



*in*Forum

In Depth Policy Analysis

**Blindness and Visual Impairment:
State Infrastructures
and
Programs**

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Blindness and Visual Impairment: State Infrastructures and Programs

In 2004, nearly 30,000 students were included in the blind or visually impaired (B/VI) category (approximately .04% of the total public school population).¹ This figure, however, only includes children and youth for whom blindness or visual impairment is identified as a *primary* disability. States indicate that these numbers may actually double or triple when children are counted for whom B/VI is a secondary or tertiary disability.² The purpose of this document is to describe the variety of state infrastructures and programs under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that serve children and youth who are blind or visually impaired. Project Forum at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) conducted this study as part of its cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

Information Gathering

Information was collected in two stages. First, in collaboration with NASDSE's Blind Education Initiative, a brief survey instrument was developed (See Appendix A for a copy of the survey).³ This survey was distributed in November of 2005 to the state education agencies (SEAs) serving all 50 states and 11 nonstate jurisdictions. By January 2006, Project Forum had received a total of 40 responses. In an effort to represent the diversity of state infrastructures and programs in place throughout the nation, Project Forum then selected eight states for follow-up interview: *Colorado, Iowa, Maryland, Minnesota, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Virginia and West Virginia*.⁴ The interview protocol was also developed collaboratively with the Blind Education Initiative and Project Forum staff conducted interviews during the months of December 2005 and January 2006 (See Appendix B for a copy of the interview protocol). Thematic analysis of the interview data was conducted using ATLAS.ti 4.1 – a software program designed to aid in the analysis of qualitative data.

¹ Information was retrieved from www.ideadata.org and includes totals for both children ages 3-5 and students age 6-21 being served under IDEA.

² See subsection of this document titled *Reporting and Accountability* for more information on this phenomenon.

³ Project Forum gratefully acknowledges the contributions of Gaylen Pugh, Director of the Blind Education Initiative at NASDSE, to this document.

⁴ Project Forum gratefully acknowledges the following individuals for taking the time to be interviewed and to review an earlier version of this document: Karen Blankenship, Consultant for Visual Disabilities, Iowa Bureau of Children, Families and Community Services; Tanni Anthony, State Consultant on Visual Impairment, Colorado Department of Education; Lisa Wright, Vision/Low Incidence Specialist, Division of Special Education, Maryland State Department of Education; Annette Carey, Low Incidence Coordinator, Office of Special Education, West Virginia Department of Education; Tom Winton, Consultant for Visually Impaired and Assistive Technology, Exceptional Children Division, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction; Jean Martin, State Specialist, Minnesota Resource Center: Blind/Visual Impairments, Minnesota Department of Education; Misty Kimbrough, Director of Special Education, Special Education Services, Oklahoma State Department of Education; Pat Abrams, Director – Special Education Services, Virginia Department of Education.

Findings

Survey findings are reported first, followed by interview findings. Both sets of findings revealed a variety of state-level infrastructures as well as a wide range of programs currently in place to serve this population.

Survey Findings

State-level Personnel

According to survey data, 35 of the 40 responding states have one or more state-level staff dedicated to handling issues relating to students with B/VI. Twenty-nine of the 35 included information on full-time equivalency (FTE) of their staff. Of these, seven states have exactly one (1.0) FTE state-level staff person; 16 states have less than one FTE state-level staff person (the range was from .05 FTE to .95 FTE) and six states have more than one FTE state-level staff person (the range was from 1.5 FTE to 12 FTE). It is important to note that in some cases, states included only SEA administrative staff in their FTE count, and in others, states also included SEA staff providing consultation and/or technical assistance (TA) to local education agencies (LEAs). These findings are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1 – State-level Staff Dedicated to Blind and Visually Impaired Issues (n=29)

< 1.0 FTE	1.0 FTE	> 1.0 FTE
AK, AZ, DC, GA, ID, NC, OR, MD, MA, MO, NE, NM, SC, UT, WV, WY = 16 states	CO, FL, HI, IA, MN, TX, WI = 7 states	AR, KY, MI, ND, PA, VT = 6 states

State-operated Schools for the Blind

Respondents from 32 states reported that their state operates a school for the blind, seven of which are “dual sensory schools” (i.e., combining both a school for the blind and a school for the deaf). Eight states have no state-operated school for the blind. These findings are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2 – State-operated Schools for the Blind (N=40)

School for the Blind	Dual Sensory School	None
AZ, AR, CA, GA, ID, IN, IA, KY, MD, MI, MN, MS, MO, NE, NM, NY, NC, ND, OK, OR, PA, SD, TN, TX, WI = 25 states	AL, CO, FL, SC, UT, VA, WV = 7 states	AK, BIA, DE, DC, HI, MA, VT, WY = 8 states

Of the 32 states with a state-operated school for the blind, the state school board has jurisdiction over the school in 21 (See Table 3). Of these, the SEA and board of directors for the state-operated school for the blind share jurisdiction under *Arkansas* state law and *Nebraska's* SEA shares jurisdiction over the school for the blind with the regional education agency in which the school is located. Interviewees from 11 states report that other entities have jurisdiction over the state-operated school for the blind, including the state legislature (AZ); other state agencies such as the Department of Health Services (NC) or Department of Rehabilitative Services (OK); the board of directors for the school for the blind (AL, MD); and the board of regents (IA). In *Indiana*, the school for the blind is a stand-alone state agency.

Table 3 – Jurisdiction Over State-operated Schools for the Blind (n=32)

State School Board	Other Entity
AR, CA, FL, GA, ID, KY, MI, MS, MO, NE, NM, NY, ND, OR, PA, TN, TX, UT, VA, WV, WI = 21 states	AL, AZ, CO, IN, IA, MD, MN, NC, OK, SC, SD = 11 states

State-level Initiatives and Programs

Respondents from 36 states reported that they have one or more state-level initiatives or long-standing programs in place related to serving students with B/VI. It is important to note that because states volunteered information on their state-level initiatives and programs, the numbers below most likely underestimate the full extent of activities taking place across states. Of the 36 states that provided such information under this item:

- 17 have initiatives relating to TA to LEAs serving students who are B/VI;
- nine have initiatives relating to ongoing professional development for teachers of the visually impaired, other educational staff and parents;
- nine described lending libraries for teachers of the visually impaired and/or students who are B/VI;
- eight described SEA support for personnel preparation programs at institutions of higher education (IHEs) within the state;
- seven reported state deaf-blind projects;
- four reported initiatives relating to low vision;
- three reported initiatives relating to secondary transition for students who are B/VI; and
- three described state legislation relating to B/VI issues.

Respondents from 19 states reported “other” types of initiatives. These initiatives – either currently in place or anticipated in the near future – include: distance education for teachers of the visually impaired; peer interaction programs at elementary, middle and high schools; a universal design project for students who are print impaired; an expanded core curriculum resource guide; B/VI focus groups and discussion groups; a handbook for teachers of the visually impaired; a listserv for teachers of the visually impaired; a comprehensive needs assessment for teachers of the visually impaired; and summer school for students with B/VI.

Interview Findings

This section summarizes findings from interviews conducted with SEA staff from the following eight states: *Colorado, Iowa, Maryland, Minnesota, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Virginia* and *West Virginia*.

State-level Personnel

Of the eight states interviewed, six have had a state-level staff person designated to handle issues relating to B/VI for some time and two states (OK, VA) are currently in the process of hiring/training such a person. *Iowa* and *Minnesota* each have a full-time (1.0 FTE) state-level staff person. *Maryland's* position is .95 FTE; *Colorado's* is .75 FTE; *North Carolina's* is .7 FTE; and *West Virginia's* is .35 FTE. *Virginia's* new position will be .5 FTE. According to interviewees from several states, the person in this position is formally identified as a state-level "Vision Consultant,"⁵ whereas in other states, this role appears to be less formalized and the person may be responsible for non-B/VI issues as well (e.g., *Virginia's* position is split equally between issues relating to B/VI and issues relating to deafness and hard of hearing; *West Virginia's* position devotes 35% to B/VI issues, 30% to deaf-blind and 35% to deafness and hard of hearing).

In five of the states interviewed, these positions are funded through IDEA Part B funds; in *West Virginia* the position is funded by a combination of IDEA Part B funds and state funds; and in *Iowa* and *Maryland* the position is funded jointly by the SEA and the state-operated school for the blind.

Interviewees described a wide range of responsibilities associated with the position. Most commonly, state-level staff are responsible for:

- coordinating professional development for teachers of the visually impaired, orientation and mobility (O&M) specialists and/or paraprofessionals;
- providing technical assistance to LEAs;
- conducting annual needs assessments and developing and implementing action plans;
- representing issues related to B/VI on various state-level taskforces and workgroups;
- addressing issues related to assessment of students with B/VI (e.g., identifying test item bias);
- serving as liaisons between the SEA and the state-operated school for the blind;
- collaborating with institutions of higher education (IHEs); and
- administering federal quota funds.⁶

⁵ According to the interviewee from *North Carolina*, an organization for vision consultants exists, known as the Association of State Education Consultants for the Visually Impaired (ASECVI). The organization does not yet have a website, but does operate a listserv for state vision consultants and other interested parties.

⁶ Federal quota funds are an annual appropriation shared proportionally among all public schools and private non-profit educational agencies for students who are B/VI. States conduct an annual registration of students who are legally blind to determine their share of these funds. Each state's share of these funds is then held in escrow at the

Other responsibilities mentioned by no more than one interviewee included developing policies and procedures, participating in focused monitoring visits, managing the state's Deaf-Blind Project and monitoring grant programs. The interviewee from *Minnesota* reported that responsibilities also included facilitating more communities of practice addressing a variety of issues relating to students with B/VI (e.g., accessible materials, low vision, assistive technology, assessment and mentoring of new teachers of the visually impaired).

Most of these positions require a background and/or certification in special education (preferably with an emphasis in B/VI) and school-based or agency-based experience working with this population or other low-incidence populations. Many require a Master's degree and several require prior administrative experience. Significantly, the three states with a full-time vision consultant all specifically require licensure in B/VI and experience teaching students with B/VI.

Most, but not all, of these positions are housed at the SEA. *Minnesota's* vision consultant, for example, is located at the state-operated school for the blind and *Iowa's* was only recently transferred from the school for the blind to the SEA.

Infrastructure

Several interviewees described unique features of their state's infrastructure for serving students with B/VI:

- *Colorado* has a state leadership entity called the Vision Coalition made up of SEA staff, representatives from agencies serving students with B/VI and teachers of the visually impaired from the school for the blind, as well as from four regions of the state.
- *Virginia* has a Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired that works closely with the SEA to provide services and coordinate professional development and technical assistance to LEAs.
- *Minnesota* statute mandates a resource center for B/VI that provides leadership for teachers, workshops and summer institutes for students with B/VI. The mandate establishes an advisory committee that develops recommendations regarding the resource center.

State-operated Schools for the Blind

Governance

In two states (*VA*, *WV*) the state-operated schools for the blind are governed by the state's board of education and in the remaining five states jurisdiction falls under a separate entity. In *Iowa*

American Printing House for the Blind and, as orders for materials are processed, their cost is drawn against the account.

and *Minnesota* governance for the school for the blind is under the jurisdiction of a governor-appointed board of regents/directors and in *Maryland* governance is under the jurisdiction of a board of directors that is partially appointed by the governor. *Colorado's* school for the blind is also governed by a board of trustees. In *North Carolina*, jurisdiction of the school falls under the state's Department of Health and Human Services and in *Oklahoma* jurisdiction falls under the state's Department of Rehabilitative Services.

Although two interviewees reported that having a separate governing structure for the state-operated school for the blind posed no challenges, three believed that there were some. For instance, the interviewee from *Iowa* noted that because the board of regents was also responsible for overseeing three IHEs, the school for the blind is sometimes treated as "second priority." Two other interviewees noted that because the school for the blind does not fall under jurisdiction of the state school board, the school's concerns are at risk of being "overlooked."

In-service Personnel Preparation

The interviewee from *Colorado* reported that in-service personnel preparation is almost always conducted jointly for teachers of the visually impaired who teach at the school for the blind and teachers of the visually impaired who serve the rest of the K-12 public school system, and that there is "fantastic participation" by all. In the remaining seven states (IA, MD, MN, NC, OK, VA, WV) some personnel preparation for teachers of the visually impaired is conducted jointly and some separately. Many of these interviewees noted that getting staff from the school for the blind to participate in state-wide personnel preparation activities "doesn't happen naturally" and that personnel preparation activities are "not as integrated" as they would like. Examples of the ways in which personnel preparation is conducted jointly include the following:

- *Colorado* – The state vision consultant is responsible for coordinating professional development opportunities throughout the year, including an annual state conference on B/VI issues. Events have been held on the school for the blind campus, such as the annual O&M training.
- *Minnesota* – The Statewide Vision Network provides professional development opportunities four times per year (one of which can be "down-linked") for all teachers of the visually impaired. In addition, a community of practice in the area of B/VI organizes professional development activities that allow participants to explore topics in greater depth than can be done during a one- to two-day conference.
- *North Carolina* and *Iowa* – The school for the blind in each of these states hosts professional development activities on campus. In *North Carolina* this includes an annual vision conference which involves collaboration with the SEA, the school for the blind, professional organizations, the state agency for the blind, teachers of the visually impaired from across the state and other groups. *Iowa's* school for the blind holds summer institutes on campus which promote collaboration between general educators and teachers of the visually impaired.

- *Virginia* – The Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI) provides one state-wide workshop every year to all teachers of the visually impaired and two annual trainings for teachers of the visually impaired within each of the DBVI’s six regions.

Consultation

In six states (IA, MD, MN, NC, OK, WV), consultation plays a significant role in the relationship between the school for the blind and the rest of the K-12 public school system. However, several interviewees reported that consultation is not as extensive and/or is not done “as effectively as we would hope for.” Interviewees from all six of these states described outreach programs on the part of the school for the blind enabling itinerant teachers of the visually impaired and/or O&M specialists to provide technical assistance to teachers serving students with B/VI throughout their state. These outreach services are particularly critical in remote regions of states like *Colorado* where hiring and retaining a full-time teacher of the visually impaired can be challenging. Some states described “courtesy” consultations, which are free of charge to LEAs, but most described situations in which teachers of the visually impaired and O&M specialists are employees of the school for the blind who consult with LEAs on a fee-for-service basis. In *Iowa*, for instance, *all* O&M specialists are hired and evaluated through the school for the blind, but are paid for by area education agencies who then assign them to work in particular LEAs. In *Oklahoma*, teachers of the visually impaired throughout the state are welcome to visit the school for the blind and to bring students with them for free evaluation.

In terms of consultation, several interviewees (CO, MN, NC) mentioned the importance of annual conferences and regional meetings where professionals can get together “face-to-face” and share information. *North Carolina* described its statewide B/VI conference as a “great model of collaboration for all of us” due to the partnership exemplified between the SEA, school for the blind, professional organizations, the state agency for the blind, teachers of the visually impaired and other groups.

Three states (MN, NC, WV) have listservs that help create a sense of community and enable ongoing dialogue among teachers of the visually impaired and other related services providers serving students with B/VI throughout the state. One interviewee reported that the listserv has “promoted a lot more collegiality across the state.” Although *Colorado* does not have a listserv at this time, it does have alternative means of sharing information among members of the B/VI service community, including an e-mail distribution list, a webpage for postings related to B/VI services and resources, and a monthly newsletter.

Placement and Admissions

According to all of the interviewees, placement at the state-operated school for the blind is determined by the individualized education program (IEP) team in conjunction with the school for the blind. Four interviewees (CO, MD, OK, WV) reported that parents could also choose to unilaterally place their child at the school for the blind. In some cases (CO, OK) unilateral

placement means parents only incur the cost of transportation to and from school and possibly the cost of a paraprofessional, but in *Maryland* unilateral placement means that the parents incur the cost of tuition as well.

Admissions criteria for schools for the blind vary somewhat from state to state. Six states (IA, MN, MN, NC, VA, WV) have no eligibility criteria related to type and/or severity of disability. However, *Colorado's* school for the blind does not serve students with severe intellectual impairments (unless it is determined through a diagnostic placement that the child could benefit from the unique environment that the school for the blind offers) and *Oklahoma's* school for the blind does not serve students for whom the program is not a good fit (e.g., students unable to take advantage of braille instruction). Interviewees from two states (CO, NC) noted that the school for the blind is not equipped to meet the needs of students with significant behavioral challenges. Also, in *North Carolina*, the students are required to exhibit a certain level of self-care skills, since the school for the blind is a residential facility. Although there are no specific exclusionary criteria in *Virginia*, the school for the blind only serves students for whom the school is able to provide an age-appropriate peer group. In *Maryland*, the school for the blind has several programs specially designed to meet the needs of certain groups (e.g., a Deaf-Blind Program, a highly structured program for students with autism in addition to B/VI and an expanded short-term placement program).

State Role

Six interviewees (CO, IA, MD, MN, NC, OK) reported that the state role of the school for the blind has changed significantly over the past 10 years, particularly in terms of providing increasing outreach services throughout the state as a whole. According to one interviewee, "They've always seen themselves as a school first and outreach second, but that's changing," and in the words of another, "It used to be a much more isolated or segregated entity, and it's becoming more of an outreach entity." Interviewees from both *Colorado* and *Minnesota* described efforts on the part of the school for the blind to take a more active role in all statewide B/VI initiatives including participating in state-level taskforces and workgroups. Of the two remaining states, one reported that the "school for the blind would like to play a more active role," but had not yet really begun to do so.

Leadership Roles for Individuals with B/VI

In four states, one or more individuals with B/VI hold leadership positions at the state-operated school for the blind. In *Colorado* and *Minnesota*, one or more individuals who are B/VI serve on the board of directors/trustees and in *North Carolina* and *Oklahoma*, individuals who are B/VI serve as principals of the school for the blind. Most interviewees also noted that individuals who are B/VI serve in a variety of non-leadership positions at the school for the blind, including as teachers of the visually impaired and related service providers. Interviewees from two states also reported that individuals who are B/VI hold leadership positions at the SEA, though not in the Department of Special Education.

Personnel Preparation

Teachers of the Visually Impaired

All eight interviewees reported having one or more IHEs with programs geared toward preparing teachers of the visually impaired. Six states (CO, IA, NC, OK, VA, WV) have one program located at an IHE in the state; *Maryland* has two programs located at IHEs in the state; and *Minnesota* has one collaborative program between the state's Department of Education and seven participating IHEs. Programs in five of these states (CO, MN, NC, OK, WV) are considered "permanent." After having only an add-on endorsement available for teachers of the visually impaired, *Virginia's* SEA is in the process of establishing a permanent state-approved program for teachers of the visually impaired for offering both initial and add-on endorsements. Programs in the remaining two states are short-term programs requiring renewal at the end of several years:

- *Iowa* – The teachers of the visually impaired preparation program is only funded by the University of Iowa for the next three years, at which point it will be up for reevaluation.
- *Maryland* – Both the teachers of the visually impaired program at Johns Hopkins University and the SEA's cooperative arrangement with Pennsylvania College of Optometry to prepare teachers of the visually impaired will come to an end in 2006 and the state is currently exploring ways to meet future personnel needs.

Even in those states where teachers of the visually impaired preparation programs are now permanent, interviewees frequently described significant efforts on the part of the SEA to develop and sustain these programs. Interviewees from all eight states reported that the SEA supports its IHE programs in one or more ways. Most commonly, interviewees described offering loan forgiveness and/or tuition reimbursements for teachers who completed programs for the visually impaired (IA, MD, MN, OK, VA, WV); funding programs for teachers of the visually impaired either partially or entirely (MD, MN, OK, WV); paying faculty salaries (IA, OK, WV); sitting on advisory committees to the program (MN, NC); and supporting research in the area of B/VI (CO, IA). Other kinds of support included paying faculty transportation costs (IA), supporting mentorship opportunities for teachers of the visually impaired in training (CO) and paying for course materials (OK). In *Maryland*, the SEA was also responsible for initiating the relationship with the Pennsylvania School of Optometry to set up a program in the state for training teachers of the visually impaired and O&M specialists.

Although not directly related to support for IHE programs, *Colorado* also has a state incentive grant that provides money specifically for the recruitment and retention of teachers of the visually impaired, including signing bonuses, money for mentors, professional development money and caseload hardship money (e.g., for teachers of the visually impaired with caseloads spread out over a large geographical area).

Interviewees from three states (MD, NC, OK) reported that in spite of having one or more teachers of the visually impaired preparation programs in the state, their personnel needs are still not being adequately met. Interviewees from three other states were unable to answer this question without first gathering additional information. For example:

- *Iowa* is conducting a follow-up study to evaluate the effectiveness of its current teachers of the visually impaired preparation program. The interviewee expressed concern that while several cohorts have graduated, only one new teacher of the visually impaired has been employed, suggesting that new teachers of the visually impaired may not want to move to where the jobs are.
- *Virginia* plans to conduct a needs assessment to address preparation and needs of teachers in the field.

According to the interviewees, *Colorado* and *West Virginia* were the only two states that had no shortages of teachers of the visually impaired at this time.

Orientation and Mobility Specialists

Three states (CO, MD, NC) have IHE programs designed to prepare O&M specialists, and *Iowa* is considering adding a dual certification program (i.e., combining both teacher of the visually impaired and O&M training) at its IHE. In *Oklahoma*, individuals must travel out of state in order to become O&M specialists, but are able to complete their practica on the state-operated school for the blind campus.⁷ *Iowa* is in the process of developing certification for O&M specialists, but the proposal has not yet been approved. Several other states (MN, NC, VA) either require or recommend that O&M specialists receive national board or academy certification. Almost all interviewees reported that the shortage of qualified O&M specialists within their states is a serious concern. In the words of one interviewee, recruiting and retaining O&M specialists is “a very big challenge.” Another interviewee expressed concern that, in the case of dually certified teacher of the visually impaired/O&M specialists, educational services may be emphasized to the exclusion of needed O&M services. The interviewee stressed that while quality educational supports are necessary, it is also necessary to “ensure we’re protecting O&M.”

Paraprofessionals

Although no specific questions were asked about paraprofessionals serving students with B/VI, interviewees from several states brought up issues related to the preparation of paraprofessionals working with this population. *North Carolina* has an official job description for braillists at the state level; several LEAs in *Maryland* offer certification for braillists; and standards for braillists in *West Virginia* are developed at the county level. *Maryland* is in the process of developing a state-level training package for paraprofessionals working with students who are B/VI and *Iowa*

⁷ In *Oklahoma*, the SEA provides all O&M specialists with a car, cell phone and laptop computer.

is considering the creation of a program that would train paraprofessionals as nationally certified brailleists. Interviewees described a variety of ways in which paraprofessionals received training as brailleists, including a correspondence course through the Library of Congress and a new online course at the American Foundation for the Blind. Again, interviewees stressed the shortage of paraprofessionals qualified to work with students who are B/VI.

Certification/Licensure Options

All interviewees reported that their states offer one or more certification/licensure options for teachers of the visually impaired. *Colorado* also offers certification for O&M specialists. Most of the states have competency-based options that include requirements for practicum experiences. Some states offer stand-alone options, others offer add-on options, and *North Carolina*, which currently only offers a stand-alone license, is planning to offer an add-on option as well. When asked if the current certification/licensure options met their states' needs, interviewees' responses were mixed. Some felt they could not answer the question without gathering more data, and others were emphatic that the current system was inadequate. In the words of one, "I don't know what more we could provide, but I don't think we have an adequate number of certified staff."

Educational Materials and Technology

NIMAS and NIMAC

The National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS) was included as part of the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA. NIMAS refers to "the standard established by the Secretary to be used in the preparation of electronic files suitable and used solely for efficient conversion into specialized formats" [P.L. 108-446 §674(e)(3)(B)]. The Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) further describes NIMAS files as "a collection of consistent and valid XML-based source files created by K-12 curriculum publishers" from which "accessible, student-ready alternate-format versions of core textbooks (i.e., braille, Digital Talking Book, etc.) can subsequently be created."⁸ States are required to provide assurances regarding compliance with NIMAS as part of their program applications to the U.S. Department of Education.

IDEA also states that "The Secretary shall establish and support, through the American Printing House for the Blind, a center to be known as the 'National Instructional Materials Access Center' not later than 1 year after the date of the enactment of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004" [P.L. 108-446 §674(e)(1)]. States will be given the choice to opt in or out of this national repository.

Three of the states that were interviewed, *Colorado*, *Maryland* and *Virginia*, have already decided to coordinate with the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Center (NIMAC). The remaining states are still in the process of deciding what to do.

⁸ For more information, see CAST's website at <http://nimas.cast.org/about/faq/index.html>.

Interviewees from four states (MD, NC, OK, WV), reported that they already had legislation and/or regulations in place prior to NIMAS requiring publishers to supply textbooks in an electronic format and *Maryland* is currently in the process of both changes to legislation and regulations to meet the new requirements. A fifth state, *Virginia*, had only required publishers to supply state-adopted textbooks in electronic format, even though use of state-adopted textbooks is not mandatory.

Interviewees from several other states described processes currently in place for ensuring that textbooks and materials are converted to braille or large print. For example:

- *Colorado's* Instructional Materials Center for the Visually Impaired sources and/or produces large print and braille textbooks for students with B/VI. It is funded by the SEA with LEA \$200 per pupil contributions.
- *Iowa's* Department for the Blind (a rehabilitation agency) is responsible for converting textbooks to braille and receives funding from the SEA to handle this. Additional braille of materials is handled by the school for the blind.
- *Minnesota's* Department of Education, in a memorandum informing LEAs of their fiscal year entitlements, includes a form on which districts are asked to indicate whether they give permission to the SEA to withhold \$5 per child from federal Part B flow-through monies to be used when a child who is B/VI needs educational materials translated into braille. Participating LEAs receive braille at no costs and LEAs who do not participate are billed.
- *Maryland's* Instructional Resource Center (IRC) for Students with Visual Impairment is located at the school for the blind. It is funded by the SEA, school for the blind and each LEA. The IRC purchases and loans braille and large print textbooks and converts texts that are not available in specialized formats.

Timely Access to Books and Materials

Interviewees from most states agreed that ensuring timely access to books and materials for students who are B/VI can be a challenge. According to most, the primary reasons why students might not receive their materials on time include teachers making last minute changes to the curriculum or failing to plan far enough in advance and students making last minute changes to their course schedules or moving from one LEA to another. These changes often result in significant delays because braille a book can take as long as six months, particularly in states where there is a shortage of qualified braillists. Several interviewees noted that NIMAS will do little to address these types of problems, although rapidly evolving technologies mean that software programs offering immediate, high quality braille conversions should soon be

available.⁹ In the words of one, “The problem is not so much publishers, as making sure that the [entity responsible for preparing textbooks and materials] is alerted in time to be able to prepare the text book.” Several interviewees stressed that education of teachers of the visually impaired and other special education teachers on this topic is critical. For example, *Colorado* is in the process of developing materials to be disseminated to LEAs explaining the importance of teachers planning ahead and ordering textbooks and related materials in the spring in order to ensure that students receive their materials on time in the fall. *Colorado’s* letter will include information on the significant costs involved in making last minute changes to curriculum once textbooks and materials have already been translated into braille. As the interviewee noted, “People had no idea what books cost. You might have a geography book that’s a \$15,000 book because of maps, and the kid shows up and they decide not to use the textbook. So we have really worked hard to educate our people, and I think we’re really making a big dent.”

Access to Assistive Technology and Other Resources

Most of the states interviewed (CO, IA, MN, OK, VA, WV) have some type of state-wide system for sharing assistive technology and/or other resources for students with B/VI (e.g., closed circuit televisions, braille notetakers, screen readers, embossers). For example:

- *Oklahoma* provides five lending libraries through Oklahoma AbleTech, one of which is housed on the school for the blind campus and is specifically geared toward meeting the needs of students with B/VI.
- *Iowa* has a Technology and Assistive Device Center, operated by the school for the blind, as well as two libraries that provide reading materials. One is located at the school for the blind and one is operated by the Department for the Blind.
- *West Virginia* has an Instructional Resource Center that provides assistive technology specific to students with B/VI as well as a children’s vision rehabilitation grant that provides additional resources.
- *Minnesota* recently instituted a collaborative assistive technology lending library housed at its vision consultant’s office. Minnesota’s assistive technology community of practice has developed reference notebooks to accompany each piece of equipment.
- *Virginia’s* special education Training/Technical Assistance Centers (T/TACs) provide professional development on assistive technology, including lending library materials and devices. The T/TACs are funded under an SEA grant.

⁹ While states await these changes in technology, Bookshare provides an almost immediate conversion to Braille, although it is generally acknowledged that these conversions are not of the very highest quality without additional manual labor. For more information, see CAST’s website at <http://nimas.cast.org/>.

Several interviewees also described state-wide lending libraries for assistive technology and other resources serving *all* students with disabilities, including those with B/VI (e.g., *Virginia's* Training and Technical Assistance Center, *Oklahoma's* Assistive Technology Center and *Colorado's* Assistive Technology Project).

Related Advisory Groups

Two states have some type of advisory group to ensure that students receive their textbooks and materials in a timely fashion:

- *Maryland* has an advisory group to the state's Instructional Resource Center, which was created in response to a state-level taskforce recommendation several years ago.
- *Colorado's* Vision Coalition serves in an advisory capacity to the Colorado Instructional Materials Center for the Visually Handicapped.

Two additional states described more generic groups that have addressed the issues of textbook availability, but are not exclusively intended to handle such issues – i.e., *Iowa's* Department of Education has a special education panel and *Minnesota* has a legislative advisory committee to its vision consultant.

Two states have some type of advisory group that monitors the use and availability of assistive technology: *Minnesota's* assistive technology community of practice focuses on these issues and *North Carolina's* assistive technology program has a grant advisory council consisting of a wide variety of stakeholders.

Low Vision

Interviewees from seven states (CO, IA, MN, NC, OK, VA, WV) described low vision clinics and/or other initiatives relating to low vision. For example:

- *Minnesota* has a community of practice exclusively devoted to issues related to low vision. It conducts three or four clinics per year where 60-80 students receive low vision evaluations. The community of practice has a five-year plan to improve services for students with low vision and is in the process of finalizing a handbook for low vision services.
- *West Virginia* offers comprehensive low vision evaluations through the Children's Vision Rehabilitation Project (CVRP) at eight clinics throughout the state. The SEA pays for 100 evaluations per year at \$900 per child and CVRP covers the cost of approximately 50 additional children per year.
- *Colorado* offers four, free low vision evaluation clinics throughout the year staffed by an optometrist who specializes in low vision, a teacher of the visually impaired who is

certified in low vision and an administrative support person. Colorado's program also provides low vision devices at cost. Plans are underway to offer a series of university-level courses specific to low vision for both new and veteran teachers of the visually impaired.

- *Virginia* provides free low vision evaluations to students who need them, as well as necessary low vision devices. The program is state-wide and involves 25-30 optometrists and ophthalmologists.

Cortical Visual Impairment

Interviewees from four states (CO, MD, OK, WV) described their initiatives that address cortical visual impairment (CVI).¹⁰ As one interviewee noted, “[CVI] is growing and becoming a more recognized need in all states.” *Colorado*, *Maryland* and *Oklahoma* have all held statewide conferences on CVI, frequently bringing in international experts on the topic. *West Virginia* has partnered with several other states, including *Vermont*, *Maryland* and *Delaware*, to train a team of CVI mentors. These mentors receive five years of training themselves, and will soon be training others, including early interventionists and teachers of the visually impaired. The mentoring program is being funded by *West Virginia's* Part C program. In addition to its personnel preparation initiative, *Oklahoma's* school for the blind also has a classroom specifically designed to meet the needs of students with CVI.

Miscellaneous Programs and Initiatives

Interviewees from most states described a variety of other programs and initiatives relating to B/VI issues, several related to personnel preparation. For example, *Colorado* offers several university-level courses designed to expose teachers of the visually impaired and O&M specialists to early childhood issues. *Iowa* has also offered several early childhood modules as part of its in-service training.

Five interviewees (CO, IA, MD, VA, WV) also mentioned their states' deaf-blind projects.¹¹ For example, *Iowa* recently received funding for a new deaf-blind services project that involves a multi-disciplinary team providing technical assistance throughout the state. Members of the team include personnel from the state-operated school for the blind, state-operated school for the deaf, area education agencies (AEAs) and its department of education. Also, *Colorado's* project, in

¹⁰ According to the American Printing House for the Blind, www.aph.org/cvi/definition/html, “CVI may be defined as bilaterally diminished visual acuity caused by damage to the occipital lobes and/or to the geniculostriate visual pathway. CVI is almost invariably associated with an inefficient, disturbed visual sense because of the widespread brain disturbance.... CVI is a neurological disorder, which results in unique visual responses to people, education materials, and to the environment. When students with these visual/behavioral characteristics are shown to have loss of acuity or judged by their performance to be visually impaired, they are considered to have CVI.”

¹¹ For more information on states' deaf-blind projects, see the National Technical Assistance Consortium for Children and Young Adults Who Are Deaf-Blind (NTAC) website at www.tr.wou.edu/ntac/.

addition to providing technical assistance, provides an annual summer institute with national-level speakers.

Other programs and initiatives not previously mentioned in this document include the following:

- *Iowa* offers an expanded core curriculum resource guide including an assessment guide, lesson plans, standards and benchmarks.¹² The guide was developed by a team of master teachers and administrators and is intended to provide consistency in services throughout the state. *Iowa* also has a transition workgroup made up of transition specialists from the department of the blind, state-operated school for the blind, deaf-blind project, and its department of education. Every two years, this workgroup holds a statewide transition conference. This year's conference will focus on partnering with families.
- *West Virginia* conducted a comprehensive needs survey of all teachers of the visually impaired in 2000, developed an action plan, and has since met all of its goals, including offering professional development activities in the areas of assistive technology, standards-based individualized education programs (IEPs) and early identification.
- *Minnesota's* vision consultant facilitates two additional communities of practice: one that focuses on evaluation and reviews test items for bias; and one that focuses on mentoring new teachers of the visually impaired. Other initiatives include a summer transition program for youth who are B/VI and annual activities for families of children who are B/VI.
- *Virginia* is striving to build staff capacity to use more up-to-date instructional materials (e.g., providing grants to schools in order to purchase equipment to make tactile graphics).
- *North Carolina* has a literacy taskforce which promotes braille literacy and is planning to revise the state's handbook for teachers of the visually impaired as soon as the new IDEA regulations are available.
- *Maryland* is working to address the goals of the *National Agenda for Children and Youth with Visual Impairments, Including Those with Multiple Disabilities*, which includes several focus groups to address some of these goals at the state level.¹³ A taskforce will also be looking at establishing grade level standards related to expanded core curriculum and linkage to the state curriculum.

¹² According to the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) website, <http://www.afb.org/Section.asp?SectionID=44&TopicID=189&SubTopicID=4&DocumentID=2117>, the expanded core curriculum covers the following eight areas: compensatory functional academic skills, including communication modes; orientation and mobility; social interaction skills; independent living skills; recreation and leisure skills; career education; use of assistive technology; and visual efficiency skills.

¹³ For more information on the National Agenda's 10 goals, see AFB's website at: <http://www.afb.org/Section.asp?SectionID=56&DocumentID=2667>.

- *Colorado* is developing an information packet for supervisors of public school teachers of the visually impaired. SEA sponsored workgroups have prepared Literacy Fact Sheets specific to B/VI and a bank of sample IEP goals and objectives specific to learners with B/VI. These items have been posted on the SEA webpage on B/VI.

Reporting

Interviewees agreed that compiling an accurate count of students who are B/VI poses a significant challenge. Because Child Count data, collected on December 1 of each year, only include children for whom B/VI is the primary disability, most states have developed alternative ways of “counting” students who are B/VI that includes those for whom B/VI is a secondary or tertiary disability. For example, interviewees from six states (CO, MD, MN, NC, OK, WV) noted that they report annually to the American Printing House for the Blind (APH) on the total number of students who are legally blind. This is because APH administers the Federal Quota Program that provides funds to states for purchasing APH instructional materials for eligible legally blind students in educational settings.¹⁴ Other systems for counting all students who are B/VI are described below:

- *Colorado*, in addition to participating in the APH count (which in Colorado includes “Baby Count,” a registry for birth through three years of age), relies on a third count for accuracy: Colorado Instructional Materials Center for the Visually Handicapped does an annual registration of learners which includes every child, birth through 21, with B/VI.
- *Minnesota* aligns a low vision count with the APH count and requires teachers to turn in both counts at the same time. When added to the deaf-blind census, these combined counts provide a “pretty good idea of how many kids have service needs.”
- *Virginia* has a statewide online data system for students receiving special education services that includes secondary and tertiary disabilities as mandatory fields.
- *Iowa* is a non-categorical state (i.e., does not use the federal disability categories at the state level) and uses statistically significant “sampling” in order to estimate the total number of students with B/VI.
- *Maryland* conducted a survey of its teachers in order to generate a more thorough count of students receiving services.

Although *North Carolina* does not collect a comprehensive count of all children who are B/VI at this time, it is starting to implement a new statewide online system for data collection called the Comprehensive Exceptional Children Accountability System (CECAS) that, like *Virginia’s*

¹⁴ For more information on the Federal Quota Program administered by APH, see the following website:
<http://www.aph.org/fedquotpgm/fedquota.htm>.

system, will enable LEAs to collect information on secondary disabilities such as B/VI (although secondary disability is not a required field).

The discrepancy between Child Count – which is “unduplicated” (i.e., counts each child only once) – and state efforts to conduct more thorough counts of students who are B/VI is dramatic. For example, 2004 Child Count data for *Colorado* indicate that there are 323 children for whom B/VI is a primary disability, but the CIMC/VH count indicates that there are actually more than 900.¹⁵ Similarly 2004 Child Count data for *Maryland* indicate that there are 475 children with B/VI as opposed to its survey of teachers that indicates that there are actually closer to 2000 children with B/VI. *Minnesota’s* Child Count for 2004 was 444, but the state’s APH and low vision counts indicate that there are actually 1544 students with B/VI.

Accountability

Four states (CO, NC, VA, WV) report that they disaggregate test data by disability category, but only by primary disability. *North Carolina* generates annual reports on outcomes for students with B/VI, as well as by accommodation (e.g., according to whether the students took the test using braille, large print or assistive technology). Although *Maryland* does not disaggregate data by disability, the state does disaggregate data by accommodation. *Oklahoma* staff plan to disaggregate data for students who are B/VI once the state has adopted a state-wide online special education data system. Because *Iowa* is a noncategorical state, disaggregation of data is “really difficult.”

Summary

Recent and Anticipated Changes

Interviewees described a variety of changes that have taken place over the past 10 years in state-level services to students with B/VI. First and foremost, they stressed the changing role of the school for the blind from segregated school to provider of outreach services. Interviewees emphasized a shifting sense of responsibility on the part of the school for the blind for *all* students with B/VI throughout the state, not just those attending the school for the blind. For example, *Maryland’s* school for the blind has started to provide new types of services, including more short-term placements and summer programs designed to meet the needs of students who, for the most part, still attend their home schools. In several states, the school for the blind has also assumed a greater “leadership” role within the special education community at large by participating in vision coalitions and/or state-level boards.

Another theme gleaned from the interviews was that states had improved their infrastructures for serving students with B/VI, including hiring and/or more clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of the state vision consultant or other state staff designated to handle issues related to B/VI. Interviewees from *Colorado*, *Iowa* and *Minnesota* described the importance of

¹⁵ Child Count figures for 2004 can be found at www.ideadata.org.

having their positions housed at the SEA (as opposed to the school for the blind or another location). Interviewees from both *North Carolina* and *West Virginia* mentioned the importance of newly instituted personnel preparation programs for teachers of the visually impaired at one or more IHEs within their states. Other types of changes noted included improvements in communication (e.g., listservs), advances in AT and improved instruction using evidence-based practices.

In terms of anticipated changes, interviewees mentioned efforts underway to accomplish the following:

- improve the qualifications of paraprofessionals working with students with B/VI;
- increase data-based decision making at the state-level;
- strengthen qualifications of IHE faculty running preparation programs for teachers of the visually impaired;
- disaggregate outcome data for students with B/VI;
- develop programs at the school for the blind to meet the needs of students with significant behavioral issues; and
- improve identification of students with sensory impairments including B/VI.

Barriers

Interviewees identified a number of barriers to serving students with B/VI. Most commonly, interviewees described their states' inability to provide textbooks and materials to students with B/VI in a timely fashion and a shortage of qualified personnel, including teachers of the visually impaired, O&M specialists and braillists which one interviewee described as "a very big challenge." Other barriers mentioned included:

- difficulty providing necessary services for students with B/VI in remote parts of the state;
- incentives to identify students with multiple disabilities (MD) as opposed to B/VI if the LEA lacks a sufficient number of teachers of the visually impaired;
- lack of joint personnel preparation for school for the blind staff and other K-12 staff;
- lack of certification for O&M specialists and/or O&M preparation programs at state IHEs;
- the need for teachers of the visually impaired to "wear many hats," for example, serving "all ages, a wide range of abilities and additional disabilities";
- the high cost of braille and assistive technology;
- the challenge of sustaining current preparation programs for teachers of the visually impaired;
- problems obtaining an accurate count of students identified with B/VI;
- the risk that teachers dually certified as teachers of the visually impaired and O&M specialists will not have enough time in their schedules to provide needed O&M services, as well as educational services to their students;
- the fact that new web-based technologies are not necessarily designed to include students with B/VI;

- the lack of expertise on the part of LEA-level administrators in evaluating teachers of the visually impaired or identifying the features of a high quality vision program;
- a threat to schools for the blind, when not under the jurisdiction of the SEA, of slipping between the cracks in terms of state educational priorities; and
- the inability to disaggregate data by disability category in noncategorical states.

Policy Recommendations

Interviewees from most states offered one or more policy recommendations. Most commonly, interviewees mentioned the importance of employing a state-level vision consultant (preferably full-time) and housing him/her at the SEA as opposed to the school for the blind or some other location. In the words of one interviewee, being part of the SEA means “You have a lot more power to make changes.” In the words of another, being housed at the SEA means the vision consultant is “in on all the conversations, knows exactly where [the SEA] is headed and what the big picture looks like.” A third described her shift from the school for the blind to the SEA in the following words, “I really feel I’m more directly involved in the infrastructure and decisions.” Other policy recommendations included the following:

- Create e-mail communication systems, including listservs, to facilitate dialogue among professionals in the field.
- Sponsor one or more statewide conferences per year for teachers of the visually impaired.
- Require statewide reporting on secondary disability categories.
- Coordinate with NIMAC.
- Educate teachers about the cost of translating books to braille and the necessity of ordering books *early*.
- Institute one or more permanent personnel preparation programs for teachers of the visually impaired and O&M specialists at state IHEs.
- Advocate for additional funds for low incidence disabilities such as B/VI.
- Encourage schools for the blind to continue to expand the range of programs they offer to include short-term and summer programs, as well as inservice opportunities for teachers of the visually impaired.
- Facilitate the development of a dynamic parent advocacy group.

Concluding Remarks

As both survey and interview findings indicate, states have a variety of infrastructures in place and sponsor a diverse range of programs and/or initiatives for supporting students with B/VI. Interviewees from most of the eight states interviewed reported that state infrastructures for serving these students have improved over the past 10 years, with most states hiring a vision consultant or other state-level staff to handle issues pertaining to students with B/VI; most state-operated schools for the blind assuming an increasingly visible role statewide in terms of offering outreach and technical assistance; and most states offering at least one preparation program for teachers of the visually impaired at a state IHE. All interviewees agreed that getting textbooks and materials to students with B/VI in a timely fashion was a significant concern, and

they all anticipated improvements in this area as a result of NIMAS/NIMAC. Although interviewees were proud of their states' accomplishments, most recognized the need for ongoing improvement, particularly in terms of preparing adequate numbers of qualified staff, including teachers of the visually impaired, O&M specialists and braillists.

Appendix A – Survey Instrument

**Project Forum at NASDSE
State Screening Survey:
Infrastructure and Initiatives for Serving
Students who are Blind or Visually Impaired
September 2005**

Name of Person Completing Survey: _____

Position: _____ State: _____

E-mail: _____ Telephone: _____

1. Is there a state-operated school for the blind in your state?
 Yes
 Dual-sensory school
 No (If no, skip to Question #3)

2. Who has jurisdiction over the state-operated school for the blind?
 State school board/state education agency (SEA)
 Other department/agency: _____

3. Is there a person(s) at the SEA level responsible for addressing issues related to students who are blind or visually impaired?
 Yes
 No (If no, skip to Question # 5)

4. What is your state's full-time equivalency (FTE) dedicated to students who are blind or visually impaired? _____

5. Do you currently have any state-level initiatives or long-standing programs related to serving students who are blind or visually impaired?
 Yes
 No
If yes, please describe briefly: _____

6. Would you be willing to be interviewed on this topic?
 Yes
 No

Appendix B – Interview Protocol

Blindness and Visual Impairment: State Infrastructure & Initiatives Interview Guideline Project Forum at NASDSE

The purpose of this study is to describe state-level infrastructures for serving children who are blind or visually impaired and to highlight state-level programs/initiatives that are currently in place to serve this population. (*Italicized sections are only for interviewer and are not intended to be read aloud to interviewee.*)

SECTION A – DESIGNATED STATE-LEVEL STAFF

(1) According to your survey responses, your state DOES/DOES NOT have one or more state-level staff people designated to handle issues relating to students who are blind or visually impaired.

If state “DOES”:

- What is the source of funding for the position(s)?
- What are the responsibilities associated with the position(s)?
- What are the job criteria (e.g., academic credentials, experience, etc.)?

If state “DOES NOT”:

- How are state-level issues and inquiries handled relating to students who are blind or visually impaired?
-

SECTION B – STATE-OPERATED SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND

(2) According to your survey responses there IS/IS NOT a state-operated school for the blind in your state.

If there “IS NOT” a state-operated school for the blind:

- What are the policies/procedures regarding sending a child to a private school for the blind or an out of state state-operated school for the blind?
- Does your policy differentiate between state-operated and private schools for the blind?

If there “IS” a state-operated school for the blind:

According to your survey responses, school governance for the state-operated school falls under the jurisdiction of the STATE SCHOOL BOARD/OTHER _____. The next few questions relate to the relationship between the school for the blind and the rest of the K-12 public education system:

- Is inservice personnel preparation conducted jointly or separately?
- Do teachers and administrators from the state-operated school for the blind and the rest of the K-12 public education system consult with one another? If so, how?
- Are there any policies or procedures regarding shared staffing during workforce shortages?
- How is placement of students in the school for the blind handled?
- Does your state’s school for the blind have admissions criteria related to type and/or severity of disability (e.g., is there a range of disabilities other than blindness or visual impairment represented in the school and/or any exclusionary criteria – e.g., no mental retardation, only mild disabilities, etc.)?

If the state-operated school for the blind is under the jurisdiction of “OTHER”:

- How is the governing body for the school for the blind appointed?
- How do the two governing bodies communicate with each other (i.e., the board governing the public K-12 system and the entity governing the school for the blind)?
- Are there any challenges relating to having a separate governing structure for the school for the blind?

(3) Do any individuals who are blind or visually impaired hold leadership positions at the SEA or state school for the blind?

SECTION C – PERSONNEL PREPARATION

(4) Does your state have one or more higher education programs specifically geared toward preparing teachers of the visually impaired (TVIs)?

If “ONE OR MORE”:

- How many?
- What kind of relationship does the SEA have with this program(s)?
- Are the state’s TVI needs adequately met via this program(s)?

If “NO PROGRAMS”:

- How does your state meet its TVI needs? (Probe: relationships with neighboring states, alternative certification, distance education?)

(5) Does your state have one or more endorsements relating to students who are blind or visually impaired?

If “ONE OR MORE”:

- Please describe.
- What are the components of the endorsement (e.g., total number of required credit hours, number of B/VI-specific credit hours, practicum experience)?
- Are the existing endorsement options adequately meeting your state’s needs?

(6) Does your state offer certification for orientation and mobility (O&M) specialists?

If “YES”:

- Are there any higher education programs in your state specifically geared toward preparing O&M specialists? If so, please describe.

SECTION D – EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS AND TECHNOLOGY

(7) Has your state chosen to coordinate with the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standards (NIMAS) Center?

If “NO”:

- What alternative will your state be using to meet the new requirements in IDEA 2004 for accessible materials?

(8) Do students in your state who are blind and visually impaired generally receive all necessary textbooks and other educational materials in the student’s preferred reading medium (e.g., braille, large print, assistive technology) at the same time as their non-disabled peers?

(9) Is there a system within your state for sharing assistive technology (e.g., lending library)?

(10) Does your state have advisory groups that (a) ensure that students receive their textbooks and materials in a timely fashion and (b) monitor the use and availability of assistive technology?

SECTION E – OTHER INITIATIVES

Ask only of states listing additional initiatives, not already covered by interview.

(11) Based on your survey responses, we know that your state currently has a number of additional initiatives relating to children who are blind and visually impaired:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Probe for details regarding each initiative.

(12) Are there any additional state-level initiatives/programs currently in place relating to students who are blind/visually impaired that we have not already discussed (e.g. taskforces, personnel development activities, etc.)?

SECTION F – REPORTING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

(13) How does your state count and report the number of students who are blind and visually impaired including those with multiple disabilities for whom vision loss may not be the primary disability?

(14) Does your state monitor the progress of children who are blind and visually impaired (e.g., disaggregate and/or report data relating to this population)?

SECTION G – OVERVIEW AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

(15) How have state-level infrastructure and/or services to students who are blind or visually impaired changed over the past 10 years within your state?

(16) Are there challenges or barriers in your state to serving students who are blind and visually impaired that have not come up in this interview?

- If so, please describe.
- What policy recommendations would you make to address these challenges/ barriers?

(17) Do you anticipate any changes in the near future regarding issues relating to students who are blind and visually impaired?