



# The Alaska Deaf-Blind Project

## Quarterly Newsletter

The Alaska Deaf-Blind Project serves any individual from premature birth to age 22 with a hearing and vision loss. We serve those in urban and remote areas, individuals not enrolled in school, and those in secondary school. The Alaska Deaf-Blind Project's assistance is provided free-of-charge to families, schools, and community organizations.

[Project Information](#)

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### A Letter from the Editor

I recently participated in an IEP meeting for a little guy transitioning from ILP services to Preschool. I was on the phone from several hundred miles away, and around the table were ILP staff, school district personnel, and family. Even though I wasn't there in person, I could picture how full the table was and how overwhelming that could feel. The best part was, even though it was a very full meeting, the family did not feel overwhelmed. Why? Everyone at the table (and on the phone) was there for their little boy.

As a Deaf-blind specialist, I have been lucky enough to work with some wonderful families, teachers, paraprofessionals, and students. I get to meet with SLP's, PT's, and OT's at many of the schools that I visit, as well. When I cannot meet them in person, I know that they are willing to collaborate over email and this collaboration is essential. It is essential for me as an educator as well as for the students that I am working with. When you have a child with dual sensory impairments, with or without additional disabilities, it can be hard to know where to start, when to push and when to pull back, or even what is reasonable to expect from your child/student. Having the support and knowledge of a team gives different perspectives, allows everyone to bounce ideas off of each other, and provides support not only when things go smoothly, but also when our kiddos are struggling.

*“Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much”  
- Helen Keller*

[Jennifer Schroeder](#)

SESA Deaf-blind and Multiple Disability Specialist

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## **Teamwork from a Mother's Perspective**

by LaVonna Currey

As a parent, I feel the team approach is essential for my child. It is very important that SESA observe her behavior and routine at school. Then as a team we implement the tools to help her in the best possible way. A fresh set of eyes on her often see patterns in her behavior that those who work with her everyday miss. It is vital that we continue to receive new information and tools to address some difficult behavior. We also get new strategies to help her learn and gain more independence.

The SESA specialist gives the classroom staff and myself many helpful ideas to help lessen her frustration. Video chatting and emails allow SESA to see if their suggestions are being correctly implemented. They allow the Teacher and Para who work with her on a daily basis to ask questions and get assistance.

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**Kendra and Morgan all set for a theme day at school!**

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## Teamwork and Collaboration: A Special Education Teacher's Thoughts by Erica West, FNSBSD

I always tell people that one of the things I love most about special education is working and collaborating with a team. I feel it is vital to every student's success to have a team behind them. A student's needs are diverse and varied, and to meet them, different viewpoints are essential in building a picture of the whole child. As a teacher, it is my job to bring together the varying team members and create a space where each voice is valued, considered, and used to address all the needs of a student. Team members might not see each other or talk together often. Teachers are the point of contact between all members of the team and can help collate and analyze the various pieces of information that team members contribute.

For a student that is deaf-blind and learning to communicate their wants and needs, it is vital that team members share information so that the child's needs are met. Sometimes a student will show skills and behaviors for some members of the team and not for others. Another setting such as the home environment or an OT therapy room might bring out new behaviors and skills not shown elsewhere. Some techniques that various team members might use may be more successful than others. Teachers take in all this information and then disseminate it to the team. The team can then use the information to create a comprehensive plan for the student. I firmly believe in and have seen the results from a truly collaborative team approach. I strongly encourage all those involved in education to create and foster strong team collaboration!

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## A Paraprofessional's Perspective by Hope Van Der Meulen

I think a team is essential for my student. Everyone has a different way to teach. It gives her ample ways to learn, plus she gets a different energy. I myself am very loud and animated. I sing a lot, and love to sign. I am patient enough let her do stuff on her own, and teach her how to be independent. I don't let her get away with shenanigans, but can recognize when she's toast. I enjoy bouncing ideas off my coworkers and learning from them about what works for them. With a team there is always new positive energy, and some people are stronger in different subjects. It's nice to have a break and recharge. As the saying goes it takes a village to raise a child.



**Avery loves to draw, write, and color-  
and is so proud of herself!**

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## An Ideal World

by Dena Luchsinger, Developmental Specialist

In an ideal world, every kid would have a team. Not every deaf-blind kid, not every special needs kid -- every kid.

A team is important because we see one another through our own unique perspective and purposes. No one but a parent sees their child as my own precious child, my highest priority. Only a therapist with a specialty will see how certain challenges can be addressed and yearn to do everything in his/her power to help that child overcome.

One thing I have appreciated about the time I've spent collaborating with Jennifer is that she and I share the perspective that the little guy we've supported together for two years now cannot and should not be supported in isolation but rather celebrated as a member of a supportive family. When we discuss priorities, we talk about informing the family of options they might not have the time to research for themselves, but also making sure they know that we understand that the decisions about how they will invest their time and energy is theirs alone, no judgment here ever of "not enough." We celebrate gains with them, but I think it is even more lovely that we celebrate simply what is. We're not there to fix anyone or anything because I don't think either of us believe anything or anyone needs fixing.

I don't know what these parents would think has been my role in their lives, but I hope, as their precious one exits ILP and enters preschool, they have learned to trust their guts. I've seen them grow from being determined but overwhelmed by a whole new world of services and experts who sometimes oversell their products. These parents have learned what I try to teach every baby I see: "Keep trying! You're doing it!" and eventually -- "You did it!"

Thanks, Jennifer, for sharing this journey with me.



Uriah is enjoying some imaginative play at home.

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# The Role of the Teacher for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

By Olivia Yancey, MDE

According to *Deaf Education Career Resources*, the field of education for the deaf is broad and diverse. An individual who obtains specialized education on how to be a teacher for the deaf and hard of hearing often (TODHH) typically focuses on language acquisition and strategies to teach this population of students with individual learning and communication needs. When reviewing job postings or resumes on [Deafed.net](http://Deafed.net) for Teachers of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the interested candidate or employer has to select the location, type of position, and communication modality. A couple of implications can be drawn from the job search options using this database provided by [Deafed.net](http://Deafed.net) and [Hands & Voices](http://Hands & Voices).

First, educational teams can and should include an individual who has training in teaching students with hearing loss in all stages of the student's developmental needs (e.g., early intervention through high school). This professional can offer a unique perspective to the Individual Education Planning Team on how hearing loss can impact the student's communication, education, and social skills. Part of the position statement of the Council of Exceptional Children-Division for Communication, Language, and Deaf/Hard of Hearing (DCD) stated, *"for students who are deaf or hard of hearing (DHH), credentialed teachers of students who are DHH (TODHH) are critical to the provision of appropriate evaluation, educational programming and planning, and student-centered instruction."*

The TODHH may be able to offer guidance to the multidisciplinary team in the following areas: assistive listening technology use, speech perception, listening skills, receptive and expressive language, social skills, self-advocacy, and academic present levels.

It is also important to highlight that teachers for the deaf or hard of hearing may have experience in one or more communication modalities (e.g., American Sign Language/English, Listening and Spoken Language, Total Communication, Cued Speech, etc.). Depending on the educational philosophy and training of the TODHH, this individual can offer individualized training or instruction for the family members, student, and educational staff throughout the academic year. This could range from teaching specific classes for the students, yearly in-services to general education teachers, regular training and collaboration with primary teachers, or early intervention training of language acquisition strategies for family members.

For example, if a student's chosen communication mode is receptive and expressive language in American Sign Language and written English, the Teacher for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing who has this communication modality and training in the subject area (e.g., mathematics, Language Arts, science, social studies, etc...) may offer direct instruction in the needed subjects or IEP goals in the student's own language.

Another example, if a student whose communication mode is listening and spoken language with an assistive listening device (e.g., hearing aids for each ear and a personal FM microphone system) and attending academic classes with her peers may obtain pull-out instruction from an itinerant Teacher of the Deaf or Hard of Hearing. This instruction could be for pre-teaching and re-teaching of language and academic objectives or self-advocacy skills needed. This itinerant TODHH may also provide bi-annual in-services for specific school staff that work with this student (e.g., troubleshooting hearing aids, accommodations for the student, teaching strategies).

The role or purpose of the Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing was briefly summarized. If the school staff have a student who has hearing loss, this author encourages the reader to review the following resources for more information:

- Council of Exceptional Children's document, *Teachers of Students Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing: A Critical Resource Needed for Legal Compliance*,
- Chapter 8 in NASDSE's document *Optimizing Outcomes for Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition).

For questions or comments, please contact the author via [email](#) or phone (907) 334-1332. [References](#)



**Hannah is learning how to control her own music-  
which she loves to dance along with!**

## The Role of the Teacher of the Visually Impaired/Blind

by Angel Black, M.S.Ed., TVI

In response to the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) most states began to analyze and collect student-specific data and study the effectiveness of educational programs that serve the low vision population. There are various data points that are required to meet the guidelines of the federal and state requirements such as, achievement in both academics (reading, math, and science), functional outcomes of the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC), the importance placed on the least-restrictive environment, timely and accurate assessments, and use of research or evidence-based instructional strategies. The role of the Teacher of the Visually Impaired or Blind (TVI) is not only rooted in meeting each of these requirements, but also in supporting the needs of the students, their families, and the team of professionals that also work with the students.

A TVI is generally a licensed special education teacher who has received specialized training and received certification in meeting the educational needs of students who have a visual impairment or who are blind, ages birth through 21. The role of the TVI is an instructional position that provides direct and/or consultative special education services specific to vision loss.

### **A TVI will:**

- Interpret the student's specific medical eye condition, doctor's reports, and the educational implications of the visual impairment.
- Administer Functional Vision Assessments/Learning Media Assessments and produce written reports on the results of each.

- Assume the responsibility for needed specialized instruction, training, and services required to meet the unique educational needs of the student.
- Assist student, parents, and others teachers:
  1. In understanding the unique educational needs and learning characteristics of visually impaired students.
  2. Make them aware of services and support available from local, state and national resources.
- Assist teachers and parents in making environmental adjustments for the student at school and at home.
- Provide instruction to teachers and parents in the development and maintenance of skills to meet the student's unique educational needs in the following Expanded Core Curriculum areas:
  1. Low vision and visual efficiency skills (sensory efficiency)
  2. Functional and communication skills (includes Braille reading and writing when needed, as well as Nemeth math)
  3. Daily independent living skills
  4. Career and vocational education skills
  5. Use of assistive technology
  6. Compensatory skills to access all areas of the general education curriculum
  7. Orientation & Mobility
  8. Recreational and leisure skills
  9. Self-Determination which includes self-awareness, assertiveness, creativity, pride, problem solving and self-advocacy skills
- Identify instructional methods and materials for meeting goals and objectives.
- Recommend appropriate service delivery options, including class placement, physical education, related services, specialized equipment, adaptations in testing procedures and time frames for implementation.
- Consider current and future reading and writing media for the student based on reading distance, reading rates and accuracy, portability of reading skills, visual fatigue, and tactual sensitivity.

The specific responsibilities of the TVI may vary depending on the student's age and needs, the goals the educational team sets, the type of educational program the student participates in, and of course, the policies of the student's school district.

This was a brief summarization of the role of the Teacher of the Visually Impaired/Blind. If you have any questions, comments or concerns please feel free to contact the author by [email](#) or by phone 907.334.1300 or 907.334.1333.

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