



Intervener Services and Interveners in Educational Settings: Technical Report Updates

Since “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 has revisited the definition twice since it was originally published. This occurred in December 2018, when we convened a committee of experts from around the country to review the definition for current relevance and accuracy, and in October 2021, when we revised the training section of the document and had it reviewed by a group of experts. This document outlines changes made to the definition based on recommendations that emerged from both reviews and updates to 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 time.

2018 UPDATES TO FULL DEFINITION

The 2018 review committee members were individuals from 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

2018 Review Committee Recommendations

Ages Served

The original 2013 definition stated 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 they be added:

- 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 important 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*

In the 2013 definition, enhancing independence by providing support to form relationships is implied in the fourth bullet under the primary roles of an intervener (see above). However, because educators often have concerns that interveners create dependency, the committee added the following explanation after 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 intervener's responsibilities on the educational team was described as follows in the 2013 definition:

- Participate as an active member of a student's educational team
- Attend and participate in IEP meetings
- Attend regularly scheduled planning and feedback meetings with the teacher and other team members
- Are actively supervised and supported by the classroom teacher and other professionals responsible for the student's IEP
- Receive 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 to the education of children with disabilities.

The committee also suggested adding the phrase “and training” to the final bullet to emphasize an intervener’s 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 this implied that 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 deafblind 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 student’s methods of communication, if not already proficient.*

Other

Since the original definition was published, Ruth E. Ryder, the Acting Director of the Office of Special Education Programs at that time, wrote a letter to Linda McDowell, Director of NCDB, 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.

The committee 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).

2021 UPDATES TO TRAINING SECTION

In 2021, NCDB revised the section on training to make it consistent with best practices in personnel preparation for teachers and other education professionals. This involved specifying the importance of having experience with the population served and strengthening language related to the need for supervision and coaching from professionals with expertise in deaf-blindness.

NCDB provided a draft of the revised section to the 2021 review committee members (listed below), and based on their feedback, added the following essential components of training to the definition:

1. Coursework or training on deaf-blind intervention aligned with the CEC standards.
2. Supervised experience, such as a practicum or coaching by a professional with expertise in deaf-blindness. The intervener candidate must be working with a child or youth who is deaf-blind in an educational setting.
3. Documentation of proficiency (through a portfolio or other method) that shows attainment of the knowledge and skills outlined in the CEC standards

2021 Reviewer Committee Members

- Michelle Clyne, Project Coordinator, Project Reach: Illinois DeafBlind Services
- Erin Farrer, Project Director, Utah DeafBlind Project
- Katie Humes, Project Director, Washington State Services for Children with Deaf-Blindness
- Beth Kennedy, Director, DeafBlind Central and Deafblind Intervener Training Program, Central Michigan University
- Ann Mayes, Education Specialist, Minnesota DeafBlind Assistance Project
- Ira Padhye, Project Director, Virginia Project for Children and Young Adults with Deaf-Blindness

REFERENCES

Alsop, L., Robinson, C., Goehl, K., Lace, J., Belote, M., & Rodriguez-Gil, G. (2007). *Interveners in the classroom: Guidelines for teams working with students who are deafblind*. Logan, UT: SKI-HI Institute, Utah State University.

H.R.1120 - Alice Cogswell and Anne Sullivan Macy Act 115th Congress (2017-2018).
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th/congress/house-bill/1120/text>

National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness. (2013). *Definition of intervener services and interveners in educational settings: Technical report*.

https://documents.nationaldb.org/Intervener_Definition_Technical_Report_2013.pdf

National Center on Deaf-Blindness. (2016). Are intervener services appropriate for your student with deaf-blindness?: An IEP team discussion guide.

<https://91372e5fba0d1fb26b72> -

[13cee80c2bfb23b1a8fcedea15638c1f.ssl.cf1.rackcdn.com/cms/IEPGuide_NatIDB_8_22_1083.pdf](https://www.ies.ed.gov/nslp/13cee80c2bfb23b1a8fcedea15638c1f.ssl.cf1.rackcdn.com/cms/IEPGuide_NatIDB_8_22_1083.pdf)

U.S. Department of Education. (2018). *August 2, 2018 Letter to Linda McDowell, Ph.D.* [OSEP Policy Document]. https://sites.ed.gov/idea/idea_files/osep-letter-aug-2-2018-letter-to-linda-mcdowell-ph-d/

National Center on Deaf-Blindness, November 2021

nationaldb.org

The contents of this publication were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, #H326T180026. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government. Project Officer, Susan Weigert.

