

**Deaf-blindness:
What constitutes eligibility for the disability category
deaf-blindness, and why is identification critical?
(January 4, 2010)**



It is estimated that the rate of deaf-blindness is expected to be .1% to .2% of the population of people with disabilities. Following the national trend, it would be estimated that 168 – 336 of the 167,930 students with disabilities in Virginia would have deaf-blindness. According to Virginia Department of Education's December 1, 2007 child count, 15 students were reported as receiving special education services under the primary disability category of deaf-blindness.

This suggests that many children with deaf-blindness may be included in different disability categories. A child who does not have full use of hearing and vision needs special support to develop communication/language skills, and subsequent literacy and access to the curriculum.

According to *Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia* (2009), "Deaf-blindness" means simultaneous hearing and visual impairment, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness. (8VAC20-81-10)

A child can have some usable vision and/or some usable hearing and still be included in the disability category of deaf-blindness.

In the past, some children in Virginia schools were included in the disability category of "severe disabilities." That category will not be used after this year.

The IEP team should consider whether each student meets eligibility criteria as a student

with deaf-blindness. A child with deaf-blindness, despite possible concomitant disabilities, should not be classified as a student with multiple disabilities.

"Multiple disabilities" means simultaneous impairments (such as intellectual disability with blindness, intellectual disability with orthopedic impairment), the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments. The term does not include deaf-blindness. (8VAC20-81-10)

"Deaf-blindness is a disability of access – access to visual and auditory information." (Alsop, Blaha, & Kloos, 2008) Most content information is presented visually and/or auditorily in the classroom. It is important that children experiencing both a vision and hearing loss are appropriately identified and receiving accommodations and/or modifications to ensure access to education. Stating that a child has deaf-blindness does not necessarily require a change in placement.

Training and technical assistance for working with students with deaf-blindness is available.

For more information:
Virginia Project for Children and Young Adults with Deaf-Blindness, Partnership for People with Disabilities, Virginia Commonwealth University Web site: www.vcu.edu/partnership/vadbproject/ or contact Dr. Julie Durando, Director, at (804) 828-8252. Text users dial 711. (Relay)

Virginia Department of Education Web site: <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/> or contact Dr. Debbie Pfeiffer at (804) 371-4059 or 1-800-422-2083. Text users dial 711. (Relay)