



Chapter 4

Services and Placement Options

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Issue I. The educational team must fully include the family and student in developing the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and Individualized Transition Plan (ITP).

Issue II. The educational team should consider how the student’s combined vision and hearing losses may create a need for one-on-one support to access and participate in the life of the school.

Issue III. The educational team should consider the challenges, unique to the student who is deafblind to ensure appropriate educational services and placement decisions.

Issue IV. The educational team should ensure that goals and objectives addressing the development of communication and social relationships are included in the IEP and ITP, to meet the individual needs of the student who is deafblind.

Issue V. The educational team should ensure that services address the expanded curriculum areas to meet the unique needs of the student who is deafblind.

Issue VI. Educators should ensure the availability and use of assistive technology for students who are deafblind.

Issue VII. Educators must ensure that transition planning for the student who is deafblind is collaborative and involves all appropriate adult service agencies.

Introduction

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004 requires that an array of services and placement options be available to students with disabilities. The goal of placement in the least restrictive environment (LRE) will only be realized when the student has full access to the curriculum and educational environment in his/her communication forms, has authentic interactions with both peers and professional personnel, and achieves high educational performance standards (National Association of State Directors of Special Education [NASDSE], 2006, p. 51). The services provided for students who are deafblind must be well coordinated and implemented in a collaborative manner to meet the identified needs of the student.

Issues and Practices

Issue I. The educational team must fully include the family and student in developing the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and Individualized Transition Plan (ITP).

IDEA (2004) mandates parental involvement in the ongoing planning of their child's educational services. Deafblindness has a dramatic impact on the student's social and communicative connections and on his/her ability to develop as a person. Parents' vital input provides the team with essential information that often cannot be determined through formal assessment or testing and is essential in developing individualized educational services. Family members interact with a student who is deafblind in natural environments. They recognize and respond to his/her likes, dislikes, and communication which are often idiosyncratic.

The following considerations and strategies are recommended in developing the IEP/ITP and planning services with family and student input:

- Give parents information about best practices in the education of students who are deafblind and about deafblind resources prior to participation in the educational team process.
- Whenever possible, include the student as an active member of the team.
- Determine the priorities of the student and parents as the important first step in the development of the IEP/ITP.
- Set timelines within the IEP/ITP for personnel development that will ensure program implementation, modification, and access to learning for the student.

- Define specific roles and qualifications of specialized and related service personnel, such as the deafblind specialist, orientation and mobility specialist, intervener, paraprofessional and interpreter. (See chapter 2.)
- Define in the IEP/ITP a communication rich environment that will enable the student who is deafblind to have access to the curriculum and to fully participate in the life of the school.

Issue II. The educational team should consider how the student’s combined vision and hearing losses may create a need for one-on-one support to access and participate in the life of the school.

The key to understanding how to provide access to the general curriculum for students who are deafblind comes out of the team’s understanding of the impact of combined vision and hearing losses on incidental learning, communication, social relationships and access to the curriculum. The following considerations should be taken into account to identify appropriate adaptations for the student who is deafblind that will promote learning in school, home, and community environments:

- When developing the IEP/ITP, the team must consider the student’s need for one-on-one support (e.g., for an intervener, paraprofessional or interpreter) to ensure access to people and the learning environment.
- Curriculum access is affected by the student’s experiential history, communication abilities, visual and auditory functioning, age, preferences, learning style, additional disabilities, and prior education.
- The student should be able to use augmentative and alternative communication systems, including sign language, to interact in the classroom and other school environments.

Issue III. The educational team should consider the challenges, unique to the student who is deafblind to ensure appropriate educational services and placement decisions.

The team should understand the impact of combined vision and hearing losses on incidental learning and communication and social relationships. For each student the impact of combined vision and hearing losses is different. For example, the presence of additional disabilities create highly complex challenges. Students who are deafblind have unique communication abilities and needs and the team’s awareness of these should drive decisions about placement and the planning of services. Just as students who are deaf or hard of hearing require a communication

plan within the IEP so too do students who are deafblind. The individualized communication plan is the foundation for an IEP that is appropriate for a student who is deafblind (NASDSE, 2006).

The communicative abilities of a student are a prime consideration in determining the placement where his/her abilities can be maximized. The team should evaluate which settings provide competent personnel and peers who will provide opportunities for the student to build communicative, social, and educational competence.

Deafblindness also challenges the student's ability to learn about the physical environment and to move safely within that environment; therefore, training in orientation and mobility (O&M) is important. The O&M specialist must use alternative methods other than those used with students who are only blind. For example, students who are deafblind may not be able to use sound to localize and orient themselves in unfamiliar environments. They may need to use communication cards in print and braille to request assistance for crossing streets.

Students, who have additional physical disabilities, may also require the specialized services of a physical and/or occupational therapist. Students with complex health issues may require medical intervention on an ongoing basis.

The team should evaluate the range of specialized services and supports outlined in the student's IEP and find the placements where these supports can be delivered in the most coordinated manner.

Issue IV. The educational team should ensure that goals and objectives addressing the development of communication and social relationships are included in the IEP and ITP to meet the individual needs of the student who is deafblind.

Students who are deafblind are isolated from both people and things and frequently need one-on-one communication support. The building of communication and social relationships require direct teaching and opportunities for genuine social interactions.

Under IDEA, students with deafblindness are entitled to extracurricular and nonacademic school activities, as well as the special materials, devices, and support services needed to participate in all areas of school life. Basic strategies for achieving communication and social goals and objectives include:

- providing training to school personnel on the effect of deafblindness on the development of social skills and personal relationships,
- providing training to school personnel and peers on students' communication

system to facilitate social connections,

- providing all necessary accommodations and/or adaptations required to enable participation by students in extracurricular activities,
- allocating sufficient time for activities to ensure the inclusion of the student who is deafblind in school and extracurricular activities,
- developing a peer and/or mentorship program to foster improvement of students self-esteem and personal expectations,
- providing appropriate instruction on social-sexual education to help students understand various kinds of relationships and the behavior that is appropriate within those relationships.

Issue V. The educational team should ensure that services address expanded curriculum areas to meet the unique needs of the student who is deafblind.

It is essential when planning services and placements to provide an expanded curriculum for a student who is deafblind. An expanded curriculum may include: communication and social skills, orientation and mobility skills, compensatory skills such as use of communication devices or Braille; independent living skills, recreation and leisure skills, visual and auditory efficiency skills, vocational education, and strategies for self determination (Hatlen, 1996).

Expanded curriculum content is often best taught through natural interactions in real-life environments which will enable students who are deafblind to access and participate in home and community life. For example, recreation and leisure skills and interests are vital in achieving a good quality of life at school, home, and in the community. Students who are deafblind typically have a limited repertoire of recreation and leisure skills because the losses of vision and hearing diminish the possibilities for development in this area. When developing the IEP, important elements of the expanded core curriculum are:

- embedding expanded curriculum goals and objectives,
- including adaptations and accommodations necessary to enable students who are deafblind to access and participate in home and community life,
- including extended school days and summer programs that may be necessary to address the needs of the student who is deafblind,
- indicating appropriate extent and type of one-on-one support for students to access activities that will lead to acquisition of knowledge and skills in expanded core curriculum areas.

Issue VI. Educators should ensure the availability and use of assistive technology for students who are deafblind.

Both IDEA and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) emphasize including individuals with disabilities within standards-based curricula and assessments. For students who are deafblind, assistive technology in the form of both high and low tech devices will be key in fostering their equal access to learning.

Technological advances in braille production, along with the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS) legislation of 2004, should allow students who are deafblind and braille users to receive classroom texts and materials at the same time as their sighted peers. The following points should be considered in meeting the assistive technology needs of students who are deafblind. (See chapter 2 on personnel).

- Either an academic or functional Learning Media Assessment should be included in an assistive technology evaluation that is administered by a team that includes the family and a professional knowledgeable about deafblindness.
- An assistive technology evaluation should address the alternative and augmentative communication needs of students who are deafblind.
- Assistive technology needs should be stated in IEPs and students should be provided with the technology that enables equal access to and participation in learning activities with sighted-hearing peers.
- Implementing the use of assistive technology should include training for students who are deafblind, for educational staff, and for students' families.
- Students who are deafblind should be allowed to take home technological devices that enable them to communicate with others, complete school assignments, and to access the environment.

The technology used by students who are deafblind should be determined by an assistive technology evaluation conducted by a competent professional with knowledge and skills in communication and technology for students who are deafblind. Prescribed devices may range from sophisticated electronic braille and computer access devices to low-tech communication boards and books. Assistive listening devices and low vision devices should also be considered (e.g., FM units or auditory loop systems, closed circuit TV, special scopes).

Issue VII. Educators must ensure that transition planning for students who are deafblind is collaborative and involves all appropriate adult service agencies.

IDEA 2004 requires that transition services be afforded to all students with disabilities. It defines these services as “a coordinated set of activities that is a result-oriented process that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of students with a disability to facilitate the student’s movement from school to post-school activities” (IDEA, 2004). The intent of the law is to assist students with disabilities to lead successful and productive lives as adults. Independent living and vocational skills are important components of the IEP throughout the student’s school years.

Research shows that many young adults who are deafblind leave school with little chance for employment, and most struggle to obtain the services and supports needed to live in the community (Petroff, 2001, p. 1). Often, there is no one adult service agency that assumes responsibility for this population. For example, a blindness agency may feel that transitioning students who are deafblind and have additional cognitive disabilities should be served by the agency in charge of serving young adults with developmental disabilities. Addressing this problem is not easy, but change can begin with appropriate transition planning that maintains a strong focus on students’ unique needs (Mount, 1992). The following strategies are recommended to accomplish effective transition to adult life for students who are deafblind:

- Use person-centered planning (Mount, 1992) and other appropriate tools for assessment to plan for adult services. These tools assist educators, students, and families in identifying strengths, preferences, and specific skills needed in adult life.
- Teach independent living skills (e.g., orientation and mobility, the use of transportation services, use of special devices) in the settings where they will be used.
- Provide students who are deafblind with a variety of work opportunities in their schools and communities to identify their interests, capabilities and possibilities.
- Start to plan early for transition to adult services. Identify key members of the transition team as well as timelines for implementing the transition plan.
- Determine the supports students will need as adults living and working in the community (e.g., communication support service providers, interpreters, augmentative communication systems).
- Establish interagency agreements with adult service providers who can and should be involved with students who are deafblind as they enter adult life.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990) requires that college students receive appropriate support to participate in the curricula. This includes students with deafblindness.

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