

What is Deaf-Blindness?

The federal definition of Deaf-Blindness states: *"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 in special education programs solely for children and youth with hearing impairments, visual impairments, or severe disabilities, without supplementary assistance to address their educational needs due to these dual, concurrent disabilities."* 34 CFR 300.5 (b) (2).

For the North Dakota Dual Sensory Project, this generally means that children ages birth through 21 would likely have documented vision and hearing losses with the following criteria:

- Have a documented hearing loss (mild to profound degree) and vision losses (low vision to legal blindness)
- Have a diagnosed syndrome or pathology that impacts hearing and vision
- Have multiple disabilities that impact central processing abilities as demonstrated by inconclusive vision and hearing responses during evaluations or in their natural environment

Nationally, over 90% of the children and youth on the census who are deaf-blind have additional disabilities (Killoran, 2007), resulting in a population with complex, diverse needs. This places this group of students among the most vulnerable, at-risk students because they have varying degrees of hearing and vision losses, in addition to other significant disabilities and health issues. While most children learn incidentally through observation, interaction with others, and overhearing, children who are deaf-blind require specialized instruction. The delivery of appropriate services for individuals who are deaf-blind requires knowledge and training of the impact on the development of the child. In addition, it requires a set of effective instructional strategies, accommodations, and assistive technologies to meet the unique needs and learning styles of the children.