

Integrating Deafblindness into the IEP: Strategies for Success

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IMPORTANCE OF DOCUMENTING DEAFBLINDNESS ELIGIBILITY

Most children and youth with CHARGE syndrome have some level of vision and hearing loss and should be considered deafblind. **For a student who is deafblind it is imperative that deafblindness and the impact of the dual sensory losses is clearly documented and described throughout the IEP.** This documentation will ensure that annual goals, program accommodations and modifications, services and supports, and program placement address the student's unique needs related to their deafblindness.

IDEA DEFINITIONS

Deaf-blindness means concomitant hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes 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.	Multiple disabilities means concomitant impairments (such as intellectual disability-blindness or intellectual disability-orthopedic impairment), the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments. Multiple disabilities does not include deaf-blindness.
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FEDERAL REPORTING GUIDANCE: Limitation when student has an additional disability

Deafblindness: (1) If a child has only two disabilities and those disabilities are deafness and blindness, and the child is not reported as having a developmental delay , that child must be reported under the category "deaf-blindness."	Multiple Disabilities: (2) A child who has more than one disability and is not reported as having deaf-blindness or as having a developmental delay must be reported under the category "multiple disabilities."
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EXAMPLE: In 2023 the California Department of Education reported serving eighty-seven (87) children kindergarten to 22 years eligible under the Deafblindness category, that is only Deafness and blindness.

In contrast, California Deafblind Services reported in their annual Deafblind Child Count from the same year 1,138 children from birth to 22 years with both vision and hearing loss, including those with additional disabilities, received educational services.

DETERMINING PRIMARY AND SECONDARY ELIGIBILITY CATEGORIES

If a student has vision and hearing losses and an additional disability this federal reporting guidance leads many IEP teams to identify a student with CHARGE syndrome as having Multiple Disabilities as indicated by one of the sensory low incidence categories (Visual Impairment, Hearing Impairment, or Deafness) and Intellectual Disability or Orthopedic Impairment or Other Health Impairment.

When Multiple Disabilities is selected as the primary eligibility, the guidance about selecting Deafblindness as the secondary eligibility is not clearly stated.

When a student is deafblind with one or more additional disabilities, we **recommend that teams strongly consider Deafblindness as the secondary disability.** Some teams may choose to select another category, such as Hearing Impairment or Visual Impairment, to ensure a particular program model or services that most appropriately meet the student's educational needs. For instance, a program for students who are blind/low vision with additional disabilities may exist in a particular district and in this case, the team may determine Multiple Disabilities and Visual Impairment are the appropriate eligibility categories. In another case, access to language through American Sign Language may be a high priority and the team would select Multiple Disabilities and Hearing Impairment or Deafness.

Areas "Deafblindness" can documented within the IEP, if not included as primary or secondary eligibility

Eligibility: Describe the student's current vision and hearing levels and the accommodations and supports needed to access and participate in the general education curriculum.

Present Levels: Describe skills, interests, preferences, and unique needs related to deafblindness in all areas of need.

Special Factors: This section includes information about 1) a student's need for assistive technology; 2) low incidence services, accommodations, and equipment; 3) considerations if the student is blind or visually impaired; and 4) considerations if the student is Deaf or hard of hearing.

Services: Offer of FAPE: When determining program placement and services the team must list all the supports and services considered, including the options that are not selected such as programs for Deaf or Blind/Low Vision

Program Accommodations and Modifications: Description of accommodations and modifications to increase access to visual and auditory information and supports needed to participate in the curriculum and other educational activities and routines

Other Services and Supports for School Personnel, or for the Student, or on Behalf of the Student: Specialized training in a specific low incidence disability, such as deafblindness; technical assistance from the state deafblind project; transition services; or providing the family with information and resources

Accommodations Page Example for Elementary School Student

ACCOMMODATIONS	
Instructional accommodations needed for the student to be involved in and progress in the core curriculum (must be related to the student's disability). Accommodations alter how instruction is provided but do not alter the content of the curriculum. The accommodations listed below apply to all subjects and settings unless specified otherwise.	
Setting/Schedule	Sensory Needs
Allow extra time to travel	Use of self-monitoring strategies
Warning before transitions (schedule, environment, staff)	Warn student of changes to schedule
Seat at front of room; avoid glare	Allow extra classroom movement
Seat away from distractions/noise	Allow breaks as needed
Enlarged digital books on website or application on portable tablet	
Directions/Instructions	Student Response
Directions given through visual cues, signs, verbally, variety if need	Visual cue for student to wait for turn
Masking of items that are not target items	Scribe/assistance transcribing response
Large print - 20-22 point; Clear, High contrast materials	Allow for extended response time/think time
Use descriptive language - such as put the spoon on the table	Type on PDF/photo application on portable tablet
Pictures 2" per foot from student (2" at 1 ft, 4" at 2 ft)	Access to portable tablet w/stylus & use of applications for stu resp
Repetition when needed	
Organization/Study Skills	Personal Care/Equipment
No copies of copies	FM system
Note-taking assistance	long white cane
Graphic organizer	monocular
Portable tablet to enlarge photos and digital text	assistance/supervision of nutrition and hydration times
OCR application on portable tablet	
Text reader application/accessibility setting on portable tablet	

Tips and Suggestions

- Identify a team member with deafblind experience and credentials who can guide and lead team discussion.
- Identify within reports the interventions, supports, accommodations and modifications that are currently used or needed.
- Ask & listen to the student and family members about what supports and accommodations work and don't work.
- Describe the student's access needs, services and supports, accommodations and modifications clearly and with detail.
- Seek advice and recommendations from state deafblind project staff.
- Families:** Review the IEP carefully prior to signing and offer additional information or revisions in writing, as needed.

Article: Making Sense of Eligibility Categories & the Importance of Documenting Deafblindness in the IEP (Maier, 2024)



Examples from an IEP that documents deafblindness



Digital copy of this poster



*NOTE: This information and examples are based on IEP process used in CA. Other states and LEAs may use different forms. However, sections of the IEP should be consistent per IDEA requirements.