



Policy Paper on Interveners

The National Intervener & Advocate Association, which represents interveners, families and professionals, requests that NASDSE adopt a policy of support to recognize intervener services as related services at the national, state, and local levels.

Helen Keller, the most well-known individual with deafblindness in the United States, benefitted from constant one-to-one services provided by Anne Sullivan who gave Helen access to information about people and things in her environment. This was critical to her ability to learn, communicate, and function in the world. Today, students who are deafblind can receive the same services that Helen Keller received from individuals with training and specialized skills in deafblindness. These individuals are called **interveners**.

What do interveners do?

By the nature of their disability, students who are deafblind don't have access to the natural flow of visual and auditory information that is necessary for learning, communication and success in educational environments. Interveners are individuals who work one-to-one with these students to provide them with access to sensory information, facilitate their communication and interaction, and promote their social and emotional well-being.¹

Why should interveners be listed as a related service?

According to the December 1, 2018 National Child Count, there are 9,904 children and youth who are deafblind, ages birth through 21 years in this country.² Because deafblindness is the lowest of low incidence disabilities, it is not widely understood by educators and service providers. The majority of school districts have no experience educating these students and no understanding of best practices for educating them. When faced with these students, they assume they can educate them with existing staff and expertise. If parents request intervener services, school administrators don't support the designation of intervener services on a student's IEP. They will often state that an "intervener" is not listed on IDEA's list of related services, even though this list was never intended to be all inclusive. In some cases, parents have had to go to due process in order to obtain an appropriately trained intervener for their child.

The National Child Count report further states, "Interveners are key players in providing access to a child or youth who is deaf-blind... While it is encouraging to see that 726 children and youth are receiving intervener services, it is also discouraging that this accounts for only 7% of the population." Overall, the data on outcomes for students who are deafblind support the need for change in the delivery of services in the educational system. National statistics on outcomes for children who are deafblind in terms of employment and post-secondary education are dismal.³

Why can't a paraprofessional provide for a student who is deafblind?

The role of interveners in educational settings is uniquely different from the role of classroom paraprofessionals. Unlike general classroom paraprofessionals, interveners must have intensive training in deafblind intervention including communication methods, environmental access, sensory loss, deafblind instructional strategies, and methods to create independence rather than dependence. An intervener facilitates the student's connection to others by explaining and modeling the student's specific communication system, acting as a bridge to the world, and creating a safe and supportive environment that encourages successful interactions. Also, an intervener participates as an active member of the student's team including attendance at IEP meetings in order to contribute valuable day-to-day knowledge of the student.⁴

What national efforts have occurred?

On a national level, it's critical that intervener services be recognized in IDEA as a related service for children who are deafblind. Current legislation -- the Alice Cogswell and Anne Sullivan Macy Act (H.R. 4822 & S. 2681) -- contains language that supports the addition of intervener services under the related services category. Additionally, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) recognizes the value of designating intervener services as related services in the IEP process. In an informal guidance letter dated August 2, 2018, Ruth E. Ryder, then the Acting Director of Office of Special Education Programs, stated, "... *the Department's long standing interpretation is that the list of related services in the IDEA and the Part B regulations is not meant to be exhaustive ... if they are required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education... 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, ...*"

As previously stated, the National Intervener & Advocate Association, which represents interveners, families and professionals, requests that NASDSE adopt a policy of support to recognize intervener services as related services at the national, state, and local levels.

¹ Alsop, Blaha, & Kloos. (2006). *The Intervener in Early Intervention and Educational Settings for Children and Youth with Deafblindness*. Logan, UT: SKI-HI Institute.

² Bull, Robin. National Child Count. NCDB, <https://www.nationaldb.org/info-center/national-child-count/>. July 1, 2020.

³ Petroff, Jerry. "A National Transition Follow-Up Study of Youth with Deaf-Blindness: Revisited." *AER Journal: Research and Practice in Visual Impairment and Blindness*. Volume 3, Number 4, Fall 2010 pp. 136-137.

⁴ 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.