

Winter 2024 Pre-Convention Issue



Visual Impairment and Deafblind Education Quarterly

Volume 69, Issue 1

The Voice and Vision of Special Education



Cover photo description: The cover photo is a moment between a young student and his TSVI captured by a member of the Texas Deafblind Project on a consultation to the student's school district.

Photo submitted by: The Texas Deafblind Project

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DVIDB *Preconference*

MARCH 8, 2024
9AM - 4PM

● The CVI Protocol: A Framework for Describing CVI

Ilse Willems

● Braille's Dynamic Future

Willow Free

● Making Connections with Families, Transitions, and Careers with the APH ConnectCenter

Olaya Landa-Vialard

**REGISTER
TODAY**

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Non-members - \$100

Register at:

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Exceptional
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The voice and vision of special education

**Sponsorships & Group Rates
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Contact: Dr. Kathleen Stanfa
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Message from the Editor

Kathleen M. Farrand

Associate Professor, Arizona State University

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Welcome to the first issue of 2024. I am pleased to share with you this dynamic issue to kick off the new year and to prepare us for the upcoming preconference and convention. This issue begins with two articles by two of the presenters, Ilse Willems and Willow Free, at the upcoming Division on Visual Impairments and Deafblindness (DVIDB) preconference. I hope these articles inspire you to sign up to attend the [preconference](#) on March 8, 2024.

The next articles are an amazing collection of feature articles to celebrate the accomplishments of the 2024 DVIDB Award Winners. Read on to learn more about the some of the dynamic and dedicated people working in the field. Congratulations to our award winners and thank you for all that you do for the field!

The next two articles highlight some of the outstanding work being done in the state of Texas, the state many of us will be traveling to in March for the upcoming [2024 CEC Convention and EXPO](#). The first article features the Texas Deafblind Project and is written by Kaycee Bennett, Hillary Keys, and Kate Borg. The second article describes how the Region 4 RDSPD is supporting children who are deafblind and is written by Marina McCormick. The issue ends with a great article by Gwynn Suttell, highlighting some of the outstanding CEC Member Benefits available to all members of CEC.

Be prepared to be inspired and motivated to sign up to attend the DVIDB preconference. I hope to see many of you in San Antonio where we will get the chance to celebrate with our DVIDB award winners and members. A special thank you to Kathy Stanfa, for her leadership as DVIDB president!

President's Message

Kathleen Stanfa,

Professor, Kutztown University,

stanfa@kutztown.edu



Happy New Year! I hope 2024 is off to a great start for all of you. After the new year rolls in, it's time to begin thinking about CEC's annual convention, to be held this year in beautiful San Antonio, Texas in March. I hope you will be able to join us either in person or virtually for the conference. Our division has several excellent presentations slated. What a fantastic opportunity to learn from experts from all over the country on a variety of topics related to visual impairments!

I'd like to welcome and congratulate our newly elected leadership to DVIDB. Adam Graves will be serving as President, Beth Jones as President Elect, and Susan Brennan as Secretary. Newly elected Directors include Belinda Rudinger, Karen Carl, Patricia Camarillo, Kathleen Farrand, Hilary Travers, and Paige Furbush. Thank you all for running and for serving on our board. I wish to also offer my most sincere appreciation to Nicole Johnson for her support as Past President. Her leadership has been invaluable to me personally and to advancing the mission of DVIDB. Thank you for your guidance and your outstanding commitment to the Division!

The DVIDB Board is excited to announce our 2024 award winners. The Division grants five awards to amazing candidates in our field who are nominated by their colleagues. DVIDB's Awards Committee uses rubrics to independently score and determine award winners. This year's award winners are exceptional members of our field, making important contributions and improving the lives of students with visual impairments and their families. Congratulations for your achievement!

Deborah D. Hatton Dissertation of the Year Award:	Dr. Jessica Schultz
DVIDB Distinguished Service Award:	Dr. Nicole Johnson
Exemplary Advocate Award:	Anne Gurss
Virginia M. Sowell Student of the Year Award:	Stacey Buck
DVIDB Teacher of the Year Award:	Mary Tubbs

I want to remind you that DVIDB’s preconference day will be held virtually on March 8th, 2024 from 9 am – 4 pm. Attendees can earn up to 6 ACVREP credits. This event is free for DVIDB members and a link to register is available on our website. Continue to check our Facebook page and website for upcoming webinars and other events throughout the year. If you will be attending CEC in person in San Antonio, be sure to watch for announcements about our social event.

Today I write this as my last message as President of DVIDB. It has been an honor to serve the division in this capacity. I look forward to continuing to work with Adam Graves as the incoming President and to continue to see DVIDB make meaningful contributions to our field. Wishing you and yours a happy, healthy, and abundant 2024.

VIDBE-Q 2024 Convention Issue



The intended purpose of the Spring 2024 convention issue is to provide manuscripts aimed at practitioners about presenter contributions to the CEC 2024 program and work related to the field of visual impairments and deafblindness. This issue will allow those who were unable to attend your session to know more about your work.

Guidelines:

- 3-5 pages
- Tables, images, and/or figures should have a text description & title (APA 7th edition)
- References
- APA formatting (7th Edition)
- 12 point, Times New Roman or Arial font
- Author information for title: Name, affiliation, highest degree earned, and email address
- Please identify target audience

Email your manuscript submission
to Kathleen.Farrand@asu.edu.

Deadline for submission: April 5, 2024

The CVI Visual Behaviors: A Methodology for Describing CVI

Ilse Willems

Perkins School for the Blind

ilse.willems@perkins.org

Target audience: TSVIs

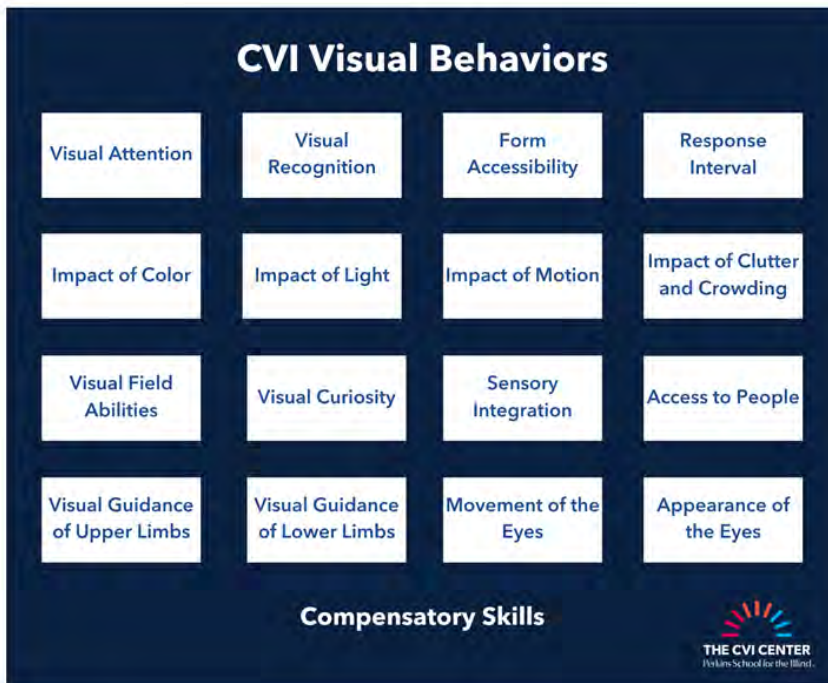
Cerebral/Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI) is a brain-based visual impairment caused by damage to the visual pathways or visual processing centers of the brain. It is the leading cause of visual impairment in children in developed countries (Flanagan et al., 2003). There are many common associated conditions, such as Cerebral Palsy, Down Syndrome, and a range of genetic syndromes (Pehere et al., 2018; Wilton et al., 2021).

Combining current research and diverse perspectives in the field, listening to stories about the lived experiences of individuals with CVI and their families, and learning from conducting CVI assessments of and teaching students with CVI, Perkins developed a current, inclusive, and more comprehensive methodology for

understanding CVI, simply called the CVI Visual Behaviors. This methodology includes sixteen visual behaviors and associated compensatory strategies that provide a deeper understanding of the many ways CVI might manifest in an individual and the big impact CVI has on access. No area is separated from the other—the CVI visual behaviors are highly connected—and all can impact the individual with CVI at any time.

Figure 1

CVI Visual Behaviors



Using the sixteen visual behaviors as the foundation, Perkins created a CVI assessment tool, The CVI Protocol, which guides a teacher of students with visual impairments (TSVI) through evaluating how a student is impacted by CVI and what types of accommodations and supports would benefit the student. Every individual's lived experience is different, and the way CVI manifests and creates barriers to access is unique to each person. Overarching and potential implications are outlined in this article, but only a comprehensive CVI assessment can help to determine the appropriate accommodations for each student. CVI is life-long. The CVI visual behaviors are an ongoing need—they can change and improve for some, but the need never goes away.

CVI affects a student's ability to attend and recognize, which causes difficulty for a student to access their materials, their environment, the people around them, and their world.

Visual attention and visual recognition are the two main focus areas of the assessment and the other visual behaviors circle around those. The visual attention assessment area measures the student's ability to be visually aware of an item, establish visual attention, and maintain visual attention (Dutton, 2015). Some individuals with CVI benefit from visual support, such as adding light, motion, or bright saturated colors, when presenting the item (Cohen-Maitre & Haerich, 2005; Geetha 2020). Students may also benefit from an auditory cue or a verbal label to

let them know an item is being presented. Environmental factors, such as noise, distracting movement, or clutter, can impede a student's ability to attend to an item and these same factors can also cause visual fatigue. There are often multiple supports that need to be in place for a student to be able to access their vision. If one or more of these supports are not in place, a student might need to rely more heavily on alternative strategies, such as their compensatory skills. Providing a multisensory approach to learning allows the student the ability to use multiple sensory channels and strategies to access their materials.

The visual recognition assessment area measures the student's ability to visually recognize items and determines which compensatory strategies the student is using to support or solidify their recognition. Some individuals with CVI mainly rely on their visual skills and use their compensatory strategies as supports. Others rely mostly on their compensatory strategies, such as mainly relying on touch or hearing to recognize their materials.

CVI impacts a student's ability to access their learning materials. Through conducting a CVI evaluation, a Functional Vision Assessment, and Learning Media Assessment, the TSVI can determine the most accessible and appropriate types of materials for the student (e.g., real objects, two-dimensional images, print, or braille). For example, if the student can recognize two-dimensional images, what type of 2D is best (real photographs, colored realistic images, colored abstract

images, realistic black and white images, or abstract black and white images) (Manley et al., 2023)? Perhaps the student can *look* at all materials, but only *recognize* one specific form. Perhaps the student can identify simple images but has difficulty interpreting more complex images or scenes, or cluttered presentations. Through assessing a student's recognition skills, the ideal types of materials can be determined and presented, to ensure the student has access.

CVI also impacts a student's ability to interact with their materials. Students may have difficulty reaching accurately for materials, such as using the appropriate hand shape and accurately interpreting the location of the item (Chokron & Dutton, 2016). Visual motor skills can also be affected by how the item is presented, such as how many items are shown at a time, what the item looks like, and how familiar it is. Individuals with CVI sometimes have difficulty with using multiple senses at once. For example, it can be difficult to look at an item while holding it or looking at it while either listening to someone talking or to any auditory output from the item itself (Dutton, 2015). Individuals with CVI may benefit from having time to explore an item using just one sense at a time.

Navigating environments and understanding spatial locations can also be difficult for individuals with CVI (Chokron & Dutton, 2016). Walking into a room and visually seeing and interpreting who is there, what is in the room, and where all the furniture is located, can be difficult. An individual with CVI may not notice

or may not accurately interpret a change in depth or a transition from one type of surface to another (such as moving from concrete to grass). It can be scary and difficult to navigate a space, especially if it's unfamiliar or busy. Without full and reliable visual access to the world around them, many with CVI have difficulty accessing incidental learning - the strategies and skills others can learn simply by looking around. Students may benefit from being given time to explore a new space when there is no one else around yet, as well as being provided with support such as a verbal label, "there is a desk to your right-hand side". An Orientation and Mobility Specialist can also help to determine if a white cane or other mobility support could be beneficial for the student to provide them with a tactile cue when they are close to an item or nearing a change of depth.

CVI can have a big impact on social skill development. Individuals with CVI may have difficulty looking at faces - which leads to challenges in recognizing those around them and noticing and accurately interpreting facial expressions (Dalrymple & Palermo, 2016). They may rely on other compensatory strategies, such as the familiar sound of someone's footsteps, someone's smell, or someone's overall features, to help them recognize people. Individuals with CVI may also use context—for example, knowing that they usually see their speech and language pathologist in the speech room could help them identify their speech therapist when they enter that room. One strategy to support access to people is to

introduce yourself each time you work with your student— “Hi Jack, it’s Sally”— so that the student doesn’t have to try to guess who is approaching them.

Most with CVI have strategies and workarounds for every moment of their day and can become adept at discovering and using compensatory strategies to access their world. Some examples of compensatory strategies include: using memory, context, predictability, verbal cues, auditory cues, tactile cues, smell, and color coding. A student’s compensatory strategies must be assessed and identified to empower the student with the ability to access their learning and environment at all times, no matter if they can rely on their vision or not. Tools, resources, and materials that match student’s compensatory skill use should be fostered and part of an individualized multisensory approach to learning.

Each individual with CVI is impacted in different ways, which means their ability to use their vision can vary, and how much they rely on compensatory strategies, as well as which strategies they rely on, can be unique. Each student should be supported by the specific strategies they need to allow access to their educational learning.

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The Future Belongs to Everyone

APH is committed to building a future that belongs to everyone by offering a wide selection of inclusive and accessible products, and valuable resources, to support those who are blind and visually impaired, are [deafblind](#), have [CVI](#), or [multiple disabilities](#).

From products that support braille literacy and low vision, to physical education, fine arts, math, health and science, and more: begin building your toolkits for inclusive learning by reading our [Toolkit blogs](#).



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The [APH ConnectCenter](#) offers curated advice and resources to assist children, parents, adults, and job seekers who are blind and visually impaired, and their associated professionals. It includes:

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- [CareerConnect](#): for job seekers
- [Transition Hub](#): for school-age youth planning for graduation and life after college
- [ConnectCalendar](#): for people and organizations to find and share info about upcoming events in the field of blindness and visual impairment
- **Information & Referral Hotline (800-232-5463)**: for answers to questions related to visual impairment and blindness

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APH's mission is empowering people who are blind or visually impaired by providing accessible and innovative products, materials, and services for lifelong success. To learn more about APH and our products and services, [visit APH.org](#) today.

Braille's Dynamic Future

Willow Free

American Printing House

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This pre-conference for Council for Exceptional Children's Division on Visual Impairments and Deafblindness focuses on the new braille file type being developed by people throughout the international braille community, eBRF or eBraille. A certified braille transcriber with over 12 years of experience, I've also worked on the braille transcription software BrailleBlaster, where I learned about markup and how it could be adapted for braille. I've spent the past two years working with the DAISY Consortium and representatives from over 40 companies and organizations around the world to develop eBraille.

The whole idea of the eBraille effort is to create a new braille file type that includes markup, links, and tactile graphics. Dynamic braille is changing, but the file types we have relied on have not. One of the most popular braille file types in the United States is the BRF (Braille Ready Format). A great file type that has served our community well, it was designed primarily for embossers, which limits users to one static, non-interactive page size and no need to adjust for any other.

Today we have single line braille displays that do their best to handle BRF, but the user gets a less than ideal experience, with awkward reading flow due to odd line breaks, poor navigation capabilities, and no way to connect the braille to any potential stack of graphics.

In addition to single line displays, we also have multiline displays on the horizon, which include APH's Monarch. The Monarch is 32 cells by 10 lines and represents just one new potential page size. There will be other multiline displays and we should avoid having our braille libraries segmented based on the page size supported by specific hardware. Without a new file type, the same material would have to be transcribed repeatedly for each device, whether it be an embosser, the Monarch, or a different multiline and so on, making the process expensive and disorganized.

The eBraille file type hopes to address these concerns. The primary way that it improves on BRF is through markup. Markup is tagging that tells the reading system that something is, for example, a heading, list, or paragraph. Using markup means the file formatting is no longer tied to the page's size. For example, a centered heading can be adjusted dynamically for a 40, 32, or 20 cell line as needed. An added benefit is that a user can also utilize markup to navigate the document, just as they do with a screen reader on a well-made webpage when jumping to a particular heading, link, or item on the page.

The inclusion of links also aids navigation. This will make tables of contents more useful and make it easier to access information such as footnotes and endnotes. Also, a transcriber could link to content referenced earlier in the transcription, such as a specific map or chart relevant to and referenced by the current material.

Finally, the inclusion of tactile graphics will make it easier for dynamic multiline displays like the Monarch to display both braille and tactile graphics, while also improving production using embossers that support both. Since alt text is a requirement of eBraille, it will also mean that more information is available for the user, even if the tactile graphic is not being produced on the hardware they are using to read the braille. For example, if the user is reading an eBraille file on their single line braille display, they will instead see the alt text for the graphic, where currently they would only see blank space. This makes it easier for them both to know not only which tactile graphic to grab out of their stack, but also to have a description to prepare them to better understand that graphic.

These three changes will not drastically change the production of braille by transcribers, either. Currently, transcribers are already identifying content as headings, lists, paragraphs, etc. but that information is being thrown out when they save as the current file type. The only change to their current workflow will be the need to identify links and insert tactile graphics. The main change will be in the

software so that all the information added throughout the transcription process is no longer thrown out.

In the end, these changes will benefit braille users everywhere, particularly students who must consume braille under high pressure circumstances, such as during tests, learning new information in the classroom alongside their peers, or creating materials on which they will be graded. The enhanced navigation will remove a barrier they currently have to keeping up with their peers, as will the inclusion of tactile graphics and alt text. It will also make it possible for more innovation among software developers to utilize all the information included in this rich file format for the benefit of the reader. We know that braille reading skills improve employment and income outcomes (Ryles, 1996).

I hope you will join us for this pre-conference presentation. There is a lot more to discuss and your feedback and participation will be appreciated!

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For more information contact:

Orientation & Mobility Program
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Visually Impaired Learner Program
Holly Lawson — hlawson@pdx.edu

Virginia M. Sowell Student of the Year Award Stacey Buck

Nominated by Kathleen Stanfa

Stacey Buck is passionate about supporting the Division on Visual Impairments and Deafblindness (DVIDB) and professionals and students it serves. She has been a special education teacher for 14 years and is currently enrolled as a student at Missouri State University where she is pursuing her certification in Orientation and Mobility. She is currently in the doctoral program in Evangel University.

Stacey serves as DVIDB's student worker where she is responsible for a variety of administrative and other tasks, providing support where needed. She maintains the DVIDB membership database and assists with electronic communication with members. Stacey is an asset to DVIDB and to the field of visual impairments.

Congratulations, Stacey Buck, DVIDB's Virginia M. Sowell Student of the Year Award Winner!



2024 DVIDB Award Winners



Nicole Johnson

Distinguished
Service Award



Stacey Buck

Virginia M.
Sowell Student
of the Year
Award



Anne Gurss

Exemplary
Advocate Award



Jessica Schultz

Deborah D.
Hatton
Outstanding
Dissertation of
the Year Award



Mary Tubbs

DVIDB Teacher
of the Year

Congratulations
to the 2024
DVIDB Award
Winners!

Deborah D. Hatton Outstanding Dissertation of the Year Award Jessica Schultz

Nominated by Mackenzie Savaiano

Dr. Jessica Schultz's dissertation, *Executive Functions in Braille Reading and Individuals with Visual Impairments*, provides valuable research to build on developmental models of executive functioning for individuals who are blind and read braille. In addition, her research demonstrates a technically sound design and extraordinary statistical analysis of data. Her findings build on previous research on executive functions in individuals who are blind by including analyses comparing individuals who are blind with individuals who are sighted, as well as conducting a regression analysis to determine any specific contributions of the executive functions (i.e., working memory, inhibition, shifting) to braille reading. A unique contribution of Dr. Schultz's work is the inclusion of an auditory discrimination task, to try and control for auditory memory in her model of how executive functions predict or contribute to reading.

Congratulations, Jessica Schultz, DVIDB's Dissertation of the Year Award

Winner!



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Teacher of the Year Award

Mary Tubbs

Nominated by Katie Ericson

Mary Tubbs is a teacher of students with visual impairments for Boothby Therapy Services, she works with students from diverse backgrounds throughout the state of New Hampshire. She collaborates with her colleagues to design thoughtful, individualized programming for students, and she is a lifelong learner, always seeking to improve her practice.

Mary's passion lies in evidence-based practices for social-emotional learning for students with visual impairments. Since graduation, she has worked to improve instruction in social-emotional components of the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC). In particular, she has worked with related service providers, school administrators, and others to improve ECC instruction and social-emotional supports for military-connected students. Mary has shared her work with the larger vision community at both local and international conferences, such as the biannual AERBVI International Conference, and in peer-reviewed journals.

Mary has been, and continues to be, a strong and vocal advocate for her students and service providers in our field. Congratulations, Mary Tubbs, DVIDB's Teacher of the Year Award Winner!

Exemplary Advocate Award

Anne Gurss

**Nominated by Jody White, Melissa Day, Amber Rea, Amy Bitter,
and Janet McAfee**

Anne Gurss currently holds degrees in Early Childhood Special Education, Social Work, and a certification in teaching Students with Visual Impairments. She has worked in the teacher field, teaching students for over 30 years and has, in addition, spent time mentoring many teachers along the way. She always goes above and beyond what is called for. She works with individual students to help them achieve their best potential. She provides activities for all areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) that are fun and engaging and gets to know each individual student to create activities that will be most motivating to them.

In Kansas she has been a mentor to many as they have gone through the endorsement and master's programs. She is always available for questions about teaching, evaluating, writing evaluations and Individualized Education Programs (IEP), creating new activities and much more. She shares her experiences of working with students with visual impairments through the years in a way that has taught others how to teach well. She brings an excitement to learning new things.

A “Let’s do it” and “Anything can be accomplished” attitude has made the challenges of being an itinerant teacher fun. Even when things are stressful, she proclaims ‘Keep calm and Braille on!’ Not only are her stories of how she teaches engaging and very practical, but her numerous sayings and made-up songs are priceless and make it fun for students to learn. It makes the journey of delivering what is best to students seem more achievable and even easy - even when there is much work to do.

Anne is creative and innovative in the way she teaches students. She knows that hands on learning and creating experiences for students to use their senses will help them to get to know the world around them. She has a song for everything, is an artist, creative and has the energy of the Energizer bunny. She has created a summer Braille/ECC camp from the ground up, for students to continue working on Braille skills and ECC skills. This camp includes cooking activities, games, reading, outings, and her favorite, goal ball. The students look forward to this two-week camp every year and the exciting activities she provides.

Anne has created monthly professional development activities for the TSVIs at Greenbush. She has taught others about everything from ECC activities, CVI activities and evaluations, to functional vision evaluations and iPad apps. She has also created a celebration of Braille and ECC for students in the middle of the year where they can come from all of our area districts to learn about technology,

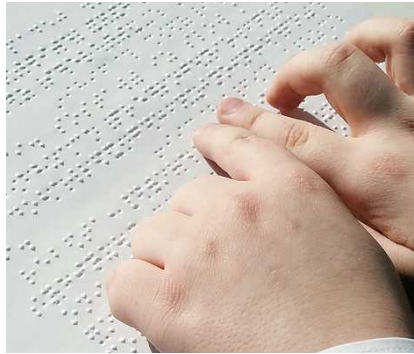
games, crafts, Braille books and more. It is evident that families trust and respect her.

She focuses on independence with all her students whether it be with academics, independent living skills, or leisure activities. When her students graduate, they have multiple skills to help them in the real world. One of the best words that describes Ann is "humble". She is excellent at her craft. When anyone tries to compliment Anne on any or her many talents, she always responds with a "it's nothing, really".

Congratulations, Anne Gurss, DVIDB's Exemplary Advocate Award Winner!

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Back to School Issue

Visual Impairment and Deafblind
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Distinguished Service Award Nicole Johnson

Nominated by Lisha Yochimowitz

Dr. Nicole Johnson has demonstrated dedication and long-standing excellence in the field of education and rehabilitation of students with visual impairments and deafblindness. Dr. Johnson continues to expand and promote the [KU vision program](#) that is known for producing excellent teachers of students with visual impairments (TSVIs) internationally. She graduated well over 200 professionals into the field so far at Kutztown University and ensured they are well prepared. She is always there for her students beyond the classroom and remains their mentor long after they graduate and become TSVIs.

Dr. Johnson has spearheaded several webinars on accessibility and helping to educate students who are blind virtually. She is creating graduate level classes as well to help educators continue in their education and stay up to date in the latest research, including just creating a new CVI graduate level class. She is committed to expanding the program to fill the hole in the teacher shortage and actively

promotes her program to young adults entering college ([Recruiting New College Students to Become Teachers of the Visually Impaired](#)).

Dr. Johnson is often asked to help, provide support, and give of her time for families in need, school districts seeking help, committees that need advisors, and research beyond her job description. She helps in every way possible with a positive attitude and wanting to help create solutions for all. She is involved in fundraising for all in need. She often helps get materials and technology to students, finds ways to help with tuition through scholarships, creating opportunities for her student teachers by getting funding for attending conferences and other learning opportunities.

Congratulations, Nicole Johnson, DVIDB's Distinguished Service Award Winner!



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The Texas Deafblind Project: A Highlight of Educational Services Deep in the Heart of Texas

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Texas Deafblind Project and TSBVI Outreach

The Texas Deafblind Project, located at Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired (TSBVI) in Austin, is a federally funded grant program whose mission is to support the 846 individuals in Texas who are deafblind (birth through age 22 years old) and their families. This grant provided by the Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) is administered through the Texas Education Agency. As part of the TSBVI Outreach Program, project staff partner and work in collaboration with public and charter schools and the twenty regional Education Service Centers in Texas.

Etiologies of these students' dual sensory impairments vary tremendously. Each student has unique, complex, and intensive needs that impact every aspect of development and learning. Local districts must have access to evidence-based

expertise, training, and technical assistance to promote academic achievement and improved school outcome results. Because of the geographical breadth of Texas and limited number of deafblind specialists, most family members and other Individualized Education Program (IEP) team members do not have ready access to experts in this disability area. The uniqueness of individualized supports, the distance between children, the scarcity of experts in deafblind education, and limited availability of public and private resources all inform how the Texas Deafblind Project is formed and how it operates.

The team is comprised of a Project Coordinator, an Early Childhood Deafblind Consultant, three Deafblind Education Consultants, a Deafblind Transition Consultant, and a Family Engagement Coordinator. Two team members are also Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists who can share their expertise in working with children and Deafblind adults. Team members bring unique backgrounds and experiences as teachers, vocational rehabilitation specialists, family members, orientation and mobility specialists, interpreters, and more.

Part of fulfilling the Project's mission entails supporting educational teams, individual professionals, and families within Texas. This Technical Assistance Project employs a multitude of practices delivered through a variety of avenues to

accomplish its goals. As a result, in leveraging currently available technology, many resources are publicly available.

One such resource is the Texas Deafblind Project website (<https://txdeafblindproject.org/>) where users will find a wealth of information on various topics and useful tools related to children and young adults who are deafblind. The website is updated frequently to include the most recent information available while continuing to provide access to well-established resources. Some topics include a great deal of in-depth information such as deafblind interaction, behavioral supports, instructional strategies, transition to adult life, orientation and mobility, and more. A topical resources page contains a curated list of resources ranging from internally developed tools to resources from all over the world. It is a one-stop resource for busy practitioners to visit and find what they need to support their students.

Student consultation is another, more intensive, form of technical assistance provided by the Texas Deafblind Project and is individualized to a specific student. Educational teams from across the state of Texas can complete a request form on the TSBVI website requesting student-specific support. This leads to the Project staff gathering a significant amount of information about the student including, but not limited to, the IEP and Full and Individual Evaluation. After reviewing this information, Project members whose expertise matches the student's anticipated

areas of need travel to the student and spend time observing the student in their educational environment and visiting the family in the home or community. Then the team and Project staff gather to share and reflect on observations, considerations for intervention, and resources available to support the team. Ongoing coaching is available using a virtual model to provide follow-up support or resources when needed.

Instructional resources development is another role of The Texas Deafblind Project. In collaboration with the Curriculum Department at TSBVI, the Texas Deafblind Project published *The Essential Tools of the Trade for Teachers of Students who are Deafblind: A How-To Guide for Completing Evaluations* in December of 2022. This publication gives step-by-step instructions on how to thoroughly evaluate a student who is deafblind for Functional Tactile-Bodily Evaluations, Functional Vision Evaluations, Learning Media Assessments, Communication Evaluations, and Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) Evaluations. As part of this publication, Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) Considerations for Students who are Deafblind were included. This document presents seven areas to be considered in addition to those of the ECCs for students with visual impairments and learners who are deaf or hard of hearing. The ECC Considerations for Students who are Deafblind document is also available as a free

download from the Texas Deafblind Project website on the Topical Resources page (<https://txdeafblindproject.org/resources/topical-resources/>).

Another resource created in collaboration with other departments at TSBVI is *Guidance for Planning Behavior Intervention for Children and Young Adults who are Deafblind or have Visual and Multiple Impairments*. This free tool can be downloaded from the Behavioral Supports section of the Texas Deafblind Project website. It guides the user to consider behaviors generally believed to be disruptive as natural human responses to many complex stressors, such as fear, confusion, pain, etc., and to understand they can lead to an ongoing cycle of behavior/reaction. Along with reframing the idea of “behaviors” as expressions of distress, it explores ways to break this cycle by offering interventions that foster safety, success, independence, and connectedness with students by using proactive and responsive strategies. It also contains forms for behavioral intervention and support and sample behavior intervention plans containing the strategies and information provided in the behavior guidance tool.

Biannually, on odd-numbered years, the Texas Deafblind Project hosts The Texas Symposium on Deafblind Education, which is a large conference specifically designed to focus on deafblind topics affecting educational teams and families across the state. In 2023, the Project reached approximately 300 participants, through six general sessions, 14 breakout sessions, and a family social

co-hosted by family organizations over the course of the three-day Symposium. Innovative and exciting topics included the Tactile Working Memory Scale; Addressing Mental Health Among Children, Adolescents, and Teens; and Ambiguity and Its Impact on Well-Being: What It Is, What It Does, and Why It Matters. The next Texas Symposium on Deafblind Education will be held in the Austin area in the spring of 2025.

Figure 1

Texas Symposium on Deafblind Education Session with Two Peers and Interpreters



Note. Two friends who are Deafblind share their experiences leading a session at the 2023 Texas Symposium on Deafblind Education.

The Texas Deafblind Project values our continued partnership with families and family organizations across the state. Members of the Project participate annually in statewide gatherings of the Deafblind Multihandicapped Association of Texas (DBMAT) and Texas Chargers. The Project’s Family Engagement Coordinator is on the board of several statewide family organizations and is part of national initiatives promoting effective family engagement services. Culturally and linguistically respectful Family Engagement practices are embraced by all the team members and infused into all aspects of the project’s work.

Figure 2

50th Annual Family Conference



Note. The Texas Deafblind Project and TSBVI hosted the Deafblind Multihandicapped Association of Texas (DBMat) 50th Annual Family Conference in September 2023.

In addition to supporting the leadership of the state and national family organizations, the Texas Deafblind Project, in collaboration with other TSBVI Outreach members, hosts monthly virtual meetings called Family Recharge Zone. Topics of these meetings are a blend of family-chosen and family-focused training followed by a conversation exclusively for adult family members with children and adults who are blind, low vision, or deafblind. By offering sessions in English, ASL, and Spanish, Family Recharge Zone aims to reach as many families as possible and ensure that families can connect directly, without solely relying on the use of interpreters.

Another family-centered initiative the Texas Deafblind Project supports is the Family-to-Family Communities Project. In its ninth year, this national initiative brings families together once per month for 90 minutes via video conference to connect, share information and resources, and bolster one another in the journey of supporting their family member who is deafblind. Each community is made up of eight to ten family members. Trained facilitators guide each group using structured conversation and open sharing on topics determined by consensus.

Texas has exciting changes in the field of Deafblind Education happening in the near future. In September 2025, certification for teachers of students who are deafblind (TDBs) will be in effect. Texas will be the second state to have such a certification. The Texas Deafblind Project has been working diligently in

partnership with the Texas Education Agency and the State Board of Educator Certification to make this dream a reality and ensure the availability of qualified personnel for all children who are deafblind in Texas. Decades of advocacy work led us to this exciting leap forward for our children and young adults who are deafblind and their families.

Figure 3

The Texas Deafblind Project Hosts the Deafblind Interagency Taskforce Meeting



As we continue our important work, the Texas Deafblind Project will continue to lift family and individual voices to ensure that this lowest incidence population in Texas will receive the highest quality services, to enable children and students who are deafblind to learn, communicate, and interact with the world.



Texas Deafblind Project

Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired Outreach
www.tsbvi.edu | 512-454-8631 | 1100 W. 45th St. | Austin, TX 78756

The Texas Deafblind Project's mission is to support individuals in Texas who are deafblind (birth through age 22), their families, and the professionals who provide instruction and services.

As part of Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired's Outreach Department, the Texas Deafblind Project:

- Develops and maintains an extensive collection of resources and tools, txdeafblindproject.org
- Publishes TX SenseAbilities, an online magazine for professionals and families of students who are blind, low vision, or deafblind.
- Conducts effective practices training both online and in-person
- Provides school and family consultations
- Promotes and provides culturally and linguistically respectful family engagement



To learn more about our Project or request a service, visit us on the web at:

www.txdeafblindproject.org

Contact us at:

txdeafblindproject@tsbvi.edu | 512-206-9242



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Supporting Children who are Deafblind in the Region 4 RDSPD

Marina McCormick

Region 4 Education Service Center

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What Are Regional Day School Programs for the Deaf?

Providing special education services and support in a state as large as Texas can be challenging. In Texas, independent school districts (ISDs) and charter schools can enter into written contracts to jointly operate and manage such services. Such contracts are known as shared services arrangements (SSAs). By sharing special education services among SSA member districts and charter schools, services can be provided more efficiently and effectively than if each district or charter school chose to do so independently. SSAs can be tailored to identify which special education services will be provided and who will be responsible for the provision of services between the member districts and charter schools. SSAs can also be written to govern services provided through regional day school programs for the deaf (RDSPDs) (Texas Education Agency (TEA), 2013).

In the mid-1970s, RDSPDs were established in Texas through the state's legislature. The state wanted to have a process of providing a full continuum of services and support across the state for students who are deaf or hard of hearing (Texas Education Code (TEC) Chapter 30, Subchapter D). RDSPDs were established in each of the state's 20 regions. All Texas public ISDs and charter schools have access to RDSPDs through SSAs, and individualized education program (IEP) teams are to consider RDSPD services and support for any student who is found eligible for special education services as a student who is Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) or DeafBlind (DB) (19 TAC §89.1080).

In each of Texas' 20 regions, the state legislature established regional educational service centers (ESCs) to support the needs of districts and charter schools within their respective boundaries. The fiscal agent of an RDSPD SSA can be either an ISD or an ESC. While all regional ESCs regularly support 53 RDSPDs across Texas through professional development and technical assistance, only three have regional ESCs that act as fiscal agents for an RDSPD. This includes Regions 4, 13, and 15.

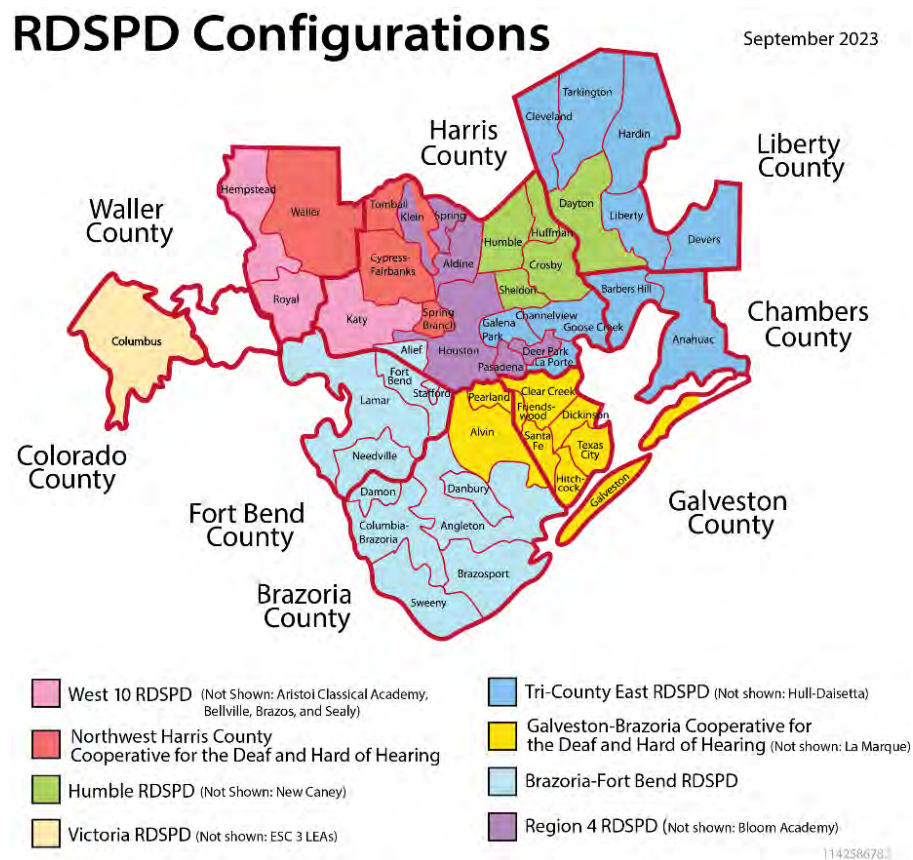
The History of the Region 4 RDSPD

In the 2011-2012 school year, Region 4 ESC was approached by TEA to act as fiscal agent of a new RDSPD in the greater Houston area. As fiscal agent of the Region 4 RDSPD, Region 4 ESC sought to promote equity in services for students

who were DHH and DB through sound fiscal and program management. The program began with only one member district, Houston ISD and approximately 265 students.

Figure 1

RDSPD Configurations in the Region 4 Service Area in Texas



Currently, the Region 4 RDSPD is one of 7 RDSPDs in the Region 4 ESC service area as shown below in Figure 2. The program is the largest RDSPD in the state (shown in purple in the figure), directly serving over 600 students, birth to 22

years old, across six member districts and one charter school: Aldine, Deer Park, Houston, Klein, Pasadena, and Spring ISDs and Bloom Academy Charter School. Five member districts act as satellite sites, meaning these districts provides services to students across all members of the Region 4 RDSPD. These districts are Aldine, Deer Park, Houston, Klein, and Pasadena ISDs. Ten percent ($n = 60$) of the Region 4 RDSPD's students are identified as eligible for special education services as DB.

Figure 2

Continuum of Services for Students, 3-21 Years, Provided by Region 4 RDSPD



Region 4 RDSPD Services for Students who are DeafBlind

The Region 4 RDSPD provides a wide variety of services and support for students who are DB, ages birth to 21 years. The diagram below demonstrates how these levels of support are offered along a continuum from least restrictive (left) to

most restrictive (right). The program supports early childhood intervention for children, birth to 2 years, through the provision of teachers of the deafblind and parent advisors, but this is not included in the diagram.

Figure 3

Explicit Literacy Instruction in Region 4 RDSPD Classroom



Special education services are recommended based on comprehensive evaluations and are tailored to each student's individual needs. The program has

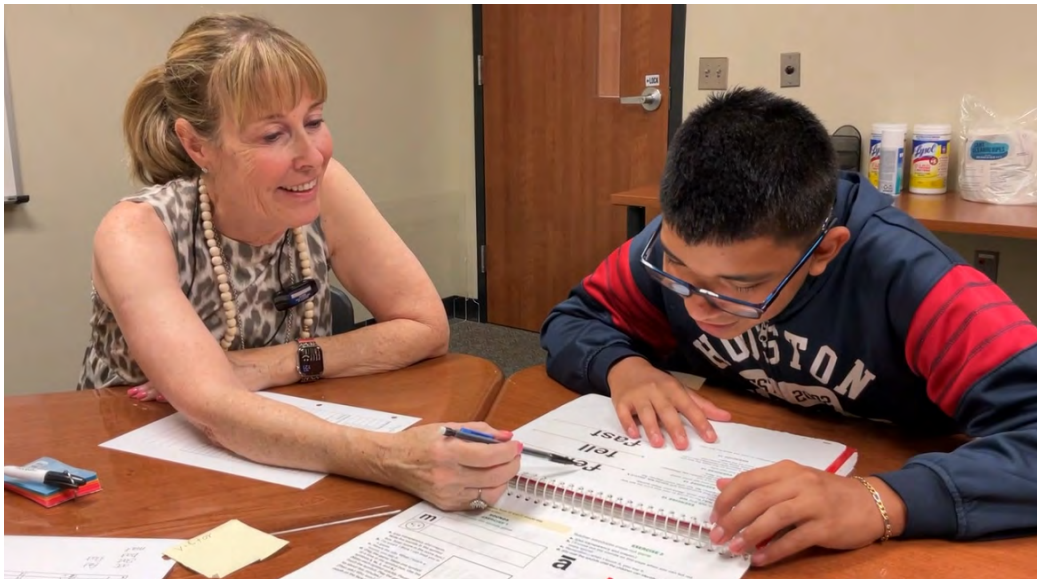
developed assessment batteries for students who are DB who have significant additional needs and are considered presymbolic or unconventional communicators, as well as for students who have slight to severe challenges and are considered symbolic or formal communicators. Examples of items included in the assessment battery for more significant needs includes the Child-Guided Approach: The van Dijk Approach to Assessment, the Functional Auditory Performance Indicators (FAPI), and HomeTalk. In addition, the program uses its own locally developed rubric as a starting point for analyzing student data and guiding discussions on service recommendations. Regardless of setting, Region 4 RDSPD students who are DB receive specially designed instruction as appropriate that focuses primarily on communication and language development, auditory training, literacy, and expanded core curriculum skills related to both DHH and visual impairments.

Founded in 2015, the program has its own Sensory Team which is housed in the satellite site district, Houston ISD. This team consists of two itinerant teachers of the deafblind, a certified orientation and mobility specialist, a Region 4 RDSPD district administrator, and the Region 4 RDSPD Program Coordinator. For many years, the Sensory Team was solely responsible for providing comprehensive evaluations, direct and indirect services, and parent support for students who were DB across the program; however, as the Region 4 RDSPD expanded with the

addition of new member districts and charter schools and student numbers have increased, additional teachers of the deafblind have been added in Aldine and Klein ISDs.

Figure 4

*A Wide Variety of Special Education Services are Available in the Region 4
RDSPD*



The Region 4 RDSPD supports its teachers of the deaf and program administrators in earning the DeafBlind Graduate Certificate from Texas Tech University, a one-year program focused on supporting the needs of students who are DB. All Region 4 RDSPD teachers of the deaf and teachers of the deafblind receive annual professional learning on topics related to DeafBlindness. The

program also has 8 instructional support staff members, including both satellite site district and Region 4 ESC staff, and 5 satellite site district leads who offer daily support to teachers and staff.

Overall, the Region 4 RDSPD seeks to provide students who are DB with comprehensive services and support to allow equitable access to high-quality instructional experiences and environments. The official tagline of the Region 4 RDSPD is “removing barriers and building dreams”. The program will continue to strive towards this vision, not only for students who are DB, but all students within its charge.

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Texas Education Code (TEC) Chapter 30, Subchapter D.

<https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/SOTWDocs/ED/htm/ED.30.htm>



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CEC's 2023iLeadership Institute: Member Benefits

Gwyn Suttell

Allied Instructional Services

Gsuttell@ais-llc.com

Every year, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) engages its many divisions and units in professional development to encourage the growth and sustainability of the organization through the Leadership Institute. The Leadership Institute is an opportunity to connect and collaborate with the many chapters of CEC. CEC is a space for special educators to grow, learn, and be supported. While there were many goals for the conference, there is one goal that stood out to me a little louder as an educator and new member of the Division on Visual Impairments and Deafblindness (DVIDB) board. That goal was CEC Goal 4 of the Leadership Conference “To support and sustain an impactful experience for all CEC and division members”. What I found at the conference was CEC and its divisions are working hard to build content that supports all special educators. CEC has created many opportunities that are meaningful and useful to you as a special educator.

Listed below are the resources you have access to as a member. All items are found under the [Improving Your Practice](#) tab of the CEC website. I hope you take a few minutes to review the extensive content available to you. I think you will find a wealth of resources that support your daily practice.

[The CEC Teacher Repository](#)

What is it? A database of resources for CEC members to find peer-reviewed resources created by members you can use in daily practice. Formats include worksheets, documents, videos, templates, handouts, and more! (It is like Teachers pay Teachers but better!)

What makes it awesome? The content is peer-reviewed and totally FREE for CEC members.

Content that is valuable to a VI professional: Individualized Education Program (IEP) checklist and templates, goal writing, data collection, and so much more!

[CEC Learning Library](#)

What is it? An on-demand professional library of webinars, courses, collections, and more.

What makes it awesome? Low-cost or free professional development (PD) on general topics relevant to the diverse students we serve. Topics such as autism, behavior management, technology, etc.

Content that is valuable to a VI professional: Content in transition and family engagement.

CEC Fall PD Day

What is it? This online event features over 20 live 2-hour sessions with content from CEC, our [Special Interest Divisions](#), and the PROGRESS Center.

What makes it awesome? All-day online session with content directly related to special education.

Content that is valuable to a VI professional: Behavior management, transition, culture, self-determination, inclusion, and mental health topics.

CEC Publications and Journals

What is it? *TEACHING Exceptional Children* (TEC) is a journal published six times a year on the current and hot topics in special education. Content is research-to-practice based with methods in true practice. *Exceptional Children* (EC) is a research-based journal published quarterly by peers.

What makes it awesome? Articles are peer-reviewed and useful tools to expand your knowledge base in all areas of special education.

Content that is valuable to a VI professional: Easy to search for vision-related content, and several articles directly linked to visual impairments and blindness.

Jump Start

What is it? Fully online program for new or early-career teachers. It focuses on topics such as IEPs, working with paraprofessionals, and so much more!

What makes it awesome? Only \$99, and you will receive 7 CEUs on completion of the course! The sessions or training modules are given by experts in the field.

Content that is valuable to a VI professional: Topics such as “Building Admins are Your Friends,” “Measurable IEPs,” and “Delegating to Paraprofessionals.”

Podcasts

What is it? CEC podcasts on a host of topics.

What makes it awesome? On the go learning while you drive!

Content that is valuable to a VI professional: With content like “How to survive your first year of teaching” or various literacy content, teachers of students with visual impairments can gain knowledge in teaching literacy and beyond.

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If you are passionate about the education of children and youth with visual impairments and deafblindness, including those with additional disabilities, please become part of our social network on Facebook. If you have a Facebook account, you can find our page and become a fan by searching for Division on Visual Impairments and Deafblindness.

For those who do not have a Facebook account, you can view our page by going to the following URL:
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