



William Daugherty, Superintendent

## Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

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for educational services for all blind and visually impaired students in Texas

## The Challenge of Low Incidence Disabilities

### Numbers are low:

- Only 8475 students are registered as visually impaired in Texas.
- Only 738 students have both a visual and a hearing impairment, or deafblindness.
- As of November 2009, there were 926 full and part time VI professionals in Texas
  - 701 full and part time specialized teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs)
  - 225 full and part time orientation and mobility specialists (COMS)

### Teachers and students are geographically dispersed and isolated:

- There are VI students in 745 (72%) of the 1030 Texas school districts. 80% of those districts have fewer than 4 students.
- TVIs typically work in isolation as the only knowledgeable person in their field in an entire district. In 601 districts, there is only 1 TVI.

### Students are extremely varied:

- A caseload for a VI professional will range widely and include:
  - newborn infants served in their homes
  - 22 year old young adults transitioning into work and/or college
  - Students with additional multiple disabilities, including emotional, cognitive, medical, physical and sensory limitations
  - Students preparing for postsecondary degrees and leadership careers
  - Students with some, lots or no vision and some, lots or no hearing
  - Students using Braille, tactual sign language, optical devices and large print

Their educational needs are complex, and for many students, specialized intervention must be specifically designed to address their sensory needs.

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## How does Texas use technology to overcome these challenges?

### College coursework is accessed across the state:

- Since 1996 Texas Tech University and Stephen F. Austin State University have collaborated with the ESCs and TSBVI and other stakeholders to increase the number of VI professionals by 85%. With moneys from the Legislature and a Federal grant, distance methods for providing the required coursework allow participants to take **college coursework either online or through videoconferencing**. All 20 Education Service Center (ESC) regions have benefited.

### Coursework is supplemented with mentors for new professionals:

- We offer the largest and 1st **VI mentor program** in the country, supplying experienced professionals to support and encourage new professionals.
- With such isolated practitioners, mentors use a powerful low tech tool, **email**, to communicate and advise.
- 58% of new professionals working with blind students are still in the process of taking coursework, so mentors are crucial to develop and maintain quality instruction.

### Inservice training is available in multiple formats:

- The TSBVI Outreach Program relies heavily on collaboration with regional ESCs, and their expertise. We offer over 200 presentations a year across the state. Increasing numbers are now offered through **interactive videoconferencing** transmitted to ESCs and from there into local districts.
- **An accessible website at [www.tsbvi.edu](http://www.tsbvi.edu)** provides a centralized resource where both new and experienced VI professionals from around Texas (and around the world) find relevant resources.
- New forms of **web-based learning** support the flow of anytime, anywhere learning in this field. Using digital videocameras locally to record interactions and **upload video** for instant consultation is a new technique that shows a lot of promise.
- **Wikis, listservs, blogs, and social networking** sites like Facebook, NING, and others are being used in pilot sites across Texas and by Texas family organizations to unite isolated families and professionals.
- The **new TSBVI campus will be wired** to share information from classrooms and the new conference facilities across the state in a way that was not possible before..