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# Determining Special Education Eligibility - Deaf-Blindness

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Department of Education, Office of Special Education



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## Introduction

These eligibility guidelines provide parents, teachers, special education personnel, administrators, and other professionals' information on the identification, verification, and determination of eligibility for special education services for children with deaf-blindness.

Deaf-Blindness or dual sensory impairments should mean a combined hearing and visual impairment; the combination of which causes severe communication and other developmental and educational needs. Deaf-Blindness/dual sensory impairments cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or blindness, unless supplementary assistance is necessary to address the educational needs resulting from the combined disabilities.

Functional deaf-blindness should mean that a child has such severe impairments that the level of sensory (auditory and visual) functioning cannot be adequately determined or the child requires adaptations in both auditory and visual modes.

This category of children has been defined by both federal and state regulations. A three-part eligibility requirement for a child to be verified as a child with deaf-blindness is as follows:

- Meet eligibility criteria (92 NAC 51.006);
- Documentation of adverse effect on educational performance;
- Determination that a need for special education is evident.
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## State Definition

**Deaf-Blindness** - To qualify for special education services in the category of deaf-blindness, the child must have concomitant hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes: severe communication needs; and other developmental and educational needs. The severity of these needs is such that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness.

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## Section 1: MULTIDISCIPLINARY EVALUATION (MDT) CONSIDERATIONS

The Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) should include at least:

- The child's parent(s);
- For a school age child, the child's regular teacher(s) or a regular classroom teacher qualified to teach a child of that age;
  - For a child below age five, a teacher qualified to teach a child below age five;
- Special educator endorsed in the area of Deaf or Hard of Hearing (D/HH) and a special educator endorsed in the area of Visual Impairment;
- A school district administrator or a designated representative; and
- At least one person qualified to conduct individual diagnostic examinations of children in their specific area of training (i.e., school psychologist, speech language pathologist, or other instructional specialist).

In addition, the MDT should consider the following team members: An audiologist or an individual qualified to interpret the results of the audiological report.

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## Section 2: GUIDELINES

The child with deaf-blindness should meet the criteria for both Deaf/Hard of Hearing (D/HH) and visual impairments.

### **Deaf/Hard of Hearing**

In order for a child to be verified Deaf/Hard of Hearing the evaluation should include:

- A written report, with diagnostic documentation, signed by a licensed or certified audiologist verifying a unilateral or bilateral, fluctuating or permanent hearing loss based on a current audiological evaluation.
- The analysis and documentation of the adverse effects the impairment has or can be expected to have on the development or educational performance of the child in at least one of the following areas:
  - Effective communication;
  - Expressive or receptive language development;
  - Speech reception or production;
  - Cognitive ability;
  - Academic or vocational performance;
  - Social or emotional competence;
  - Adaptive behavior skills, or result in a social/behavioral disability

Children with dual sensory impairments represent a very heterogeneous group. The parents, child, and family must consider communication preferences and uses when planning and conducting evaluations and assessments; to find the child's present levels of functioning, development, or progress in acquiring and using language.

### **Visual Impairment**

When determining eligibility for a visual impairment, including blindness, the evaluation should be thorough and rigorous. Such evaluations should include a data-based media assessment, be based on a range of learning modalities (including auditory, tactile, and visual) and include a functional vision assessment. An assessment of a child's vision status generally would include:

- the nature and extent of the visual impairment;
- its effect on the ability for the child to learn to read, write, do mathematical calculations, and use computers and other assistive technology;

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- the child's ability to be involved in and make progress in the general curriculum offered to nondisabled students;
  - the evaluation should be closely linked to the assessment of the child's present and future reading and writing objectives, educational needs, and appropriate reading and writing media.
  - In addition, because the evaluation must assess a child's future needs, a child's current vision status should not necessarily determine whether it would be inappropriate for that child to receive special education

In all cases, when making a determination of a dual sensory impairment, the MDT should consider the educational performance of the child to determine if it is below that of peers regardless of modifications and/or accommodations of instruction, curriculum, and environment. In addition, the MDT should consider medical information to determine if there is evidence of a combined hearing and visual impairment. Lastly, the MDT should review functional hearing and vision information to determine if there is evidence of a dual sensory impairment. The MDT must determine whether the deaf-blindness or dual sensory impairment is the primary disability of the child.

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## Section 3: PROCEDURES TO DETERMINE ADVERSE EFFECT ON DEVELOPMENT/EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE

### FACTORS TO CONSIDER

Many factors should be considered in determining if deaf-blindness is causing or can be expected to produce significant delays in the child's development or educational performance. The factors include, but are not limited to:

- Type and degree of hearing and visual impairments
- Etiology of the hearing and visual impairments
- Age of onset of the hearing and visual impairments
- Age of identification
- Current age
- Nature/status (permanent, stable, progressive, fluctuating, etc.)
- Current medications
- History and use of interventions
- Relevant family/medical history
- Current educational placement
- Educational performance (communication, orientation and mobility, language, academic, social-emotional)

This list is not exhaustive. Examination of each of these factors may lead to additional factors to consider. The educational team, including educators endorsed to teach children with visual impairments, and children who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing (D/HH), can determine how these factors may impact the child. Parents, medical professionals, classroom teachers, and the child can also provide information important in determining the impact of the hearing and visual impairments.

It is critical for the MDT to have current medical information in regard to hearing and vision in order to make appropriate evaluation decisions. This medical information should provide evidence of dual sensory impairment (both hearing and vision loss).

A functional vision assessment and a functional hearing inventory should be conducted for those children who have such severe disabilities that they exhibit inconsistent auditory and visual responses. In many cases, the medical personnel for this population cannot determine current and specific medical information regarding

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vision and hearing; therefore, conducting functional assessments in regard to vision and hearing becomes critical.

When making a determination of the adverse effects of dual sensory impairments, the educational team should consider the child's age; types of communication modality (ies) used by the child; functional use of language; functional use of hearing and vision; and the types of interventions used by the child in orientation and mobility, academic, social interaction, independent living, assistive technology, career education, and recreational and leisure skills.

The following questions are to guide documentation and determination of whether the disability has an adverse effect on the child's developmental/educational performance:

- ▶ Compensatory or functional academic skills, including communication modes
  - Does the child meet district standards (outcomes) for his/her grade levels?
  - Does the child's progress reflect his/her ability level?
  - Does the child have access to the curriculum and materials at his/her grade level in the appropriate medium (Braille, large print, auditory and assistive listening devices or tactile formats)?
  - Does the child have opportunities to participate in a functional curriculum?
  - Does the child have an effective way to communicate (Speaking, sign language including tactile sign, augmentative communication, and object/touch cues)?
  
- ▶ Orientation and mobility
  - Is the child able to determine where he/she is in the environment?
  - Does the child travel safely and efficiently in the environment?
  
- ▶ Social interaction skills
  - Does the child behave in socially appropriate ways?
  - Does the child initiate interactions with peers and adults?
  - Does the child have paper interactions?
  
- ▶ Independent living skills
  - Does the child perform the tasks that allow him/her to care for personal needs?
  - Does the child have organizational skills?
  - Does the child have the skills needed for adult independence?
  - Does the child have problem solving skills?

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- ▶ Recreation and leisure skills
    - Does the child have opportunities to participate in an array of age appropriate activities?
    - Does the child participate in movement and physical fitness activities that promote good health?
  
  - ▶ Career/vocational education
    - Does the child have information about existing vocations?
    - Does the child have opportunities to participate in a variety of job experiences?
    - Does the child have the skills needed to become meaningfully employed?
  
  - ▶ Assistive technology
    - Does the child have access to the specialized technology available (Braille note takers, speech output devices, assistive listening devices)?
    - Does the child have access to an array of technology devices (both low and high tech)?
    - Does the child have access and use specialized technology to access the curriculum?
  
  - ▶ Visual and auditory efficiency skills
    - Does the child systematically use residual hearing and vision efficiently?
    - Does the child use assistive devices to supplement hearing and vision effectively?
  
  - ▶ Self-determination skills
    - Does the child assist in the planning of his/her educational program?
    - Does the child have opportunities to make decisions about his/her educational program?

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## Section 4: RELATED DEFINITIONS

**Deaf-Blindness** – Concomitant hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which creates such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness.

**Dual-Sensory Impairment** – The presence of a combined and verified vision and Deaf/Hard of Hearing (D/HH), the effects of which are multiplicative and cumulative rather than additive, that limits the access of an individual to visual and auditory information about the world around them and interferes with the ability to gather information, learn, function, communicate, and interact with others in a clear and consistent manner.

**Congenitally Deaf-Blind** – Refers to individuals who are born with hearing and vision losses.

**Congenitally Deaf, Adventitiously Blind** – Refers to individuals who are born with deafness and acquire blindness.

**Congenitally Blind, Adventitiously Deaf** – Refers to individuals who are born with blindness and acquire deafness.

**Adventitiously Deaf-Blind** (acquired Deaf-Blindness) – Refers to individuals who are born with hearing and vision but later lose both senses to varying degrees. The losses may occur at different times.

**For additional definitions relevant to dual sensory impairments refer to the definition sections of hearing and vision impairments.**

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## Section 5: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### 1. Can children with deaf-blindness have other disabilities?

Yes, many children with deaf-blindness have additional disabilities. When assessing a child for other disabilities, such as OHI, TBI, SLI, multiple disabilities, it is important to consider dual sensory loss and the impact on educational performance.

### 2. Why is it important to complete a functional assessment of both hearing and vision when completing assessment for a child with deaf-blindness?

It is important to know the extent that the child is able to utilize his/her ability to hear and see in the school setting. Some children have such severe disabilities that they exhibit inconsistent auditory and visual responses, and in many cases the medical profession for this population cannot determine current degrees of functional hearing and vision. This information will be extremely helpful in planning the curriculum for the child in the classroom.

### 3. Is there another term for deaf-blindness?

Some people refer to deaf-blindness as a dual sensory impairment because two of the five senses are affected.

### 4. Do all children with deaf-blindness have the same level of hearing and vision loss?

No. Each individual child with deaf-blindness has varied levels of hearing and vision loss ranging from mild to severe. In fact, research states that most children with deaf-blindness have some ability to hear and see. It is the combined loss of both hearing and vision (the distant senses) which make this population unique in their educational needs. When assessing children with deaf-blindness, the child's progress data will indicate that educational performance is far below that of peers despite modifications and/or accommodations to the instruction, curriculum, and environment.

### 5. At what age should a child be assessed for deaf-blindness?

At any age in which there are questions about the child's ability to hear and see.

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## SECTION 6: RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

### REFERENCES

Alsop, Linda, (ed.). Understanding Deaf-Blindness: Issues, Perspectives, and Strategies. Utah State University, Logan, Utah: Ski-Hi Institute, Department of Communicative Disorders and Deaf Education, 2002.

Hallahan, Daniel P. and James M. Kauffman. Exceptional Learners, 12<sup>th</sup> Edition. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2011.

### STATE OF NEBRASKA RESOURCES

Boys Town National Research Hospital [www.boystownhospital.org](http://www.boystownhospital.org)

Nebraska Center for the Education of Children Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired (NCECBVI) [www.ncecbvi.org](http://www.ncecbvi.org)

Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired [www.ncbvi.ne.gov](http://www.ncbvi.ne.gov)

Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing [www.nedhh.ne.gov](http://www.nedhh.ne.gov)

Nebraska Department of Education [www.nde.state.ne.us](http://www.nde.state.ne.us)

Nebraska Deaf-Blind Project [www.nedbp.org](http://www.nedbp.org)

Nebraska Educational Assistive Technology (NEAT) [www.neatinfo.net](http://www.neatinfo.net)

Nebraska Regional Programs for Children Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing [www.nde.state.ne.us/SPEDadsites/regdeaf/html](http://www.nde.state.ne.us/SPEDadsites/regdeaf/html)

Parent Training and Information (PTI – Nebraska) [www.pti-nebraska.org](http://www.pti-nebraska.org)

### WEB SITES

American Association of the Deaf-Blind (AADB) [www.aadb.org](http://www.aadb.org)

American Council of the Blind (ACB) [www.acb.org](http://www.acb.org)

American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) [www.afb.org](http://www.afb.org)

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Helen Keller Nation Center (HKNC) [www.hknc.org](http://www.hknc.org)

National Family Association for Deaf-Blind (NFADB)  
[www.NFADB.org](http://www.NFADB.org) National Foundation of the Blind (NFB)  
[www.nfb.org](http://www.nfb.org)

National Information Clearinghouse on Children Who Are Deaf-Blind [www.dblink.org](http://www.dblink.org)

National Technical Assistance Consortium for Children and Young Adults Who Are  
Deaf-Blind (NTAC) [www.ntac.org](http://www.ntac.org)