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MEMORANDUM

TO: Special Education Directors
WV Schools for the Deaf and Blind
WV Schools for Diversion and Transition

FROM: Sheila Paitsel, Director, Special Education
Office of Federal Programs & Support
WV Department of Education

DATE: January 5, 2026

SUBJECT: 2025 Census of Children with Deafblindness (reporting 2026)

Each year as part of the reporting requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), children and youth who are deafblind must be counted. This requirement is separate from the December 1 child count and is not dependent on primary exceptionality. With your cooperation, 62 West Virginia children who are deafblind were identified last year. This count constitutes the deafblind census which is used to support the funding of West Virginia's Deafblind grant. West Virginia's Deafblind Project, funded through the United States Department of Education, provides in-service training, technical assistance, workshops, and resource materials to districts serving these children.

Many states throughout the country appear to be undercounting students who are deafblind. Most of the children with dual sensory loss have additional disabilities and are reported under categories such as intellectual disabilities or other health impaired on the December Child Count. The federal definition of "Deafblind" is as follows:

For children 3 to 21 deafblindness is defined as:

"Deafblindness means concomitant hearing and vision 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 children with deafness or children with blindness. "(IDEA, 2004)

Policy 2419 states that deafblindness should be the primary eligibility for a student who meets the criteria including those with additional impairments contributing to the student's severe educational needs.

For infants and toddlers receiving Part C early intervention services, deafblindness is defined as: "Concomitant hearing and vision impairments or delays, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and intervention needs that specialized early intervention services are needed."

Part of this group is children considered functionally deafblind. Children who are functionally deafblind are typically so severely impaired that their visual-auditory acuity cannot be determined using conventional measures, the child requires adaptations in both auditory and visual modes of instruction, or the child does not respond to auditory or visual stimuli in the environment. If, in your professional opinion, a student appears to be functioning as if he/she has both a vision and hearing impairment, include him/her in the census. Students who are cortically deaf and have vision impairment should be included as well as students who are cortically blind and have a hearing impairment. If the student is receiving special education and/or related services, then you also need to identify how you count them (IDEA Part B or Part C). Remember that a student may be eligible for special education under another category (e.g. OHI) but also have vision and hearing losses. This count does not change the special education category. A record of the evaluation and diagnosis of a hearing loss and vision loss, or diagnostic attempts, must be maintained by the local school district.

The count is to be as of December 1, 2025. See attachment/form. As a reminder, The Office of Special Education is attempting to align the December 1 child count with the deafblind census realizing that many of the children on the deafblind census would not have the primary exceptionality of deafblindness. Each child should have a documented loss of vision and hearing or indication of Cortical Visual Impairment or Central Auditory Processing Disorder. Be sure to keep an extra form so you can register additional students when they are located during the year.

The census is due back by February 3, 2026. Information may be mailed to:

Debbie Adams
WV Instructional Resource Center
301 E. Main St.
Romney, WV 26757