



Considerations for Determining Eligibility for Minnesota Special Education Services for Children Who Are DeafBlind (Updated September 2023)

Information for Minnesota Special Educators

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In Minnesota, children with verified combined hearing and vision loss may be determined eligible to receive IDEA Part C or Part B special education services under the specific disability category criteria for deafblind. Source: [Minnesota Administrative Rule 3525.1327 Deaf-Blind](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/3525.1327) (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/3525.1327/>).

The following two subparts are presented in Minnesota Rule.

Subpart 1 defines deafblindness as medically verified visual loss coupled with (combined with) medically verified hearing loss, that, together, interfere with acquiring information or interacting in the environment. Subpart 1 also states criteria for eligibility for Deafblind: students must meet eligibility for both [Visually Impaired](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/3525.1345/) (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/3525.1345/>) and [Deaf and Hard of Hearing](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/3525.1331/) (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/3525.1331/>).

Subpart 2 encourages educators to think more broadly when identifying children with combined hearing and vision loss (deafblind) by including those who might be at risk. For example, this consideration should be expanded to include students who might attend Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf or Metro Deaf School and also have medically or functionally verified vision loss, as well as students who attend Minnesota State Academy for the Blind and also have medically verified hearing loss. In addition, students who are at risk of having combined hearing and vision loss include those with conditions and syndromes, such as CHARGE Syndrome, Usher Syndrome, Down Syndrome, Goldenhar Syndrome as well as Cytomegalovirus, and Prematurity. There are many other conditions and etiologies included in a non-exhaustive list at the [MN DeafBlind Project](https://www.dbproject.mn.org/aboutus/mdcriteria.html) website (<https://www.dbproject.mn.org/aboutus/mdcriteria.html>).

For students with multiple disabilities, it is important that special education teams evaluate both medical and functional hearing and vision in order to rule out deafblindness. Teams should also consider the unique communication needs that students who are deafblind have, by understanding how restricted access can affect behavior and communication. When students have combined hearing and vision loss, they may miss approximately 90% of information due to constricted access to sounds, speech and visual information at a distance. This information is typically learned incidentally, and children who are deafblind have compromised, limited access to this type of learning. The support of an intervener should also be considered as a means for providing unique, consistent one-to-one access.

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The following at-risk conditions are listed as part of Subpart 2:

- A. For students already identified as deaf or hard of hearing or visually impaired but have not yet had a medical or functional evaluation of the other sense (vision or hearing).

Consideration: Educators should include evaluations of both hearing and vision levels and function, especially if they have an identified syndrome or condition.

- B. For students who have an identified condition such as Usher Syndrome or Optic Atrophy, that includes a potential deterioration of vision or hearing in the future, they are at risk for developing deafblindness.

Consideration: Educators should include regular monitoring of both hearing and vision in order to track any changes that would significantly impact access to instruction, people and the environment. For example, many children with Usher Syndrome experience night blindness when vision first changes, so educators should be aware of the impact of lights being turned off in classrooms and note when students appear to miss more information in darkened settings. Changes in vision typically begin in adolescence so heightened monitoring is important and when significant changes occur that impact social and instructional access. Eligibility for deafblindness could, then, be determined through re-evaluation.

- C. Students who have a medically or functionally identified hearing loss and a verified deficit in vision determined by a functional evaluation in the learning environment, would be at risk for deafblindness.

Consideration: During initial and re-evaluations, cortical visual impairment or auditory neuropathy should be considered and regularly monitored for changes over time. Although these conditions may indicate ears and eyes medically functioning, information to the brain is not processed the same way and students may function with combined hearing and vision loss.

- D. When students have an identified syndrome or condition that includes hearing and vision loss in combination with multiple disabilities, for example, CHARGE Syndrome, educators should consider students at risk and both hearing and vision should be evaluated initially and on an ongoing basis.

Consideration: For students who have multiple disabilities and/or identified syndromes, hearing and vision should always be evaluated, including both medical and functional evaluations. For example, a child with a mild-to-moderate bilateral conductive hearing loss and cortical visual impairment may meet criteria for deafblind because of dual sensory loss, which includes both a medically verified hearing loss and functional visual impairment.

References:

[Minnesota Statute 125A.02 CHILD WITH A DISABILITY DEFINED](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/125A/full#stat.125A.02)

(<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/125A/full#stat.125A.02>)

[Categorical Disabilities, Minnesota Department of Education](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/sped/cat/) (<https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/sped/cat/>)

[Minnesota Administrative Rule 3525.1327 Deaf-Blind](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/3525.1327/) (categorical eligibility criteria - Deaf-Blind)

(<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/3525.1327/>)

[Minnesota Administrative Rule 3525.1345 Visually Impaired](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/3525.1345/) (categorical eligibility criteria - Visually Impaired)

(<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/3525.1345/>)

[Minnesota Administrative Rule 3525.1331 Deaf and Hard of Hearing](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/3525.1331/) (categorical eligibility criteria - Deaf and Hard of Hearing) (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/3525.1331/>)

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