblind.

[Wisconsin Deafblind Technical Assistance Project's Intervener Page](#) provides more details on intervener training, the role of an intervener, and related resources. WDBTAP also provides scholarships and additional support for intervener training.

[Comparison of Possible Supports for Students Who Are Deafblind](#) outlines the various roles (intervener, interpreter and paraprofessional) and supports available for students with combined vision and hearing loss.

[Comparison of interveners and paraprofessionals](#) compares the roles, responsibilities, and required training for interveners and paraprofessionals who support students who are deafblind.

[Are Intervener Services Appropriate for Your Student With Deaf-Blindness? An IEP Team Discussion Guide](#) provides a framework for IEP teams to determine the appropriateness of intervener services for students with deafblindness. It offers key questions and considerations to help teams evaluate and make informed decisions about the level of support needed for each student.

[¿Son adecuados los servicios de un interventor para su alumno sordo-ciego? Guía de debate para el equipo del IEP](#) Spanish version of Are Intervener Services Appropriate for Your Student with Deaf-Blindness? An IEP Team Discussion Guide

References

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Additional Resources Regarding Interveners

For more information on the topic of the Intervener Team Model, visit:

- [National Intervener and Advocate Association](#), SKI-HI Institute, Utah State University
- [National Center on Deafblindness Intervener \(NCDB\) and Qualified Personnel Initiative](#), NCDB
- [School Based Interveners](#), DPI
- [Intervener Job Performance Rubric](#), DPI

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