



Recommendations for Improving Intervener Services

BACKGROUND

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) recognizes the current challenges faced by states and schools relative to the provision of high-quality intervener services for children who are deaf-blind. To respond to these challenges, OSEP asked the National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness (NCDB) to conduct an initiative to 1) collect information about current intervener services across the country and 2) develop recommendations for improving national, state, and local intervener services based on an analysis of the information collected. The recommendations presented on this website are NCDB's response to OSEP's request. They are intended to promote positive developmental and educational outcomes for children who are deaf-blind, from birth through age 21, by improving both the availability and quality of intervener services throughout the United States.

WHAT ARE INTERVENER SERVICES?

The concept of intervener services for individuals who are deaf-blind arose in Canada in the 1970s (McInnes, 1999, p. 75) and has been developing as a practice in the U. S. over the past several decades. Intervener services are provided by an intervener, typically a paraeducator, who:

- a) has received specialized, in-depth training in deaf-blindness and
- b) works one-to-one with an infant, child, or youth who is deaf-blind.

In school settings, the intervener serves as a member of the student's educational team.

Deaf-blindness causes profound sensory deprivation. It creates a "disability of access" to visual and auditory information about the environment (people, things, events) that is necessary for learning, communication, and development (Alsop, et al., 2007, p. 1). Without frequent and responsive specialized support, a child with deaf-blindness has limited or no means to predict events or communicate his or her needs. Without access to meaningful information that sighted and hearing children receive incidentally, children with deaf-blindness are cut off from essential

formative learning experiences. Without a sense of safety and the ability to trust that others will respond to their needs, their readiness to learn and achieve their potential is compromised.

A skilled intervener can facilitate a child's access to environmental information, support the development and use of communication, and promote social and emotional well-being (Alsop, Blaha, & Kloos, 2000). Interveners provide access to sensory information that would otherwise be unavailable to children whose vision and hearing are severely limited or absent. They enable children to become aware of what is occurring around them, attach language and meaning to all experiences, minimize the effects of multisensory deprivation, and empower children to have control over their lives (Henderson & Killoran, 1995, p. 3).

In bringing increased attention to this service through the work of NCDB's Intervener Initiative, it is also important to identify what intervener services are not. An intervener is neither a teacher nor an expert in deaf-blind education. The provision of intervener services is not a panacea for surmounting the challenges inherent in educating a child who is deaf-blind. Rather, intervener services are one of a range of critical individualized supports that may be needed for children who are deaf-blind. Interveners work closely with other team members, and they need ongoing support from teachers of children who are deaf-blind and other experts in deaf-blindness.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

There is broad agreement in the field of deaf-blindness that interveners provide a valuable service option in both school and community settings, for many children and youth who are deaf-blind. High-quality intervener services, provided by a well-trained intervener, are often necessary to provide an education in the least restrictive environment. Furthermore, intervener services play a critical role in providing children and youth with deaf-blindness access to the general curriculum. Unfortunately, there is a widespread lack of awareness of the role of interveners in many school districts and an insufficient number of trained interveners able to provide this valuable service. Currently, nationwide, only a very small percentage of children who are deaf-blind receive intervener services.

Additionally, the scope and quality of intervener services vary significantly from state to state and from school district to school district. It is clear that children and youth who are deaf-blind,

and their families, would be better served if partner stakeholders—including families, NCDB, state deaf-blind projects, universities, researchers, schools, and early intervention programs—would systematically collaborate in a nationwide effort to address the insufficiency of intervener services in most states.

REPORT ORGANIZATION

This report is organized in a format that highlights the following four broad goals:

- Goal 1: Increased recognition of intervener services by educational personnel and within local and state written policies;
- Goal 2: Training and support to increase the availability of well-trained, competent interveners;
- Goal 3: Creating systemic awareness and change through support for families as partners; and
- Goal 4: Long-term sustainability of high-quality intervener services across the nation through the inclusion of intervener services in national special education policy.

Specific recommendations support the achievement of each goal. In turn, each of the recommendations includes *implementation strategies* that articulate action steps that NCDB, working in collaboration with state deaf-blind projects and other critical partners and stakeholders (e.g., families, university faculty, interveners, teachers, other service providers, and administrators), can carry out or facilitate to achieve the recommendation. In addition, the recommendations are associated with *anticipated outcomes*. Supporting data and clarifying information are included throughout the report.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work involved in developing these recommendations could not have been successfully implemented to date without the active support and involvement of hundreds of people across the country who generously gave their time and willingly shared their wisdom and experience. Please read the “Recommendations Development Process” and “Acknowledgements” section at the end of this document to learn more about the strategies implemented to collect information

and data about intervener services, which provided a base for these recommendations. Included is our grateful acknowledgement of the partners with whom we engaged.

Lastly, these recommendations are presented with a well-deserved acknowledgment and extension of sincere gratitude to the many individuals across the country who pioneered the foundational infrastructures for intervener services that are currently in place. The recommendations presented here are an evolutionary extension of work begun by others. They are very much grounded on the work of passionate and successful leaders in the field of deaf-blindness who, for many years, led the charge in advocating for high-quality intervener services.

GOAL 1: RECOGNITION

Increase recognition and appropriate use of intervener services for children and youth who are deaf-blind.

Discussion

Over the past two decades, significant efforts by many individuals across the nation have improved the availability of intervener services for children who are deaf-blind. Families have educated policymakers about the role of interveners and the positive impact an intervener can have on the education of a child who is deaf-blind. A number of state deaf-blind projects have developed creative ways to train interveners and support them in classrooms. Since 2002, there has been a national intervener task force that has developed valuable resources, including materials that raise awareness of intervener services and guidelines for intervener competencies. Nationally, two universities now offer online intervener training.

Unfortunately, despite these strides forward, the national infrastructure to support intervener services is fragmented and unevenly distributed across the country and within states. Only a few states officially recognize intervener services as a related service option or mention them in state special education administrative rules. While it is true that some children for whom an educational team determines that intervener services are needed to ensure a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) do receive them, many who might also require them do not.

Educational teams (IEP teams and IFSP teams) are often unaware of the purpose of intervener services and lack access to resources that would help them make good decisions about a child's need for them. These challenges, as well as the difficulty that school districts often face finding well-trained interveners (or individuals who could be trained), compromise the provision of intervener services for many children.

The recommendations for this goal are intended to extend the progress made so far by families, state deaf-blind projects, university faculty, and others to increase the recognition and appropriate use of intervener services as evidenced by the following:

- personnel responsible for the education of children who are deaf-blind who clearly understand the purpose of intervener services;
- families who clearly understand the purpose of intervener services; and
- national, state, and local education policies and practices that reflect and support the provision of intervener services for children who are deaf-blind if an IEP or IFSP team determines they are needed.

The recommendations for Goal 1 provide strategies to a) coordinate efforts to improve our nation's understanding and use of intervener services and b) establish intervener services as a universally understood related service or early intervention option for children who are deaf-blind. Successful implementation of the strategies will require in-depth participation from many stakeholders including:

- the National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness (NCDB),
- families,
- state deaf-blind projects,
- university faculty,
- interveners,
- early intervention and educational administrators,
- teachers and other service providers, and
- researchers in low-incidence disabilities.

Working together to solve problems is not new to this community of individuals who are involved in the lives of children who are deaf-blind. There are already informal and formal collaborations established across agencies, organizations, individuals, and families. These

partnerships provide a strong foundation that supports implementation of the identified strategies through a new centralized system for national coordination of activities to improve intervener services.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Develop a coordinated and expanded national approach to provide state and local early intervention and education agencies with information and tools needed to understand and use intervener services.

Why This Is Important

Many passionate leaders have worked for decades to expand intervener services and make them as effective as possible. Yet the practice remains inconsistently implemented, misunderstood, and relatively unknown in some states. In addition, there is significant variation in how the term "intervener" is used, especially with respect to the type of training that should be required for interveners. In some circumstances, the designation of "intervener" is inaccurately used to describe a paraeducator who works one-on-one with a child who is deaf-blind but has not had training in deaf-blindness. What is needed now is a consistently applied definition of intervener services and a nationally coordinated effort among multiple stakeholders that brings together knowledge and innovative strategies that are currently dispersed unevenly across the country, in order to build a comprehensive foundation for intervener services.

Implementation Strategies

- ❖ The National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness (NCDB), state deaf-blind projects, and other stakeholders (e.g., families, early interventionists, teachers, related service providers, early intervention and educational administrators, interveners, and university faculty), will join forces to implement a comprehensive national intervener initiative. The initiative, coordinated by NCDB, will:
 - develop and disseminate a consistently applied national definition of intervener services, including clarification of the occupational role of the intervener;
 - organize workgroups to implement the recommendations in Goals 1 through 3 and identify additional needs and recommendations to improve intervener services, including at a minimum:

- intervener preparation and training,
 - continuing education needs of interveners,
 - coaching and supervision of interveners,
 - credentialing or certification of interveners,
 - interveners in community and home settings, and
 - interveners for infants and toddlers.
- create a web-based platform on which state deaf-blind projects, NCDB, families, and other organizations and individuals can interact and share knowledge—for example, to:
 - communicate ideas and concerns,
 - highlight intervener training and support models, and
 - access a shared video library related to intervener services (e.g., parent and professional insights, examples of interveners working with children).
- identify and implement strategies to increase collaborative efforts between agencies and organizations within individual states (e.g., state deaf-blind projects, parent training and information centers, family organizations) to improve intervener services at the state level.
- ❖ Develop and make available a core set of publications that increase understanding of intervener services and promote their development and use including, at a minimum:
 - concise fact sheets that promote an enhanced understanding of intervener services and explain the occupational role of a well-trained intervener,
 - publications that highlight promising intervener-training and support programs and provide strategies that describe how they can be replicated, and
 - publications that describe effective practices for intervener services.
- ❖ Design and launch a national data collection program to collect, compile, and make available data about the use of intervener services including:
 - characteristics of interveners and patterns of use (e.g., how many, where employed, education level),
 - characteristics of children and youth who receive intervener services, and
 - the nature of services being provided by interveners.

Anticipated outcomes:

- An organized, cohesive, systematic approach to promoting and improving intervener services in the U.S.
- A national definition of intervener services that includes a clear description of the occupational role of an intervener.
- Improved recognition and appropriate use of intervener services.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Coordinate and expand efforts to inform and influence national, state, and local policies and practices so that they reflect and support the provision of intervener services for a child or youth who is deaf-blind when needed.

Why This Is Important

Deaf-blindness is, and will likely continue to be, the lowest of all low-incidence disabilities. In addition, the impact of this disability on development and learning is unique. Gaining and maintaining attention for the highly individualized services needed by such a low-incidence and diverse group is challenging. It is critical, therefore, that national, state, and local policies and practices appropriately reflect the unique needs of children who are deaf-blind, including the provision of intervener services when necessary. Without these services many children may not have access to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE).

Implementation Strategies

- ❖ Produce and disseminate guidelines that IFSP/IEP teams can use to make informed decisions about the need for initial or continued use of intervener services for an individual child or youth.
- ❖ Using the core products described in Recommendation 1:
 - promote best practices for intervener services via information dissemination and technical assistance activities; and,
 - systematically disseminate resources to lawmakers, other policymakers, and union representatives to inform and influence policies related to intervener services.

- ❖ Work with OSEP to encourage U.S. Department of Education cross-agency (e.g., OSEP, Rehabilitation Services Administration, National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research) recognition of intervener services.
- ❖ Work with state and national special education organizations and centers (e.g., Regional Resource Centers, the National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Parent Training and Information Centers) to design and implement strategies that inform and influence policies and practices related to intervener services.
- ❖ Work with state special education advisory councils to raise individual states' awareness of intervener services.
- ❖ Contribute to the growth of knowledge related to intervener services in the following ways:
 - develop professional publications including technical reports or peer-reviewed journal articles that summarize available data about interveners and describe the history and current status of intervener services in the U.S., and
 - promote research on intervener services by:
 - facilitating discussions among graduate students and researchers within the field of deaf-blindness,
 - assisting researchers in identifying children and families who can participate in research studies,
 - providing library support (e.g., literature searching) to researchers working in this area, and
 - identifying possible funding sources for intervener services research.

Anticipated Outcomes:

- Improved access to FAPE for children who are deaf-blind.
- An increase in the number of children for whom the IFSP/IEP appropriately reflects intervener services.
- Improved achievement of IFSP/IEP goals and objectives for children who are deaf-blind.
- Local, state, and national policies and practices that reflect the need for intervener services for children who are deaf-blind.
- Increased visibility of intervener services in the professional special education literature.

GOAL 2: TRAINING & SUPPORT

Establish a strong national foundation for intervener training and workplace supports.

Discussion

NCDB designed the recommendations for Goal 1 to expand national, state, and local recognition and use of effective intervener services. They focus on efforts to increase knowledge of those services beyond the field of deaf-blindness. The recommendations for Goal 2 turn the focus back to the field by emphasizing the need to strengthen the current system of preparing and training interveners as well as the workplace supports available for interveners. These are intended to ensure that a) a sufficient number of well-trained interveners are available for children who require intervener services and b) working interveners have knowledgeable supervisors and access to experts in deaf-blindness.

Without an adequate supply of qualified interveners and an understanding of their role, decisions about the need for intervener services are more likely to be driven by the availability of an intervener rather than by a child's needs. That compromises the requirements of IDEA to develop and implement an individualized program of instruction to meet a child's unique needs as identified through appropriate evaluation. And when interveners are available, the service will not be effective without support from supervisors and expert consultants who can help interveners build their skills and respond to the changing needs of the children with whom they work.

Currently, specialized training to prepare interveners to work with children and youth who are deaf-blind is available through distance-education programs at two universities (East Carolina University and Utah State University) and, in several states, through programs operated by state deaf-blind projects. In addition, approximately 20 state projects report providing some support to interveners who are enrolled in one of the university programs, including tuition stipends, on-the-job coaching, and annual face-to-face workshops.

The task of providing workplace supports to interveners typically falls on state deaf-blind projects. A number of the projects have implemented strategies to provide training about intervener services to teachers and other team members and improve interveners' access to experts in deaf-blind education. Although the state deaf-blind projects have accomplished a great deal, limited staffing, restricted budgets, and the demands of meeting additional family and child objectives place serious constraints on a project's capacity to fully implement a training and support system for interveners. In addition, some projects report that their state and local education agencies do not support intervener services or specialized intervener training. Based on NCDB's review of current intervener services in the U.S., all of these factors contribute to a small number of qualified interveners in most states or none at all.

Significant efforts have gone into the development and updating of high-quality intervener training programs at East Carolina University and Utah State University. In addition, both are designed to enable their students to meet the Council for Exceptional Children's Specialization Knowledge and Skill Set for Paraeducators Who Are Intervenors for Individuals with Deaf-blindness. While the efforts of these programs and the state deaf-blind projects serve as a solid foundation upon which future training and workplace support systems can be built, it is clear that the existing national infrastructure is not adequate to meet current and anticipated future demands for intervener services. In the United States, almost 10,000 children between the ages of birth and 22 have been identified as being deaf-blind (NCDB, 2010). An NCDB survey of state deaf-blind projects suggests that fewer than 5% receive intervener services. It is not known for certain how many children require intervener services to receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE); however, given the profound limitations that combined vision and hearing loss place on a child's ability to access information and communicate, it is likely that many more children would benefit from these services.

As recognition of intervener services increases, their use is likely to expand dramatically. It is crucial that the field of deaf-blindness prepare for this increase by strengthening the current system of intervener training and workplace supports.

Moving forward, there will also be a need for interveners to demonstrate that they have met basic competency standards by obtaining a national or state intervener certificate or credential. NCDB

survey results and panel discussions showed there is widespread support within the field of deaf-blindness for national credentialing of interveners, but there are unresolved issues about criteria and testing requirements and concerns about unintended consequences should certification or credentialing become mandatory.

The purposes of the recommendations for this goal are to provide resources and national coordination to expand current activities related to intervener training and continuing education, intervener access to experts in deaf-blindness, and opportunities for credentialing or certification. They also respond to the challenge of recruiting interveners and the need for mechanisms that allow interveners to form communities in which they can learn from each other.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Develop a national open-access intervener-training curriculum that aligns with the Council for Exceptional Children’s *Specialization Knowledge and Skill Set for Paraeducators Who Are Intervenors for Individuals with Deaf-blindness*.

Why This Is Important

Currently, there are two university-based online intervener training programs. In addition, six state deaf-blind projects report operating a training program in their states. They vary greatly in terms of format and intensity. In addition, although most state projects do not have formal intervener training programs, most do provide technical assistance to paraeducators as members of teams working with children who are deaf-blind. However, only small numbers of interveners have been trained in the majority of states. State deaf-blind projects report that insufficient funding and personnel limit the ability to create training materials, and most report that a standardized intervener training curriculum would help them better meet their state’s need for interveners. A national open-access curriculum, created by leading experts in the field of deaf-blindness, would support consistent training across the country. It could be used to begin or update intervener training programs and expand continuing education opportunities. A national curriculum would not only save state deaf-blind projects time and money, but also provide state educational systems with a resource that could be used to implement intervener preparation programs at local colleges and universities.

Implementation Strategies

- ❖ Establish a workgroup of individuals with expertise in intervener training to collaborate with NCDB on the development of an intervener training curriculum.
- ❖ Invite professionals from the field of deaf-blindness to submit intervener or general deaf-blind education training materials for review by the workgroup and possible incorporation into the curriculum.
- ❖ Develop the curriculum using new and existing materials.
- ❖ Create a web-based platform to host and provide free access to the curriculum.

The curriculum should:

- include content that can be used for initial training as well as for continuing education,
- offer materials in a variety of formats, including video footage,
- include modules that describe how to provide internships or practicum experiences for interveners-in-training,
- include guidelines for coaching and mentoring interveners,
- include guidelines that describe the level of resources and expertise needed to effectively implement the curriculum, and
- support the use of the curriculum materials to provide training to family members and to teachers and other service providers (in addition to interveners) who work with children who are deaf-blind.

Anticipated outcomes:

- Sufficient intervener preparation and training capacity across the country to meet a growing need for intervener services.
- An increase in the number of well-trained interveners.
- Increased consistency in the type of intervener training provided across the country.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Develop strategies to ensure that interveners have knowledgeable supervisors and access to experts in deaf-blindness who can provide consultation and coaching.

Why This Is Important

Although comprehensive initial training provides interveners with basic skills and knowledge, it is important to understand that interveners are neither teachers nor experts in deaf-blind education. They need knowledgeable supervisors and ongoing support from experts, such as teachers of the deaf-blind, who can a) provide coaching and close supervision to interveners who are enrolled in a training program and early in their careers, b) help interveners acquire and maintain the knowledge and skills needed to work effectively with particular children, and c) provide ongoing mentorship and professional development. (Note: in this report we use the term “teacher of the deaf-blind” to refer to a teacher who has extensive knowledge and expertise in the education of children with deaf-blindness. However, the majority of states do not currently have a specific certification process for this specialization.)

Unfortunately, classroom teachers and other educational team members often lack expertise in deaf-blindness and the state projects, which are funded to increase statewide capacity to serve children who are deaf-blind, do not have sufficient staffing to provide ongoing consultation to a large number of educational teams. In addition, there is a severe shortage of teachers of the deaf-blind to serve on educational teams or as consultants to those teams. Building a system that supports quality supervision and access to experts knowledgeable about deaf-blindness will be difficult because of budgetary constraints in every state but critical for the successful implementation of intervener services.

As noted in the introduction to this report, intervener services are just one of a range of individualized supports that may be required by children who are deaf-blind, including supports and services provided by other trained personnel. In particular, expansion of the workforce of trained teachers of the deaf-blind is needed. This recommendation considers the need for more teachers of the deaf-blind in the context of support for intervener services. It should be noted, however, that while beyond the scope of these recommendations, there is a critical need for a broader range of strategies to address the current shortage of these teachers.

Implementation Strategies

- ❖ Use the intervener training curriculum described in Recommendation 3 to train teachers and other team members about deaf-blindness and the role of the intervener.
- ❖ Identify successful models used by state deaf-blind projects, university programs, and school districts that provide on-the-job support to interveners.
- ❖ Replicate these models to support an increasing number of interveners.
- ❖ In partnership with a broad group of stakeholders, examine the causes of the shortage of local experts in deaf-blindness, including teachers of the deaf-blind, and identify strategies to alleviate the shortage.
- ❖ Design and implement strategies to provide distance consultation, coaching, and mentoring through the use of technology applications.

Anticipated outcomes:

- Improved supervision of interveners.
- Increased opportunities for coaching and mentoring from teachers of the deaf-blind.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Expand opportunities for interveners to obtain a state or national certificate or credential.

Why This Is Important

Support for intervener certification or credentialing (hereafter referred to only as “credentialing” for simplicity) is strong in the field of deaf-blindness. A new national credential for interveners became available in 2011 as the result of the efforts of a group of individuals associated with the National Intervener Task Force. However, while the national credential—offered by National Resource Center on Paraeducators (NRCPP)—is a positive step forward, it requires 10 credits of intervener coursework at a college or university, which is currently available at one of only two existing university programs. It does not allow for pursuit of a credential by interveners who attend other programs, such as those sponsored by state deaf-blind projects or based on continuing education units instead of credit hours. A requirement that credentialing criteria include credited coursework may be feasible in the future, but at the present time, it should be broadened to include other options.

Implementation Strategies

- ❖ In partnership with stakeholders, including the NRCP and the National Intervener Task Force, and with input from a broad group of stake holders:
 - review the current National Intervener Credential, including the criteria and processes involved;
 - consider current and future needs for an intervener credential and short- and long-term goals of intervener credentialing;
 - determine additional needs that may exist related to a national intervener credential;
 - if needed, identify additional credentialing bodies that could offer a national credential that meets those needs; and
 - determine the most feasible credentialing options and move forward with efforts to expand pathways to a national credential that are applicable to interveners with a variety of training backgrounds.

Anticipated outcomes:

- Increased opportunities for interveners to gain a credential indicating they have acquired the core set of skills needed to provide intervener services.
- A consistent way for early intervention and education agencies to identify interveners who have acquired the core set of skills needed to provide intervener services.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Establish a national intervener jobs clearinghouse to assist in intervener recruitment and job placement.

Why This is Important

Currently, the number of interveners working in the U.S. is small and there is no system in place to track who they are or where they work. As the use of intervener services grows, it will be important to have a centralized way to help interveners find employment, to assist school districts in recruiting qualified staff, and to track the number of trained interveners available nationwide.

Implementation Strategies

- ❖ Convene a workgroup of interveners and other individuals who have knowledge of intervener hiring practices (e.g., educational administrators, state deaf-blind project personnel) to determine the elements needed to design an online jobs clearinghouse.
- ❖ Develop a secure online jobs clearinghouse reflecting those elements.
- ❖ Publicize the availability of the clearinghouse through current intervener training programs, interpreter training programs, state deaf-blind projects, and other relevant agencies and organizations.
- ❖ Maintain the clearinghouse data on an ongoing basis.

Anticipated outcomes:

- Improved intervener recruitment.
- Intervener access to the clearinghouse for the purpose of identifying employment opportunities.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Provide resources (e.g., technology applications, technical assistance) that help interveners establish organized online and face-to-face communities where they can improve their knowledge and skills by sharing ideas and experiences with each other.

Why This is Important

Because deaf-blindness is a very low-incidence disability, children who are deaf-blind are typically widely dispersed. As a result, interveners often report feeling isolated and lack opportunities to interact with and learn from each other. Some state deaf-blind projects address this within individual states by creating online discussion groups or occasional face-to-face meetings, but this is not available in most states and there are currently no organized state or national communities of interveners.

Implementation Strategies

- ❖ Convene a workgroup of interveners, state deaf-blind project personnel, and university faculty to determine desired features of an online community of interveners.
- ❖ Develop and maintain a web-based platform providing those features.

- ❖ Publicize the availability of the site and train interveners in its use.
- ❖ Explore opportunities for interveners to occasionally meet in person (e.g., state meetings, national or regional conferences).

Anticipated outcomes:

- Better prepared, more knowledgeable interveners.
- A decrease in the isolation experienced by interveners.
- Active state and national intervener communities.

GOAL 3: FAMILIES

Build the capacity of families to participate in decision about intervener services for their children and in efforts to improve these services.

Discussion

For many years, family advocacy has been a driving force behind the movement to make intervener services a recognized and viable option for children who are deaf-blind. It is not surprising, therefore, that there was great interest and participation from families in NCDB's initiative to develop recommendations for improving intervener services. One hundred nineteen individuals completed a survey for parents and guardians and thirteen represented the parent perspective on a family panel. In survey comments and during the panel discussion, they described the challenges and successes experienced when advocating for intervener services for their children. Some described the current system as one that places them in an adversarial position with educators and school districts and shared their frustration at being put in such a position. Parents whose children have interveners reported that their own advocacy was a key factor that led to their child's receiving those services. Many indicated that having an intervener has had a profoundly positive impact on their child's learning and quality of life.

Collectively, the purpose of all of the recommendations in this report is to create a national system for intervener services centered on what is best for children and families. Family input

and participation will be essential when each recommendation is carried out. However, families also have specific needs that are not addressed by the recommendations for Goals 1 and 2. Therefore, the two recommendations for Goal 3 supplement the others by creating resources and tools for families.

RECOMMENDATION 8

Develop information resources and tools and disseminate them to family members to increase their knowledge of intervener services and enhance their ability to communicate effectively with educators, administrators, and others about those services.

Why This Is Important

Although parents who participated in the family panel were very knowledgeable about intervener services, many said that it had been difficult for them to obtain that knowledge and wished they had learned about interveners sooner. They expressed concern that many families across the country remain uninformed, and they believe families need better access to information in order to participate as full partners on IFSP/IEP teams making decisions about intervener services for their children.

A number of state deaf-blind projects and other organizations have already developed family-focused products about intervener services, so an important component of the strategies for this recommendation is to highlight what already exists and develop additional information resources as needed. In particular, active collaboration between NCDB, state deaf-blind projects, the National Family Association for Deaf-Blind (NFADB), the National Deafblind Intervener Initiative (NDBII) Parent Group, and parent training and information centers (PTIs) will be essential.

Implementation Strategies

- ❖ Review existing family-focused resources related to intervener services.
- ❖ Use existing resources (if available) or develop new products that families can use to:
 - promote communication about intervener services with early interventionists, educators, and administrators,
 - inform decisions related to intervener services for their child, and

- inform and influence state and local policies to encourage and promote high-quality intervener services.
- ❖ Collaborate with family organizations to distribute information to families who have limited knowledge of interveners. This will include efforts to reach out to groups who are typically underrepresented (e.g., racial and ethnic minorities, families who live in rural areas, and families who are socioeconomically disadvantaged).

Anticipated outcomes:

- An increase in the number of family members who are knowledgeable about intervener services.
- An increase in the number of family members who can effectively advocate for intervener services for their children when appropriate.
- An increase in the number of family members who participate in initiatives to improve intervener services.

RECOMMENDATION 9

Develop and implement strategies that create opportunities for families to share ideas and experiences and work together to impact intervener services at local, state, and national levels.

Why This Is Important

Comments that NCDB received in response to a survey for parents and guardians and via input during a family panel discussion illustrate how important it is for families to have opportunities to share their experiences related to intervener services, and especially to have opportunities to talk to each other about those experiences. Because deaf-blindness is a rare disability, families of children who are deaf-blind are typically separated from each other by great distances. Many state deaf-blind projects already conduct activities to help family members form connections within their states. The strategies below are meant to augment those activities and bring increased focus to intervener services. They also promote continued involvement by families in the effort to expand and improve intervener services in the United States.

Implementation Strategies

- ❖ Establish accessible web-based and/or telephone groups where family members of children who are deaf-blind can share ideas and experiences about intervener services.
- ❖ Partner with key family organizations (e.g., NFADB, NDBII Parent Group, PTIs) to implement strategies for recommendations that promote appropriate effective intervener services for children who are deaf-blind.
- ❖ Develop a curriculum module about intervener services to supplement current family leadership curricula that educate family members and help them to mentor others.

Anticipated outcomes:

- Increased family understanding of intervener services.
- Increased opportunities for family members to connect online or by telephone to discuss their experiences with intervener services.
- Increased collaboration among families on activities to promote appropriate intervener services.

GOAL 4: SUSTAINABILITY

Sustain high-quality intervener services across the nation through the inclusion of intervener services in national special education policy.

Discussion

The intent of the recommendations outlined in Goals 1, 2, and 3 is to build a solid foundation for the provision of intervener services throughout the United States. Many individuals and agencies across the country have a passionate interest in ensuring the availability of high-quality intervener services for children and youth who are deaf-blind. They include parents, state deaf-blind project personnel, teachers, administrators, interveners, university faculty, NCDB, and others. While it is true that implementation will take time and hard work, these recommendations can be accomplished with a united effort by this broad community.

However, sustaining progress gained through the achievement of recommendations outlined in this report is likely to be extremely difficult without legislation that recognizes intervener services as related service and early intervention service options. Therefore, the single recommendation for this final goal is to include such a provision in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Children and youth who are deaf-blind are a diverse, low-incidence, geographically dispersed population of students. It is often difficult to gain attention to their need for specialized services in today's complex special education systems. For decades, though, services for children with this disability have been mandated in federal education law. IDEA specifies a minimum funding level to “address the educational, related services, transitional, and early intervention needs of children with deaf-blindness” (IDEA, 2004a). The current deaf-blind technical assistance network, consisting of one national center (NCDB) and 52 state deaf-blind projects is funded under this mandate to build the capacity of early intervention and education agencies in every state to serve students with deaf-blindness. While current language in IDEA does not preclude the use of intervener services for children who are deaf-blind, including these services in IDEA as both a related service and an early intervention service would highlight the need for these services for many children. The combination of technical assistance provided by the state deaf-blind projects and improved provision of intervener services at the local level would enhance the capacity of states to provide children who are deaf-blind with a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment.

The decision to recommend advocating for the inclusion of intervener services in IDEA was not made lightly. The implications would be significant at national, state, and local levels and it is not coincidental that this recommendation is the last. While inclusion of intervener services in IDEA would enhance the long-term sustainability of these services in our country, doing so before a foundation is established could actually have a negative impact on the long-term provision and availability of high-quality intervener services. If systems are not in place to recruit, train, and provide on-the-job support and supervision for interveners and to assist IFSP/IEP teams in determining a child's need for intervener services, schools and other agencies responsible for FAPE would struggle to meet the demand.

A number of features of the other recommendations in this report must be in place in order to be ready for the increase in the use of intervener services that inclusion in IDEA could create. At a minimum, significant progress will need to be made on the following:

- increasing the educational systems' understanding of the purpose of intervener services and their potential benefits for children and youth with deaf-blindness (Recommendation 1);
- ensuring that interveners have access to high-quality training (Recommendation 3);
- ensuring that interveners have ready access to workplace supports at the local level, including professionals with expertise in deaf-blindness (Recommendation 4); and
- enhancing family involvement in decision-making about intervener services for their children (Recommendation 8).

These foundational efforts will help to ensure that a base of support for intervener services is well established, thus maximizing the likelihood that congressional decision-makers will understand both the importance and the implications of the inclusion of a provision about intervener services in IDEA.

Recommendation 10

Congress should ensure the long-term sustainability of intervener services for children and youth who are deaf-blind by including them under the definition of "related service" and as an early intervention service in the next reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Why This Is Important

For many children and youth who are deaf-blind, access to high quality intervener services is needed to support specially designed instruction identified in an IFSP or IEP. By definition, a related service is a service that “may be required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education” (IDEA, 2004b). Early intervention services are defined, in part, as services that “are designed to meet the developmental needs of an infant or toddler with a disability” (IDEA, 2004c). Clearly, many children who are deaf-blind need intervener services in order to benefit from the special education provided to them. Quality intervener services support a child’s ability to participate appropriately in developmental and educational opportunities, to engage with the physical environment, and to access the general curriculum. Children who are deaf-

blind would be well served if IDEA specifically identified intervener services as both a related service and an early intervention service option.

Recommendations Development Process

NCDB developed these recommendations in response to a request from the Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) in October 2011. As noted throughout this report, the recommendations are grounded upon the achievements of many individuals who have worked diligently for years to promote intervener services in the U.S.

The process of developing the recommendations involved two phases:

1. The collection of detailed information about the current status of intervener services and practices in the U.S.
2. Development of recommendations to improve future intervener services based on an analysis of the information gathered during Phase 1.

Phase 1: Information Gathering

NCDB used the following combination of methods to gather data and other information from a variety of sources. This is the first time that comprehensive information about intervener services in the U.S. has been collected.

Surveys

In-depth surveys were developed to gather specific information from four key groups of individuals with knowledge of intervener services:

- state deaf-blind projects;
- parents and guardians of children who are deaf-blind;
- interveners; and
- early intervention and educational administrators.

All of the surveys were anonymous and administered online. To gain as large a response as possible, we announced the surveys widely across the network of deaf-blind projects and organizations using a variety of e-mail discussion groups, web sites, and Facebook pages.

Interviews

To learn specific details about current methods of intervener training, we conducted extensive interviews with:

- the directors of the two online university intervener-training programs — East Carolina University and Utah State University — and
- representatives from 25 state deaf-blind projects.

Visits to two state deaf-blind projects

NCDB staff visited the Minnesota and Texas state deaf-blind projects to learn about methods of intervener training and workplace supports and discuss issues regarding the use of interveners in their states. Both projects have long histories of active involvement in intervener services.

Literature reviews and document collection

We conducted a detailed review of the literature on intervener services. Prior to this initiative, NCDB already had a comprehensive collection of information resources as part of its DB-LINK Library. We also identified and collected a number of unpublished documents from individuals who participated in interviews.

In addition to formal information-gathering strategies, NCDB made announcements about the initiative to the field and invited anyone to contact us with questions or comments. The resulting informal conversations informed the work of the initiative.

A great deal of information was collected during Phase 1. Data summaries are available at <http://www.nationaldb.org/IntervenerDataSummaries.php>. A more detailed report of the findings is under development.

Phase 2: Development of Recommendations

In late March and early April of 2012, prior to developing the recommendations, NCDB facilitated six 2-hour online discussion panels consisting of groups of individuals with a strong interest in intervener services. There were two panels of combined state deaf-blind project personnel and university faculty, and one panel each of parents or guardians, interveners, teachers, and early intervention or educational administrators.

Prior to panels, NCDB provided the participants with summaries of the information gathered during Phase 1, and during the panels, NCDB asked them to respond to structured questions. The questions were based on an analysis by the NCDB Intervener Initiative Team of data gathered during Phase 1. Each panel was facilitated. Participants also had an opportunity to provide any additional information they wished to share either in writing or by phone following their panel.

After all of the panels were completed, NCDB staff conducted numerous meetings to develop the recommendations. They are based primarily on our analysis and interpretation of information collected during Phase 1 and insights gained during the panel discussions.

Acknowledgements

Although NCDB determined the recommendations, we were assisted in this initiative by experts who have been actively engaged in intervener services activities for many years, as well as by individuals and agencies involved in the lives of children who are deaf-blind in other ways. They provided essential information for the development of the recommendations. The high level of interest and enthusiasm shown for this project demonstrates the importance of intervener services for children who are deaf-blind and their families.

We are deeply grateful to everyone who assisted us in this endeavor. We want to particularly acknowledge the following groups and individuals. Although all provided input and assistance, the recommendations are NCDB's and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the following participants or their agencies and organizations.

Consultants

We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to Linda Alsop and Robbie Blaha who served as consultants to NCDB's Intervener Services Initiative Team during our information-gathering phase. Ms. Alsop is a national leader on interveners and intervener services, having led the National Intervener Task Force since 2002, and served both as the director of the online Intervener Training Program at Utah State University and as the editor of a 2-volume textbook for interveners, *Understanding Deafblindness: Issues, Perspectives, and Strategies*. Robbie Blaha, also a national leader, works with the Texas Deafblind Project. Ms. Blaha has worked in the field of deaf-blind education for 40 years and has been deeply involved in intervener services

activities in Texas since the early 1990s. We are grateful to both of them for sharing their extensive knowledge and wisdom with our Intervener Services Initiative Team.

State Deaf-Blind Projects

We are also grateful to the state deaf-blind projects, our partners in the deaf-blind technical assistance network. Five of the state projects— Arizona, California, Minnesota, Texas, and Utah—have been working on activities related to intervener services since the 1990s, while others started this work more recently. Many representatives from the state projects have been involved in the National Intervener Task Force. Regardless of where along the continuum states are with respect to intervener services, their response to our requests for information was overwhelmingly generous and extremely useful for this endeavor.

Of the 52 state deaf-blind projects, representatives from 42 (80%) responded to a lengthy, in-depth anonymous survey about intervener services in their states and provided their professional opinions about various aspects of intervener services. An additional 16 project personnel responded to just the professional opinion part of the survey. Many projects also responded promptly to requests for additional information and disseminated announcements about NCDB's surveys to families, interveners, and administrators.

Twenty-five of the fifty-two state projects participated in formal interviews about details of their project's intervener services activities, and many provided documents used in those activities. Others participated in numerous informal conversations with NCDB staff. A special thank you goes to the Minnesota and Texas deaf-blind projects whose staff members gave generously of their time and knowledge when they provided onsite overviews of their activities to NCDB staff.

Families

Families provided extensive details about their personal experiences with intervener services as well as their insights into the overall system of intervener services via the parent/guardian survey and during the family panel discussion. This information was extremely helpful during the development of the recommendations. We want to thank the parents who provided advice to NCDB during the development of the parent/guardian survey—Laura Fonseca, Diane Foster,

Melanie Knapp, Djenne and Michael Morris, and Sally Prouty—as well as the 119 anonymous individuals who took the survey.

University Faculty

Linda Alsop, director of the intervener training program at Utah State University, and Alana Zambone, director of the intervener training program at East Carolina University, both participated in extensive interviews about their programs and shared their knowledge of intervener services in the U.S. and their states (intervener services initiatives have been ongoing in Utah and North Carolina for many years). They also provided very helpful documentation. Ms. Alsop and Dr. Zambone participated on panels along with other university faculty.

Interveners

Input from interveners was essential for us to learn about the level of support that is available to interveners working in classrooms and other settings and to gather preliminary data about the current workforce of interveners (e.g., years of education, type of intervener training). Many thanks to Tammi Morgan, Vicki Spencer, and Erin Hladky Yanez, who provided advice during the development of the NCDB survey for interveners, and to the 128 anonymous individuals who completed that survey.

Administrators

A range of administrators employed in schools and local and state early intervention and education agencies shared their wisdom and experience via an anonymous survey and on our administrators' panel. They provided insight into intervener services in their states and their own knowledge of and attitudes toward intervener services. Administrators are on the front lines when it comes to providing intervener services for children who are deaf-blind. Their knowledge of the educational system and the place within that system where intervener services fit was invaluable.

Panel Members

Input via panel discussions from individuals with knowledge of intervener services was an important part of NCDB's recommendations development process. The information gained from these discussions was illuminating, and the panelists' comments were thoughtful and perceptive.

Both types of information provided context and depth to the data gathered during Phase 1 of the process. We want to thank all of the following individuals for the time and energy they committed to this endeavor.

Panel 1: State Deaf-Blind Project Personnel & University Faculty	Panel 2: Families	Panel 3: Interveners
Karen Blankenship	Stephanie Bernhagen	Brenda Bujold
Leslie Buchanan	Ellen Bowman	Amy Harrison
Megan Cote	Robbie Caldwell	Jennifer James
Diane Kelly	Alison Caputo	Nancy Kotyk
Beth Kennedy	Deanne Curran	Barbara Martin
Cheryl Levasseur	Diane Foster	Tammi Morgan
Jennifer Miller	Vivecca Hartman	Cindy Skiles
Chris Montgomery	Melanie Knapp	Vicki Spencer
Sam Morgan	Cyndie Pfohler	Erin Hladky Yanez
Kristen Parsons	Lisa Rohr	
Sally Prouty	Deanne Rothbauer	
Alana Zambone		
Panel 4: State Deaf-Blind Project Personnel & University Faculty	Panel 5: Teachers	Panel 6: Administrators
Linda Alsop	Doreen Bohm	Jackie Brennan
Susan Bashinski	Tina Hertzog	Maggie Mathews
Maurice Belote	Kristin Knight	Brent Pitt
Mark Campano	Jennifer Lester	Gayle Robbins
Cathy Lyle	Angel Perez	Elaine Robertson
Cyral Miller	Sarah Shreckhise	William Trant
Rose Moehring	Becky Wolf	Steve Young
Terry Rafalowski-Welch		
Cindi Robinson		
Eva Scott		
David Wiley		

References

- Alsop, L., Blaha, R., & Kloos, E. (2000). *Intervener in early intervention and educational settings for children and youth with deafblindness*. Monmouth, OR: Western Oregon University, Teaching Research, National Technical Assistance Consortium for Children and Young Adults Who Are Deaf-Blind.
- Alsop, L., Robinson, C., Goehl, K., Lace, J., Belote, M., & Rodriguez-Gil, G. (2007). *Interveners in the classroom: Guidelines for teams working with students who are deafblind*. Logan, UT: SKI-HI Institute, Utah State University.
- Council for Exceptional Children. (2009). Specialization knowledge and skill set for paraeducators who are interveners for individuals with deaf-blindness. *What every special educator must know: Ethics, standards, and guidelines*, 6th ed., pp. 195-201. Arlington, VA: CEC.
- Henderson, P., & Killoran, J. (1995). Utah enhances services for children who are deaf-blind. *Deaf-Blind Perspectives*, 3(1), 3–6.
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U. S. C. § 1482 (2004a).
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U. S. C. § 1401 (2004b).
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U. S. C. § 1432 (2004c).
- McInnes, J. M. Intervention. In J. M. McInnes (Ed.), *A guide to planning and support for individuals who are deafblind*, pp. 75–118. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- NCDB. (2011.) The 2010 national child count of children and youth who are deaf-blind. Retrieved from: <http://c324175.r75.cf1.rackcdn.com/products/2010-Census-Tables.pdf>

Supporting Materials

A web-based, multimedia version of this report is available at <http://interveners.nationaldb.org>. Intervener Services Initiative Data Summaries that report a selection of data gathered as part of this initiative are available at <http://www.nationaldb.org/IntervenerDataSummaries.php>.

Suggested citation for this report:

National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness. (2012). *Recommendations for improving intervener services*. Retrieved from <http://interveners.nationaldb.org>.

About the National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness (NCDB)

NCDB is a national technical assistance (TA) and dissemination center for children and youth who are deaf-blind. It is funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). In partnership with state deaf-blind TA projects throughout the U.S., NCDB conducts initiatives and activities to achieve the following goals:

- increase the capacity of state and local early intervention and education agencies to improve policies and practices for children and youth who are deaf-blind;
- promote the use of evidence-based practices; and
- increase the capacity of families to develop relationships with fellow families, service providers, and others, and expand their knowledge of deaf-blindness and skills in self-advocacy and self-empowerment.

For more information about NCDB, intervener services, or other topics related to deaf-blindness, visit nationaldb.org or contact:

NCDB

D. Jay Gense, Director

Teaching Research Institute

Western Oregon University

345 N. Monmouth Ave.

Monmouth, OR 97361

Voice: 800-438-9376

TTY: 800-854-7013

Fax: 503-838-8150

E-mail: info@nationaldb.org

The contents of these recommendations were developed under a grant from the US Department of Education, #H326T060002. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the US Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government. Project Officer, Jo Ann McCann, Office of Special Education Programs.

