Determining the Need for an Intervener in Educational Settings

An intervener is a specially trained person who works consistently one-to-one with a student who is deafblind. The intervener facilitates access to the environmental information that is usually gained through vision and hearing but which is incomplete to the child who is deafblind. The intervener helps the student gather information, learn concepts and skills, and develop communication and language.

An intervener provides direct support to a student with deafblindness for all or part of the instructional day. The intervener receives training in communication methods and sensory accommodations that are needed for an individual student with deafblindness to access information in various learning environments. The intervener supports the existing service delivery model, collaborating with the student’s team in implementing the student’s IEP.

Most students with deafblindness need to develop a bond and a trusting relationship with a consistent communication partner in a predictable environment in order to progress to higher-level learning. For many students who are deafblind, this trusted communication partner is the intervener.

Teaming is essential in the success of this model. Classroom teachers and other professionals on the instructional team provide the supervision, direction, and support that are necessary for interveners to be effective in their role. An intervener should never carry out his/her duties independently, but instead function as an integral part of the student’s instructional team.

**Primary roles of the intervener**

In summary, the primary role of the intervener is to:

* facilitate the access of environmental information usually gained through vision and hearing, but which is unavailable or incomplete to the individual who is deafblind;
* facilitate the development and/or use of receptive and expressive communication skills by the individual who is deafblind; and
* develop and maintain a trusting, interactive relationship that can promote social and emotional well-being. (Alsop, 2002)

**Is an intervener needed for your student?**

This document is designed to help the IEP team to determine whether an intervener is an appropriate support for an individual student with deafblindness in a school setting. It is a guideline for discussion about all supports needed to provide the student full access to the educational experience based on: 1) individual student assessment; and 2) consideration of the existing and/or proposed services for the student.

**Step 1: Questions about the Student with Deafblindness**

The decision by the IEP team to provide intervener services is based on the level of support a student who is deafblind needs in order to gain access and effectively participate in all of his/her instructional environments. The team should discuss how to address all identified issues.

A variety of support approaches and strategies may be creatively employed by the team to address the student’s individual needs. In some cases an intervener trained in deafblind-specific knowledge and skills may be the most appropriate, effective, and/or efficient service delivery model.

The questions in the following table can assist the team in determining how to address the supports related to the student’s deafblindness.

| Questions about the Student with Deafblindness |
| --- |
| 1. Does the student need assistance to effectively detect, gather, and/or prioritize information from communication partners and the surrounding environment?
 | Yes | No |
|  |  |
|  If yes, how will this access issue be addressed, and by whom? |
| 1. Does the student rely on the sense of touch or near vision to gain information, so that he/she is unable to reliably get information that other students get from a distance?
 | Yes | No |
|  |  |
|  If yes, how will this need be addressed, and by whom? |
| 1. In a group instructional setting, is it difficult for the student to gather information or follow a discussion?
 | Yes | No |
|  |  |
|  If yes, how will this need be addressed, and by whom? |
| 1. Does the student use equipment or adaptive aids, but not efficiently or effectively enough to keep up with the pace of the instruction being given?
 | Yes | No |
|  |  |
|  If yes, how will this need be addressed? |
| 1. Is the student unable to orient him/herself to the environment or move to different learning environments without assistance?
 | Yes | No |
|  |  |
|  If yes, how will this need be addressed? |
| 1. Does the student rely on communication methods not generally used or understood by many of his or her communication partners (teachers, staff, or peers)? Consider all the various environments the student accesses throughout the entire school day.
 | Yes | No |
|  |  |
|  If yes, how will this need be addressed? |
| 1. Does the student often need individual intervention by a trained or knowledgeable support person in order to communicate effectively receptively and/or expressively?
 | Yes | No |
|  |  |
|  If yes, how will this need be addressed? |
| 1. Does the student need a high degree of consistency in strategies and communication systems, so that working with numerous people during the day causes him/her confusion and frustration?
 | Yes | No |
|  |  |
|  If yes, how will this need be addressed? |
| 1. Due to sensory isolation, does the student have difficulties in trusting, bonding, or relating and responding to a variety of people?
 | Yes | No |
|  |  |
|  If yes, how will this need be addressed? |
| 1. Because of sensory impairments, is the student unfamiliar with certain common information, so that in order to fully understand concepts or common references used in instruction or conversation, the student frequently needs more explanation than that given to other students.
 | Yes | No |
|  |  |
|  If yes, how will this need be addressed? |
| 1. Is the student unable to access the same information as classmates who are not deafblind?
 | Yes | No |
|  |  |
|  If yes, how will this need be addressed? |

**Step 2: Questions about the Instructional Team**

Answering the questions in the next table will help the team decide if the support described above can be provided in the proposed or current instructional arrangement without additional supports.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Questions about the Instructional Team | Yes | No |
| 1. Does the student’s need for effective deafblind-specific intervention strategies and communication methods require additional education and training for staff members?
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| * If numerous staff will need training, would it be more efficient to concentrate training on fewer specialized individuals?
 |  |  |
| 1. Does the specialized educational programming recommended through assessment and the IEP create a need for an additional trained support person? Before answering this question, examples to consider include, but are not limited to:
* due to other demands in the classroom, does the instructor find it difficult to remain in close enough proximity so the student can maintain visual, auditory, and or tactile access to instruction;
* due to the needs of other students, does the instructor find it challenging to adjust the pace of instruction so the deafblind student has enough time to get understandable information through either modified communication or tactile/close-vision exploration;
* do any instructors have difficulty or unfamiliarity with the student’s preferred communication modes (e.g. tactile symbols, sign language, tactile sign);
* does existing staff find it challenging to schedule time for deafblind-specific material adaptation and equipment maintenance (e.g., communication aids, vision devices, hearing devices, etc.) ;
* Other (explain). \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
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| 1. Is it challenging to limit the number of individuals working with the student so that he/she can form trusting relationships?
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| 1. Is it challenging for the team to be consistent due to the large number of individuals working with the student?
 |  |  |
| 1. Is it challenging for the team to provide necessary background and fill-in information to help the student fully understand instruction and conversation across all settings?
 |  |  |

**Step 3: Determine the Need for an Intervener**

Now that you have completed the Steps 1 & 2, you are ready to use that information to discuss and make a recommendation about the need for an intervener for the student with deafblindness. Any items answered “yes” in steps 2 and 3 should result in discussion and planning.

**Additional Information**

If intervener services are recommended, this should be noted in the Supplemental Aids and Services section of the IEP.

Hierarch of Support Needs for Teams Supporting Students who are Deafblind

West Virginia SenseAbilities: <http://wvde.state.wv.us/osp/deafblindresources.html>

References

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