



# Missouri Deaf-Blind Technical Assistance Project

## Let's talk Deaf-Blind Eligibility – FAQs and their answers

There seems to be some confusion around the topic of determining a student's educational eligibility for deafblindness. 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: What is the eligibility definition for deafblindness according to Missouri Standards and Indicators criterion?**

#### **Answer(s):**

- 700.10 Hearing and visual evaluation: The evaluation report documents both hearing and visual impairments as described in the criteria for Hearing Impairment/Deafness and Visual Impairment through:
  - 700.10.a. Comprehensive evaluations by a qualified otologist, otolaryngologist, or audiologist.
  - 700.10.b. Comprehensive evaluations by a licensed optometrist or board-certified ophthalmologist.
  
- 700.20 Comprehensive educational evaluation: A comprehensive educational evaluation is present which documents:
  - 700.20.a. All areas in which the child's visual and hearing impairments adversely affect her/his educational performance
  - 700.20.b. The combination of the hearing and vision loss cause severe concern in the following areas:
    - 700.20.b.(1) Communication
    - 700.20.b.(2) Development
    - 700.20.b.(3) Education needs



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**Question: What is the benefit for the IEP committee to assign a deafblind label to a student?**

**Answer(s):**

- A student with dual sensory loss (i.e. deafblindness) can have very different educational needs than those with a single sensory loss (i.e. hard of hearing (HI) or visually impaired (VI)). It is important for the educational 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 in order to develop an appropriate IEP.
- Typical educational approaches for students with VI labels involve the use of vision as a compensatory strategy. For those students with a HI label, 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 the deafblind label, teams and families may not be made aware of information about the Missouri Deaf-Blind Technical Assistance Project, the National Center on Deafblindness, Helen Keller National Center, or iCanConnect.
- 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 another categorical diagnoses are acceptable, it is recommended that deafblind (DB) be selected and then ranked in the primary position.**



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**Question: Does the deafblind label qualify a student for additional services that the HI/VI or other label does not?**

**Answer(s):**

- **Generally speaking, a student qualifies for the same services, regardless of their label.** All students will be counted on the Deaf-Blind Census and can access the support of the MoDBTAP.

**Question: Why is the student with mild dual sensory loss considered Deaf-Blind?**

**Answer(s):**

- A student with deafblindness is one who: "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;**"
- The question to consider is whether the **combined effects** of the mild vision and hearing losses impact 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 Deaf-Blind under the eligibility criteria, 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 IEP. 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 assure 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

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sensory losses when designing programming.

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

## Answer(s)

- There are two separate counts that students with deafblindness should be reported on each year.
  - US Department of Education, IDEA count.
  - Deaf-Blind Census that is collected by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

## IDEA Count:

- The US 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.
- 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 they are not missed. Policy makers may not see the separate Deaf-Blind Census that OSEP collects from the state Deaf-Blind Projects.

## Deaf-Blind Census:

- The Missouri Deaf-Blind Technical Assistance Project, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, is required to report annually on individuals, 0-21 years of age, who are Deaf-Blind in Missouri. This information is collected by state Deaf-Blind Projects and informs the National Center on Deafblindness as required by OSEP.

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- **The Deaf-Blind Census 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.**

**Question: What information on community and state service resources for Deafblindness is provided for the parents and student?**

### Answer(s)

- 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. For instance, information about the Missouri Deaf-Blind Project, the National Center on Deafblindness, Helen Keller National Center, or iCanConnect.

**Question: If the Missouri Deaf-Blind Census is due before the IEP process of assessing vision and hearing is complete, should the child be reported?**

### Answer(s)

- Yes! Students for whom vision and hearing loss are suspected, but who have not been tested, may be reported on the Deaf-Blind Census and remain there for one year. During that year, evaluation of their sensory functioning should be completed.