

# ***Open Hands Open Access: An Overview of New, Interactive Multimedia Learning Modules and Related National Initiatives to Support and Train Educators Working with Children and Youth with Deaf-Blindness***

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- Key Points:**
1. Definition of an intervener
  2. *Open Hands Open Access* (OHOA) online training modules
  3. National certification initiative
  4. Interveners as a related service in the reauthorization of IDEA

## 1. Definition of an intervener

“Intervener” is the term used in the field of deaf-blindness to describe the role of one-on-one paraeducators serving children and youth with combined vision and hearing loss. Interveners have specialized knowledge and skills in order to effectively meet the unique and complex needs of these students.

The following definition of the term intervener is from the National Center on Deaf-Blindness:

Interveners, through the provision of intervener services, provide access to information and communication and facilitate the development of social and emotional well being for children who are deaf-blind. In educational environments, intervener services are provided by an individual, typically a paraeducator, who has received specialized training in deaf-blindness and the process of intervention. An intervener provides consistent one-to-one support to a student who is deaf-blind (age 3 through 21) throughout the instructional day. Working under the guidance and direction of a student’s classroom teacher or another individual responsible for ensuring the implementation of the student’s IEP, an intervener’s primary roles are to (Alsop, Blaha, and Kloos, 2000):

- provide consistent access to instruction and environmental information that is usually gained by typical students through vision and hearing, but that is unavailable or incomplete to an individual who is deaf-blind;
- provide access to and/or assist in the development and use of receptive and expressive communication skills;
- facilitate the development and maintenance of trusting, interactive relationships that promote social and emotional well-being; and,
- provide support to help a student form relationships with others and increase social connections and participation in activities.

An intervener does not work in isolation. Instead, he or she:

- participates as an active member of the student's educational team,
- attends and participates in IEP meetings,
- attends regularly scheduled planning and feedback meetings with the teacher and other team members,
- is actively supervised and supported by the classroom teacher and other professionals responsible for the child's IEP, and
- receives ongoing support from professional educators with expertise in deaf-blindness (National Center on Deaf-Blindness, 2013).

## 2. Open Hands Open Access training modules

The federally funded National Center on Deaf-Blindness is developing the *Open Hands Open Access (OHOA)* online intervener training modules. The *OHOA* module content is aligned with the Council for Exceptional Children's *Specialization Knowledge and Skill Set for Paraeducators Who Are Interveners for Individuals with Deaf-Blindness (What every educator must know, 2009)*. There are many partners collaborating with NCDB in the development of the *OHOA* modules, including: state deaf-blind project personnel, consumers, family members, university personnel, educators including interveners, and distance education specialists. The highly rigorous *OHOA* modules include captioned and audio-described videos, readings, slide presentations, discussion boards, assignments, quizzes, and reflections.

The following eight *OHOA* modules are now available through the NCDB website. Another ten modules are currently being field-tested and eight more are in development this spring/summer. When the project is completed in 2016, *OHOA* will consist of a total of 26 modules.

- Module 1: An Overview of Deaf-Blindness and Instructional Strategies
- Module 2: The Sensory System, the Brain, and Learning
- Module 3: The Role of the Intervener in Educational Settings
- Module 4: Building Trusted Relationships and Positive Self-Image
- Module 5: Availability for Learning
- Module 6: Understanding Communication Principles
- Module 7: Emergent Communication
- Module 8: Progressing from Non-Symbolic to Symbolic Communication and Complex Language

For general information about *OHOA*, go to: <https://nationaldb.org/ohoa>

There are two ways to participate in *OHOA*: hosted and un-hosted. **Hosted** modules are led by a group of instructors who are available to facilitate each cohort's progress through the modules, including guiding online discussions, responding to questions, and commenting on submissions. California is part of a three-state cooperative—with the

state deaf-blind projects in Idaho and Montana—to provide hosted *OHOA* training. CDBS currently hosts cohorts of paraeducators, team members, and family members through the first eight *OHOA* modules. Universal modules, which are **un-hosted**, can be accessed by anyone at any time on the NCDB website. In the universal modules, participants go through the modules with others from throughout the U.S. and other countries. All *OHOA* module training, whether hosted or un-hosted, is provided at no cost to participants. When participating in hosted modules with CDBS, university credit from the University of Montana is available (one unit per module) for a cost of \$135 for up to four units. For information on hosted *OHOA* training, contact any CDBS staff member.

### 3. National certification initiative

The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, has charged the National Center on Deaf-Blindness to develop a national certification process for interveners that will be operational by the end of 2015. The certification will be based on the knowledge and skill standards for interveners set by the Council for Exceptional Children. A national committee is developing a set of certificate requirements that will include coursework, field-based practice, and an electronic portfolio to document evidence of knowledge and skills. Watch the NCDB website for more information on national intervener certification.

### 4. Intervenors as a Related Service in IDEA

There are many groups and individuals throughout the U.S. that are working with Congress to have interveners added as a related service in the next reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, much in the way that educational interpreters are a related service for students who are Deaf/hard of hearing. In February 2014, H.R. 4040—the Alice Cogswell and Anne Sullivan Macy Act—was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives by Matt Cartwright (D-PA), Mark Takano (D-CA), and Steve Stockman (R-TX). The Cogswell/Macy Act had two parts: Title I that addressed education of deaf students, and Title II that addressed students who are blind and visually impaired. With input from the field of deaf-blindness, the governmental relations staff of the American Foundation for the Blind has drafted a third title to the Cogswell/Macy Act that is specific to deaf-blindness and will address the role of interveners on educational teams. This addition, Title III, will be a part of the legislation when it is reintroduced in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress of the United States this year. The legislation will have a new number when it is reintroduced; watch the websites of advocacy organizations for information on this bill.

### **References and Resources**

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