

Pathways for Intervener Training in the United States

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The benefit of interveners for children who are deafblind was first documented in a longitudinal study conducted by Watkins, et al (1994) as part of a demo site project funded by the US Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). To date, there are no supporting empirical studies, however, IEP teams are observing through practice that students who are deafblind achieve more educational outcomes when they have the support of a trained intervener. Kennedy (2021) explains that there are several ways for interveners to learn the knowledge and skills they need to support a student who is deafblind in school settings. While knowledge may be obtained in a variety of ways, Kennedy (2021) contends that learning is taken to a transformational level when prospective interveners engage in a guided portfolio development process involving the full set of CEC competencies for interveners. The diagram shows how prospective interveners can progress from being hired to earning either the National Intervener Certificate (NICE) offered through the Paraeducator Resource and Research Center (PAR²A) or the National Intervener Credential offered through the National Resource Center for Paraeducators, Related Service Providers, and Intervenors (NRCPara), both of which require the completion of a structured, guided portfolio based on the full set of CEC competencies (NCDB, 2016; NRCP, 2022). Intervenors who achieve either qualification have demonstrated knowledge and skills that elevate them to a standard that deserves to be recognized in title and commensurate compensation.

Two Pathways. By definition, an intervener is someone who has received specialized training in order to work 1:1 with a student who is deafblind (NCDB, 2021). As

indicated by the blue boxes, learning begins when a person starts working with a student who is deafblind. At this stage, learning occurs through trial and error, making mistakes, and gaining information from team members who already know the student (Kennedy, 2021). It is possible to provide *intervener-like support*, but the title of intervener should be reserved for those who have demonstrated all of the CEC competencies for interveners by developing a portfolio approved by the NRCPara or the PAR²A Center (see the two pathways on diagram, p. 4).

Due to the unique needs of students who are deafblind, it is common for people who are supporting the students to seek deafblind-specific training. There are several ways that people providing 1:1 support for a student who is deafblind to receive intervener-specific training. Current training methodologies include higher education coursework, online modules, a structured series of in-person trainings offered through state deafblind projects and state schools for the Deaf and blind, coaching from an expert in deafblindness, or a combination of two or more of these methods (Kennedy, 2021). This stage of learning is represented by the orange boxes. Like the previous stage, people who have received training can provide informed, *intervener-like support* but should not have the title of intervener.

Some people who have learned how to support a student who is deafblind will seek national-level qualifications. The pathway provided by the PAR²A Center is represented in green. The pathway offered by the NRCPara Center is represented in purple. Prospective interveners should choose a pathway toward a national-level qualification based on: 1) district requirements

and, 2) personal goals. Both organizations require people to complete a portfolio process that is guided by an expert in deafblindness. The portfolio requirements vary to some degree, but the shared components are narrative reflections, photographs, video clips, and work samples that demonstrate how the intervener candidate supports a student who is deafblind. The resulting portfolio must reflect the full set of intervener competencies as recently approved by the Council for Exceptional Children (2022). At the point a person has received notice that their portfolio has passed, then they should be officially recognized as an intervener. Teams supporting a student who is deafblind would benefit from the assurance that a person who has the title of intervener does indeed have training tied to: 1) a specialized skill set *and* 2) has successfully completed a portfolio based on the full set of CEC competencies. An intervener should be someone who has reflected on their practice competency by competency, transforming their learning to a level higher than people who stopped short of earning a national-level qualification. This expectation would help to justify why interveners should be paid more than other paraprofessional-level employees. Additionally, both PAR²A and NRCPara Centers require interveners to earn ongoing professional development. Some interveners are inspired to advance their education to earn degrees in teaching, speech-language pathology, etc.

Other pathways. An Internet search for intervener training or qualifications could bring up information about how interveners are trained and receive qualifications in other countries. Care should be taken to find the associated country to avoid confusion. In the United States, the National Intervener

and Advocate Association (NIAA) is seeking to develop a training and qualification process leading to the title of Deafblind Intervener Specialist, a position they hope to have recognized at the related service provider level.

References

- Council for Exceptional Children. (2022). *Initial Specialty Set: Deafblind Intervener*. Arlington, VA: Council for Exceptional Children. Retrieved June 27, 2022, from Deafblind Intervener SS 2022.pdf (tedcec.org)
- Kennedy, B. M. S. (2021). How interveners learn the knowledge and skills required to support students who are deafblind in school settings [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Central Michigan University.
- National Center on Deaf-Blindness. (2016). *What is NICE?* Monmouth, OR: National Center on Deaf-Blindness and The Research Institute at Western Oregon University. <https://nationaldb.org/pages/show/national-intervener-certification-e-portfolio/nice/whatis-nice>
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- National Resource Center for Paraeducators, Related Service Providers, and Intervenors (2022). *National Intervener Credentialing*. Retrieved June 27, 2022, from <http://www.nrcpara.org/intervener>
- Watkins, S., Clark, T., Strong, C., & Barringer, D. (1994). The effectiveness of an intervener model of services for young deafblind children. *American Annals of the Deaf*, 139(4), 404-409.

PAR² A Center National Intervener Certificate

NICE Review and Advisory Boards conduct regular training and collaboration meetings to address changes, challenges, and updates

NICE portfolio development occurs using NICE-approved procedures and is aligned with CEC knowledge and skills

A mentor works with the intervener to guide them through the portfolio development process and approves the portfolio prior to submission

Portfolio is reviewed and scored by at least two DB experts trained as NICE Reviewers using a field-tested rubric to ensure all CEC knowledge and skill competencies have been adequately addressed

A passing score of 75% with 80% Interobserver agreement among the reviewer scores is required

Quantitative score is accompanied by qualitative feedback to ensure future growth and professional development of the candidate

More details available: <https://paracenter.org/>

NRCPara National Intervener Credential

Coursework and methodology are approved by NRCPara to ensure that requirements are met and there is fidelity of implementation between higher education training programs

Knowledge competencies demonstrated by transcripts that indicate 12 credits of coursework with grades of B- (80%) or better

Three structured coaching visits from an expert in deafblindness during hands-on practicum (200+ hours) with qualitative feedback on performance to ensure development of skills

Portfolio development to demonstrate skills is guided by the instructor through quantitative and qualitative feedback provided over the course of the program

Program instructor approves the student portfolio before it is submitted to NRCPara

NRCPara conducts a comprehensive, independent review to determine if all CEC knowledge and skill competencies have been adequately addressed

More details available: <https://nrcpara.org/>

