

Intervener Services and Interveners in Educational Settings: Technical Report Update

Since the *Intervener Services and Interveners in Educational Settings: Definition* was published in 2013, many positive changes have occurred in the infrastructure for developing intervener services in the United States. These include:

- An increase in the depth and breadth of [resources that can be used by any state deaf-blind project to establish or expand intervener services](#)
- Significant achievements in the [recognition and training of interveners](#)
- The establishment of a second [online intervener training program at Central Michigan University](#) (the first being at [Utah State University](#))

As a result of these developments, NCDB realized it was time to revisit the 2013 definition. In December 2018, we convened a committee of experts from around the country to review the definition for current relevance and accuracy. This document outlines changes made based on their recommendations. It updates a [previous technical report describing the development of the original definition in 2013](#).

Although we recognize that the definition and interpretation of interveners and intervener services will likely vary somewhat from state to state depending on local needs and conditions, we believe the updated definition accurately reflects the collective knowledge of the field of deaf-blindness at this point in time.

Committee Members

Participants in the review were individuals at agencies that have made significant systems-change progress in their states regarding intervener services:

- Annette Carey, Principal Investigator, West Virginia SenseAbilities
- Michelle Clyne, Project Coordinator, Project Reach: Illinois DeafBlind Services
- Julie Durando, Project Director, Virginia Project for Children and Young Adults with Deaf-Blindness
- Beth Kennedy, Director, DeafBlind Central and Deafblind Intervener Training Program, Central Michigan University
- Cathy Lyle, Educational Consultant, Minnesota Deafblind Technical Assistance Project
- Susan Patten, Project Director, Utah Deaf-Blind Project

Recommendations

Ages Served

The original document states that an intervener “provides consistent one-to-one support to a student who is deaf-blind (age 3 through 21) throughout the instructional day.” Because there are a few states that serve other age ranges (e.g., Michigan public schools serve students up to age 26), the committee recommended rewording the age range.

New wording: *An intervener provides consistent one-to-one support to a student who is deaf-blind (age 3 through 21 or as mandated by state regulations) throughout the instructional day.*

Primary Roles of the Intervener

The primary roles of an intervener listed in the 2013 definition were as follows:

- Provide consistent access to instruction and environmental information that is usually gained by typical students through vision and hearing, but that is unavailable or incomplete to an individual who is deaf-blind
- Provide access to and/or assist in the development and use of receptive and expressive communication skills
- Facilitate the development and maintenance of trusting, interactive relationships that promote social and emotional well-being
- Provide support to help a student form relationships with others and increase social connections and participation in activities

Committee members noted that the following are also key intervener roles and recommended adding them:

- Facilitate concept development
- Enhance independence

Although support for concept development is already encompassed in "Provide consistent access to instruction and environmental information," the committee felt it was important to include it as a separate item because of the crucial role interveners play in facilitating conceptual learning. The role interveners play in concept development is also highlighted in the text of the bill for the [Alice Cogswell and Anne Sullivan Macy Act](#) and "[Are Intervener Services Appropriate for Your Student With Deaf-Blindness? An IEP Team Discussion Guide.](#)"

New bullet: *Facilitate concept development*

Enhancing independence is implied in the fourth bullet above related to providing support to form relationships, but because educators often have concerns that interveners create dependency, we added the following explanation at the end of the bulleted list.

New wording: *Although, some educators worry that interveners may create dependency, the exact opposite is true. Interveners are trained to “do with, not for” their students and support them to function as independently as possible.*

Teaming

The teaming roles in the 2013 definition were listed as follows:

- Participate as an active member of a student’s educational team
- Attend and participate in IEP meetings
- Attends regularly scheduled planning and feedback meetings with the teacher and other team members
- Is actively supervised and supported by the classroom teacher and other professionals responsible for the student's IEP
- Receives ongoing support from professional educators with expertise in deaf-blindness

Because school districts cannot be required to include interveners in IEP meetings, the committee recommended adding “as requested” or “as directed” to the second bullet. NCDB elected not to make this change. Although school districts cannot be required to include interveners in IEP meetings, it is considered a best practice (Alsop et al., 2007, p. 6). In addition, IDEA and special education practice stress the importance of a team approach in the education of children with disabilities.

The committee also suggested adding the phrase “and training” to the final bullet to emphasize interveners’ need for ongoing training.

New wording: *Receives ongoing support and training from professional educators with expertise in deaf-blindness.*

Training

The 2013 definition referred to “programs that train paraeducators to be interveners.” The committee members pointed out that this implied interveners must be paraeducators, when in reality, other individuals (e.g., interpreters, school nurses) may also engage in intervener training.

NCDB also felt it was important to add statements about the typical forms of intervener training in the U.S. and the importance of coaching and supervision.

New wording: *In the absence of specific state standards to the contrary, programs that train individuals to be interveners should comprehensively model the Council for Exceptional Children’s intervener competencies. State deaf-blind projects and non-degree, online university-based programs are the primary sources of intervener training in the United States. Coaching and supervision, in addition to coursework, are essential.*

The committee also recommended adding a statement about the importance of an intervener being proficient in their student's method of communication.

New wording: *In addition, an intervener's communication skills must align with their student's skills. Thus, they should receive training in their students' methods of communication, if not already proficient.*

Other

Since the original definition was published, Ruth E. Ryder, Acting Director Office of Special Education Programs at that time, wrote a letter to Linda McDowell, Director of the National Center on Deaf-Blindness, in which she described the use of interveners as a related service. This letter has been posted as an [OSEP Policy Document](#). Given the importance of the document, the committee suggested adding information from it to the intervener and intervener services definition.

In response, we added a new section heading—"Designation in IEPs"—and the following wording:

Intervener services are typically provided as part of a student's related services and supplementary aids and services. As noted by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs:

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

References

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National Center on Deaf-Blindness, 2019

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