



SPECIAL EDUCATION

FAQ

School Based Interveners

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What is an Intervener?

An **intervener** is a related service provider who provides direct and specialized support to a student who is deafblind for all or part of the instructional day. The intervener helps the student access information, communicate, and navigate their environment. Interveners act as a bridge between the child and the world, using individualized communication methods such as tactile sign language, object cues, and touch cues to facilitate learning and interaction. The overall goal of the intervener is to promote the student’s independence/interdependence, understanding, and meaningful engagement throughout the school day.

What is the role of an Intervener?

An intervener supports the existing service delivery model by helping the student access and understand their environment. Interveners collaborate with the student's team to implement the student's IEP.

Interveners may serve as communication partners, guides, and facilitators, ensuring that the student can engage with the world in meaningful ways by:

- **Facilitating Communication:** Interveners may use a variety of communication modalities to support students who are deafblind. This may include tactile sign language, object symbols, braille, or other communication methods suited to the student's needs to help them understand their environment. Interveners can facilitate the student's development and use of expressive and receptive communication skills.
- **Providing Sensory Information:** Interveners can describe and interpret the student's surroundings through touch, movement, or spoken or signed explanations (for those with some residual hearing or vision).
- **Encouraging Exploration:** Interveners support and encourage student's safe exploration of their environment by guiding them to touch and interact with objects, people, and spaces they might otherwise miss.
- **Developing Conceptual Understanding:** Many concepts that sighted and hearing children learn incidentally must be explicitly taught to deafblind children. Interveners can help facilitate the access of environmental information (usually gained through hearing or vision), and can provide direct teaching and hands-on experiences to support understanding of concepts.
- **Promoting Independence:** By supporting the application of orientation and mobility skills and environmental modifications, interveners can empower children to navigate their environment with confidence.
- **Supporting Social Interaction:** By developing and maintaining a trusting and interactive relationship, interveners can bridge the gap between the child and their peers, teachers, and family members, promoting strong relationships, participation in social activities, and overall emotional well-being (Alsop, 2002).

What can an Intervener do?

Interveners are trained to “*do with and not for*” students with deafblindness, with the long term goal of developing independence, rather than dependence. Interveners can help students with deafblindness gain access to environmental information, facilitate communication, and promote social and emotional well-being.

The specific responsibilities of an intervener should be based on the individual needs of the student, as determined by a comprehensive evaluation. If a student has a significant visual impairment as part of the deafblindness, the intervener may need to have additional training in braille or be trained as a sighted guide. In the case of a deafblind student with profound hearing loss, the team may consider training an educational interpreter, with proficiency in American Sign Language, as an intervener.

Why is an Intervener considered a related service?

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), related services are those that help a child with a disability benefit from their Individualized Education Program (IEP) to receive FAPE (a free and appropriate public education), including access to education, the environment, and communication. Members of the child's IEP Team (which include the parents, school officials, and whenever appropriate, the child with a disability) must make individual determinations based on the individual child's unique abilities and needs about whether intervener services are required to assist the child to benefit from special education. For a child who is deafblind, this could include the need for assistance with communication, mobility, or access to learning materials using strategies that only an individual trained as an intervener can provide

The U.S. Department of Education and the Office of Special Education (OSEP) provides some guidance, in a [letter to McDowell \(from OSEP dated August 2, 2018\)](#), which states:

“If the IEP Team determines that a particular service, including the services of an intervener, is an appropriate related service for a child and is required to enable the child to receive FAPE, the Team's determination must be reflected in the IEP, and the service must be provided at public expense and at no cost to the parent.” 20 U.S.C. §1414(d)(1)(A)(i)(IV) and §1401(9).

Teaming

Teaming is essential to the successful use of intervener services. Classroom teachers and other professionals on the instructional team can provide the supervision, direction, and support that are necessary for interveners to be effective in their role. An intervener should never carry out duties independently. Intervenors should function as an integral part of the student's instructional team. The benefits of teaming for a deafblind student include consistent support for the child, a holistic approach where all specialists contribute their expertise, and collaborative problem-solving and interdisciplinary growth and learning.

Determining the need for an Intervener

Before the IEP team considers whether an intervener is appropriate and needed for a particular student, the team members must:

- Ensure that everyone on the IEP team, including the parents, have a common understanding of what an intervener does and what services they can provide.
- Ensure that at least one person on the student's IEP team has knowledge and expertise in deafblindness.
- Review the student's evaluation data. Ensure that appropriate data has been collected by team members who have expertise in deafblindness.

If the IEP team suspects that intervener services are appropriate and might be beneficial to the child, the team should review the [Student Need for an Intervener: A Guided Team Discussion](#). If the team determines that further discussion should be had, they should then complete the [Determining the Need for an Intervener Form](#) to make this determination. The National Center on Deafblindness also publishes an [IEP Team Discussion Guide](#) to assist teams in making informed decisions about whether intervener services are appropriate for a particular student..

What knowledge and skills are necessary to be an effective Intervener?

A set of competencies for interveners has been developed by the Council for Exceptional Children. Intervenors must understand the various ways individuals with deafblindness communicate, including tactile sign language and symbols. They are trained to implement IEPs and adapt teaching methods to support learning in different environments, ensuring student participation and social interaction. Intervenors need knowledge of how deafblindness affects communication and development, and they must use assistive tools and strategies tailored to individual needs. They should adapt the curriculum, monitor progress, and provide consistent, individualized support to enhance communication, independence, and learning. An intervener's communication skills must align with the student's communication modality and needs. If the individual is not already knowledgeable about or proficient in these communication modes (American Sign Language, tactile signing, use of object symbols, braille, augmentative communication devices), they should receive training to be able to effectively support and develop the student's receptive and expressive communication.

Ongoing professional development, adherence to ethical guidelines, collaboration and cultural responsiveness are also critical characteristics of an effective intervener.

For more information see Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) - Professional Preparation Standards [CEC: Intervener Competencies](#).

Training Components

To become an effective intervener, specialized training is essential. Intervener training should address a [wide range of topics](#) necessary to understanding the nature and impact of deafblindness, the role of the intervener, and appropriate educational strategies to work with students with combined vision and hearing loss (Alsop, Killoran, Robinson, Durkel, & Prouty, 2004; McGinnes, 1986; Robinson et al., 2000). Training includes information about:

- The developmental and learning needs of students who are deafblind.
- General education and deafblind specific curricula for instruction of academics, related arts subjects, physical education, and the expanded core curriculum.
- Appropriate assessments for a student who is deafblind.
- The impact of the learning environment on the deafblind child.
- The impact of deafblindness on social, emotional and behavioral development.
- The importance of collaboration on the team for a student who is deafblind.
- Communication methods and sensory accommodations that are needed for an individual who is deafblind in order to access information.

Training for interveners includes three key parts:

1. **Coursework or training on deafblindness** that aligns with the CEC standards.
2. A **practicum with hands-on experience** that is supported through coaching by a professional with expertise in deafblindness. This practicum occurs while working with a student who is deafblind in a school setting.
3. The **creation of a portfolio** to document proficiency of skills and knowledge needed to provide intervener services.

Resources: Becoming an Intervener

Training for Wisconsin Intervenors

There are several programs across different regions that provide training for intervenors who work with deafblind children. In Wisconsin, the WDBTAP allocates grant dollars for intervener training through the [Utah State University - Utah State University Intervener Training Program](#). The training program consists of three semesters of study including a one-hundred hour practicum. The WDBTAP supports intervener training in the following ways:

- Provides scholarships for training individuals working with a child who has a combined vision and hearing loss.
- Offers coaching during the intervener practicum course.
- Provides ongoing support to interveners in the field.
- Provides ongoing support to school districts on the use of an intervener.

Resources: Additional Training and Support for Intervenors

The [National Intervener and Advocates Association](#) (NIAA) and The [National Center on Deafblindness](#) (NCDB) provide resources for training interveners.

[The National Intervener and Advocate Association \(NIAA\)](#)

The National Intervener & Advocate Association (NIAA) is an organization for interveners, educators and parents to advance the intervener profession. An important part of NIAA's mission is to promote the recognition, acceptance, and implementation of intervener services for children and youth who are deafblind, and to advocate through the legislative process for interveners to be listed as related service providers under IDEA. NIAA collaborates with agencies, deafblind projects, and national organizations to promote systems change at federal, state, and local levels.

[NCDB Intervener Initiative](#)

The NCDB Intervener Initiative focuses on building a strong, effective workforce of trained interveners who can provide specialized support to children with combined vision and hearing loss. It serves as a resource hub for professionals in the field and advocates for the recognition and expansion of the intervener role.

[Open Hands Open Access \(OHOA\) Modules](#)

The Open Hands, Open Access (OHOA) Modules: Deafblind Intervener Learning Modules: Deafblind Intervener Learning Modules were created as a tool to help people better understand and support students (ages 3 to 21) who are deafblind in school settings. These modules provide useful information and skills for working with these students and are an excellent supplemental resource.

[Empowering Intervenors: Training Series on Effective Strategies, Best Practices, and Innovative Approaches in Deafblind Education](#)

WDBTAP's YouTube channel features a variety of previously recorded training sessions for interveners. Learn from top experts as they share effective strategies, best practices, and innovative approaches to help you improve your skills and provide better support for students. You will also gain access to valuable tools and resources to continue advancing your professional development.

Resources: Working with Interveners

More information on the roles and responsibilities of the intervener, teacher, and administrator using this model of instruction are listed below:

- [Comparison of Possible Supports for Students Who Are Deafblind](#), Deafblind Central
- [Comparison of Interveners and Paraprofessionals](#), NIAA
- [Interpreter, Intervener, Co-Navigator/Support Service Provider...What's the Difference](#), Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired Outreach Programs
- [Interveners in the Classroom: Guidelines for Teams Working with Students Who Are Deafblind](#), NIAA
- [Intervener Job Performance Rubric](#), DPI
- [Are Intervener Services Appropriate for Your Student With Deaf-Blindness? An IEP Team Discussion Guide](#), NCDB
- [Article on Deafblindness and Interveners](#), DPI
- [A Family's Guide to Interveners for Children with Combined Vision and Hearing Loss](#), NIAA
- *Interveners in the Classroom: Guidelines for Teams Working with Students Who Are Deafblind.* (Alsop, et al, 2007)
- [Intervener as an Instructional Coach](#), Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired Outreach Programs
- [The Intervener's Role - Facilitation Questions for the Proficient Communicator](#), Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired Outreach Programs
- [Intervener Services and Interveners in Educational Settings: Definition](#), NCDB
- [Interveners for Extracurricular Activities and Non-Academic Activities](#), DPI



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