

The Project for NM Children and Youth who are Deaf-blind

CENSUS Information Q & A

It's springtime, which means that it's time for every state deaf-blind project to initiate annual census activities, including New Mexico. What exactly does this mean for our State? And why is this data collection so important? These and other frequently asked questions will be answered below:

1. What is the census?

Answer: All state deaf-blind projects that receive federal funding are required to complete an annual registry or "census" of children and youth, birth through 21 years of age, who are deaf-blind or otherwise known as dual sensory impaired. The data is compiled into a confidential report and submitted to the U. S. Department of Education by April 1st of each year.

2. What type of child qualifies for the census?

Answer: The child does not have to be completely deaf and blind; in fact the majority of those identified have some degree of functional vision and hearing. It does not matter if the child is classified by the school district under another category such as multiply impaired, as long as they meet the requirement of having vision and hearing loss in addition to their other disabilities. Children who have cortical vision and /or hearing impairment should also be included in the census count. **The federal definition of deaf-blindness includes "children and youth having auditory and visual impairments, the combination of which creates such severe communication and other developmental and learning needs that they cannot be appropriately educated without special education and related services, beyond those that would be provided solely for children with hearing impairments, visual impairment, or severe disabilities, to address their educational needs due to these concurrent disabilities".**

In addition **all infants, toddlers, and preschoolers** who have vision and hearing loss need to be identified and represented on the census. This includes all "children who are experiencing developmental delays in vision and hearing, have a diagnosed physical or mental condition that has a high probability of resulting in developmental delays in hearing and vision, or who is at risk of having substantial developmental delays in hearing and vision if early intervention services are not provided."

3. Why is it important to participate in the census?

Answer: Early identification of vision and hearing loss is very important, as strategies need to be implemented as soon as possible to help these children learn about their world in alternative ways. Since these children have a "dual sensory impairment", techniques that are utilized for children with either a hearing impairment and/or a vision impairment are often not enough to meet the unique learning needs of children with deaf-blindness. **Subsequently, very specific, individualized, instructional strategies need to be developed for each child.** If these strategies are utilized at home as well as in the educational setting, then this can mean a significant improvement in the quality of life for these children and youth.

The Project for NM Children and Youth Who are Deaf-blind provides technical assistance, training, and support for families, service providers and educational teams working with children and youth who are deaf-blind. Project staff, work closely with the New Mexico Public Education Department-Special Education, school districts throughout NM, early childhood agencies, and families to identify these children. Another reason why it is very important to accurately count the number of children in our state who qualify for services, is that NM funding for technical assistance and training is based upon the number of children identified.

4. How is the information reported?

Answer: Families, service providers and educators, assist the Project by completing the census form, or updating it annually. If we have a home address on a child, we send the form directly to the family. If not, we send the form to the school/agency the child attends. At times, we may also send the form to other members of the child's team such as NM outreach staff of the NM School for the Visually Impaired and the NM School for the Deaf as well as NM Special Education Directors.

Once the Project has compiled the information requested on each child, it is then sent to The National Technical Assistance Consortium who compiles it by state, for the US Department of Education. **The report is kept confidential and no personally identifiable information is sent, such as the child's name, address, etc.**

5. How is the information used?

Answer: The information is used to track and monitor the incidence of Deaf-blindness across the country, as well as in each state. **The information provided also helps each state plan for appropriate training and technical assistance activities to meet the needs of the children and youth, families, service providers, and educators within each state.** And finally, once a child is identified, the Project can then initiate and respond to any requests for technical assistance and training on behalf of that child.

6. How can I help with completion of the census this year?

Answer: **You can help by completing or updating the census form** that you receive in the mail. If you do not receive one and know of a child that might qualify, please contact the Project at:

The Project for NM Children and Youth who are Deaf-blind

Toll Free #: 1.877.614.4051

V/TTY: 1.505.272.0321

<http://cdd.unm.edu/deafblind>