

**2023 Montana DeafBlind Census Frequently Asked Questions**

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**Who should complete the form?** Ideally the census form should be completed by the “best service provider,” someone who knows and works closely with the child. However, anyone with access to the child’s file can complete the form, including educators, school health personnel, family members, and/or the Montana DeafBlind Project staff.

**Do I need to sign the form?** Yes. If you are completing or confirming a form, please sign or print your name on the bottom of page four. This person can be different from the “best service provider contact” but should be someone we could get in touch with if there is a question about the form.

**What if we don’t have any deafblind students in our district at this time?** While it is possible that smaller Local Education Agencies may not have any students with combined hearing and vision challenges, statistically we know that there should be about 1.56 children who are deaf-blind for every 1,000 receiving special education services. Montana DeafBlind Project staff are available to assist you in your identiﬁcation efforts.

# What if I don’t know all the information requested on the form for a particular student? Please refer to the child’s cumulative file if possible and/or the IEP.

**Does reporting a child on this census obligate our school program to provide services such as vision, hearing, orientation and mobility?** No. Individualized needs and services are determined by the family and educators through the IEP or IFSP process.

**Why is the census so important?** The DeafBlind Census data provides national and state-specific information that can be analyzed to identify service and training needs. Accurate information about how many infants, children and youth in Montana have both hearing and vision problems is used to determine priorities and needs.

**What exactly is meant by the term “deafblind”?** Montana DeafBlind Project staff recognize that this is a difficult question for families and educators, and that the federal definition can be confusing. To make it more clear, we use a functional definition of deafblindness: If an individual (birth through age 21) has combined hearing and vision problems that are significant enough to require considerations (such as specialized adaptations, modifications, and strategies) when presenting information or interacting with the child, then that child is considered eligible to be included on the census.

**What if a child has multiple disabilities that happen to include vision and hearing problems?** Most children who are deafblind have additional disabilities, including intellectual disabilities, orthopedic impairments, health impairments, etc. Please complete a census form for all students who have hearing and vision problems, regardless of the presence or absence of additional disabilities.

**What if the hearing and/or vision problems are cortical in nature?** Please include children with sensory impairments that are cortical in nature—such as cerebral (or cortical) visual impairment, central auditory processing disorder, and/or auditory neuropathology—on the census. These students usually require adaptations and modifications to their programs in order for them to succeed. In addition, these hearing and vision problems often need to be considered when developing effective, formal communication systems for these individuals. When in doubt, refer to the functional definition of deafblindness above.

**What if “deaf-blindness” is not the student’s primary disability on their IEP?** It doesn’t matter which primary disability is identified on the IEP. The Montana DeafBlind Project knows that most students who are deafblind are identified under other federal/state primary disability categories, such as “intellectual disability”, “multiple disabilities”, “hearing impairment”, “visual impairment”, etc.

**Does a child have to meet my agency’s or school's criteria for vision and/or hearing impairment to be reported on this census?** No. Eligibility for vision and/or hearing impairment services varies from district to district, and definitions are interpreted in many different ways. For example, students with only a mild hearing loss and vision loss should be included in the DeafBlind Census count since a combined mild loss of both senses can create an adverse effect on educational success. In addition, students who are deafblind do not have to meet state criteria since this census and the state count are separate entities (the state count being the number of students in Montana for whom “deaf-blindness” is marked on the IEP as their primary disability).

**Why is a child’s etiology requested on the census?** Knowing a child’s etiology is important for a number of reasons. Maintaining this database allows Montana DeafBlind Project staff, with written permission of the families, to make important connections between families. For example, parents of a child with CHARGE syndrome might contact us to ask if there are other parents of children with the same syndrome in their area. The census allows Montana DeafBlind Project staff to make these family-to-family connections. Another important reason to know etiology is that the Montana census information is combined with data from around the country to determine which causes of deafblindness are on the increase or decrease, if there are geographic clusters of students with similar etiologies, etc.

**What are intervener services and why are they now on the census?** In educational environments, intervener services are provided by an individual, typically a para-educator, who has received specialized training in deafblindness and the process of intervention. An intervener provides consistent one-to-one support to a student who is deafblind (age 3 through 21) throughout the instructional day. This new question has been added to the census so that state and federal governments can examine the need for intervener-specific training and/or regulation initiatives.

**How can I get extra copies of this FAQ and/or the census form?** Extra copies of [all census materials can be obtained on our website at: http://mtdeafblind.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/project- initiatives-and-activities/national-child-count*/*](http://mtdeafblind.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/project-initiatives-and-activities/national-child-count/)

# What if I have a question that hasn’t been answered here?

Contact Theresa Baldry at [MTDeafBlind@mso.umt.edu](mailto:MTDeafBlind@mso.umt.edu) or (406) 243-4936.