



WA State Services for Children with Deaf-Blindness

The Deaf-Blind Census:

Answers To Frequently Asked Questions

To make this year's census process as clear and simple as possible, please take a look at these "frequently asked questions."

- 1. What is the census of children who are deaf-blind?** Washington State Services for Children with Deaf-Blindness (part of Washington Sensory Disabilities Services) conducts an annual count of children aged birth through 21 in Washington who have **combined vision and hearing loss**. This census information is confidential, with only certain data submitted to the U.S. Department of Education (e.g., cause of deaf-blindness and type of school placement), *not* student or parent names, home addresses, or any other identifying information.
- 2. Why is the census important nationally?** Funding for services relies on accurate information about how many infants, children and youth nationally have combined vision and hearing loss. When Congress allocates funds for State Deaf-Blind Projects, census data are one factor used to determine each state's share of the funding, and to shape program priorities.
- 3. Why is the census important to Washington State?** Our charge from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) is to support the developmental and educational needs of children and youth with combined vision and hearing loss—regardless of the special education category in which they are counted. Most children and youth with dual sensory disabilities are counted within a special education category other than "deaf-blind," such as multiple disabilities, deaf, hearing impaired, blind/visually impaired, or health impaired. For example, in 2014 Washington State counted 246 students with deaf-blindness, while local education agencies reported a total of 22 students as "deaf-blind" on the federal child count. The annual census gives us a more accurate picture of the number and location of children/youth who are eligible for our services and helps to ensure that their needs—as well as those of their families and service providers—are met. To view a summary of the most recent Deaf-Blind Census by ESD and age category see: <http://www.wsdsonline.org/db-childcount/>
- 4. What exactly is meant by the term "deaf-blind"?** A functional definition of deaf-blindness is as follows: If an individual (birth through age 21) has combined vision and hearing loss (or, in the case of birth-to-three year olds, is suspected of having both 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, the child is eligible to be included on the census and receive services from our project.

WAC 392-172A-01035 reads: "Deaf-blindness means concomitant hearing and visual impairments, 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 students with deafness or students with blindness and adversely affect a student's educational performance."

- 5. What if a child has multiple disabilities that include vision and hearing loss?** Many children who are deaf-blind have additional disabilities, including serious health impairments, developmental delay, or physical challenges. Please complete a census form for all students who have combined vision/hearing loss, regardless of additional disabilities.

6. **What if the hearing and/or vision issues are “processing” problems?** Children with cortical visual impairment (CVI) and/or a central auditory processing disorder should be included on our census. These students often require adaptations and modifications to their educational programs. When in doubt, refer to the functional definition in question #4 above.
7. **What if deaf-blindness is not listed as a student's primary disability condition on her or his IEP?** If a child or youth has combined vision and hearing loss, he/she should be reported on our census. Again, deaf-blindness does not need to be the primary special education eligibility label to be included on our federal census.
8. **Does including a child on the census obligate the school program to provide services such as vision or hearing services, orientation and mobility, etc.?** No. A student’s needs and services are determined by the family and educators through the Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP).
Why is a child's diagnosis included on the census? Knowing the reason that a child has combined vision impairment and hearing loss is important.
 - a. First, it allows project staff to make important family-to-family connections (with parent permission, of course). Parents of a child with CHARGE syndrome might contact our office and ask if there are other parents of children with CHARGE.
 - b. Washington State census information is combined with data from around the country to determine which causes of deaf-blindness are on the increase or decrease, or if there are geographic clusters of students with similar conditions.
 - c. This information is part of our needs assessment process and helps to determine training priorities.
10. **What if my district/agency does not have any students who are deaf-blind at this time?** Smaller districts might not have any students with combined hearing and vision problems. Statistically, we expect approximately two students who are deaf-blind for every 1,000 receiving special education services. Project consultants can assist in identification efforts.
11. **What if I don't know all the information requested on the census form for a particular student?** Give us as much information as you have. Don't worry if you are missing some information, e.g., the exact level of hearing loss. It’s more important that we have an accurate count of students.
12. **Who should complete the census form?** We would suggest a person familiar with the student, such as the teacher, complete the form.
13. **What if I have a question about the census that hasn't been answered here?** Please contact Khanh Huhtala at wsds@psed.org or by telephone at 425-917-7827 or 800-572-7000.
14. **For more information regarding Washington Sensory Disabilities Services (WSDS), an OSPI State Needs Project, please see the WSDS website at www.wsdsonline.org**