

2011



**T S B V I**  
Outreach Program

KC Dignan, PhD

# **2011 SUMMARY OF NEED FOR VI PROFESSIONALS**

A comprehensive review of educational professionals who work with students with visual impairments, including a description of selected characteristics, projections of attrition and future needs.

# 2011 Summary of Need for VI Professionals in Texas

Compiled by KC Dignan, PhD

## Executive Summary

Since 1996 the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired has conducted an annual survey to assess the need for VI professionals in Texas. "VI professionals" includes teachers certified in visual impairments (VI teachers or TVIs) and certified orientation and mobility specialists (O&M). Individuals with both certifications are referred to as "dually certified." This report will provide information about the results of the survey conducted in September 2011.

The most striking findings include:

- In 2011, the total number of full- and part-time VI professionals increased from 890 to 909 individuals or a 2% increase since 2010.
  - The number of full- and part-time VI teachers increased from 657 to 660, less than a 1% increase. The percentage of full-time teachers remained at 75%.
  - The data was different for O&M specialists. 2011 saw an increase of 7% in the number of individuals available. However, the number of full-time O&M specialists decreased to 46% of the total number of O&M specialists.
  - Although an increase from 2010, the 2011 total is a 1% decrease from 2009.
- The rate of attrition increased substantially in 2011.
  - In 2011 the number of TVIs who left the field increased from 16 to 37, more than double the number who left the previous year. The rate of attrition for O&M and dually certified specialists was varied, but resulted in a 77% increase in attrition over all.
- Over the next 3 years, it is anticipated that 128 or 14% of existing VI professionals are projected to leave the field. This is a 25% increase from last year.
- The cultural diversity of VI professionals continues to be a challenge. While the diversity is similar to other educators in Texas, it is not keeping pace with the student population.
  - The number of Hispanic and Spanish speaking VI professionals decreased in 2011, from 100 to 77 and 112 to 108 respectively.
  - In 2010 there were 36 African-American VI professionals. In 2011 the number increased to 38, a modest 5% increase.
- Universities are training as many VI professionals as funds allow. There are 123 VI professionals in a post-baccalaureate program either as VI teachers or O&M specialists. Most are already teaching and counted as existing and thus not addressing the attrition or need projections. There are 11 undergraduate students receiving O&M training.
- The number of students increases each year by an average of 3%. It will be hard to maintain existing levels of services and accommodate growth and attrition.



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## Introduction

Since 1996 the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired has conducted an annual survey to assess the need for VI professionals in Texas. “VI professionals” includes teachers certified in visual impairments (VI teachers or TVIs) and certified orientation and mobility specialists (O&M specialists). Individuals with both certifications are referred to as “dually certified.” This report will provide information about the results of the survey conducted in September 2011.

Data was collected from the 20 regional education service centers (ESCs) and the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI). TSBVI serves as a statewide resource, with a concentration of students and VI professionals. As a result, TSBVI data are collected separately from that of ESCs. Unless otherwise noted TSBVI data is included in the data presented in this report. Data from TSBVI includes information about those who provide direct services via the Comprehensive Program and those who provide statewide training, short-term services and leadership via the Special Programs and Outreach Programs.

More information about how this data was collected is included in the Appendix.

## Characteristics of VI professionals in Texas

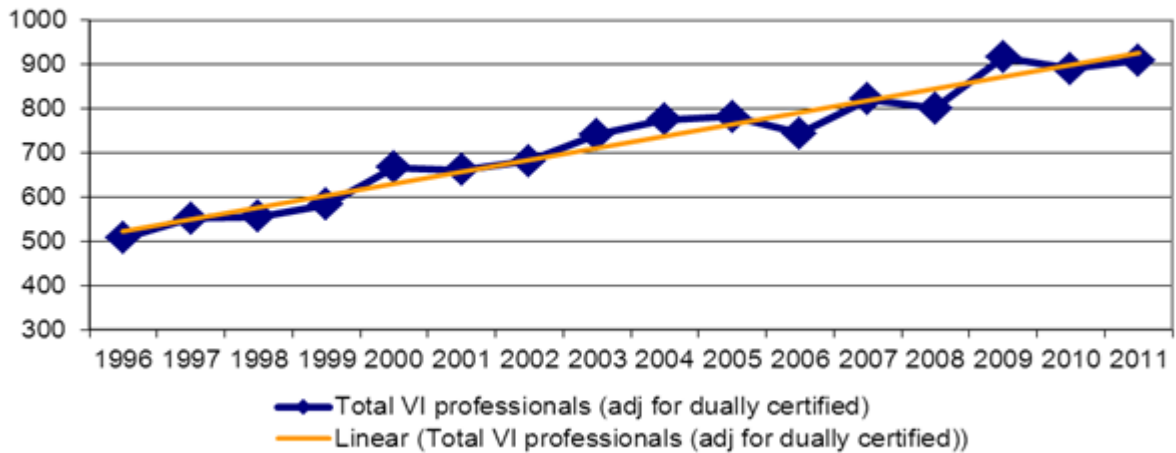
The survey asked about the number of people *functioning* as VI professionals. Many professionals may have certification as a teacher certified in visual impairments (TVI or VI teacher) and/or an orientation and mobility (O&M) specialist. However, most are not certified in both areas and do not provide both services. Those whose job assignment includes both are considered dually certified. Only data on those who are *functioning* in both disciplines are considered dually certified for this report.

## Number of VI professionals in Texas

This data has been gathered annually since 1996. Over a 15 year-span the number has increased with occasional dips. This year the number of VI professionals in Texas increased to 909 individuals or 784 full-time equivalents (FTEs) when adjusted for dually certified VI professionals.

The 2% increase comes after a decrease in 2010. As a result, over the past 2 years the number of VI professionals has *decreased* by 1%. During the same two year period the *Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments* indicated a 5.4% increase in the number of students served by VI professionals.

**Growth of VI Professionals in Texas**



The table below provides further details about VI professionals in Texas. “Individuals” include both full- and part-time VI professionals. The total number of individuals who are VI professionals increased by 2%, the FTEs increased by a slightly less amount. The “full-time equivalency” or “FTE” data adjusts for the part-time VI professionals.

This increase comes after a decrease in 2010. When compared to 2009 data, the number of VI professionals actually decreased slightly (1%) over the past 2 years. Additionally, while expanded in the following sections, the summary of this year’s growth shows that the numbers of part-time VI professionals increased both for VI teachers (TVIs) and O&M specialists. The number of full-time VI professionals (adjusted for dually certified professionals) increased slightly (1%). The number of part time VI professionals increased by nearly 5%.

Even with the reductions seen in 2010 and the slight increase in 2011, the number of teachers certified in visual impairments in Texas has increased 92% since 1996.

**Table 1: Total VI Professionals Statewide**

	2009		2010		2011	
	Individuals	FTE <sup>2</sup>	Individuals	FTE <sup>2</sup>	Individuals	FTE <sup>2</sup>
ESC Leadership <sup>1</sup>	32	22.2	29	24.1	29	20.4
TSBVI Statewide <sup>1,3</sup>	23	21.5	27	26.5	27	25.5
VI and O&M service providers (adjusted for dually certified professionals)	861	763.0	834	772.0	853	784
<b>Total VI Staff</b>	<b>916</b>	<b>806.7</b>	<b>890</b>	<b>822.6</b>	<b>909</b>	<b>829.9</b>

<sup>1</sup> TSBVI outreach and ESC consulting VI staff provide leadership/technical assistance statewide or within their region. Educators at TSBVI or ESCs who provide direct educational service to students with visual impairments are counted as "VI and O&M direct service providers".

<sup>2</sup> FTE = (part-time x .5) + full-time for all charts

<sup>3</sup> In 2010 there was a clarification in how to count statewide staff at TSBVI. This is reflected in the data since 2010 and does not reflect additional staff or resources.

In 2010 there was a change in the functional definition for TSBVI statewide personnel. This change accounts for the 2010 increase; no additional staff have been hired. 2010 was the first year that VI professionals who provide statewide leadership at TSBVI included those who provide short-term services in Special Programs at TSBVI as well as those with the Outreach Programs. The four VI professionals in Special Programs were not counted in previous years. This should be considered when comparing data.

## Direct service providers

Below are data about direct service providers. Direct service providers include VI teachers (TVIs), orientation and mobility (O&M) specialists and dually certified personnel who:

- work with students on a regular basis and
- are the teacher-of-record for issues related to visual impairments.

This does not include those who provide vision-related leadership, technical assistance or statewide services at the regional education service centers (ESCs) or the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) through the Special Programs or Outreach Programs. The ESC staff who provide leadership/technical assistance provide an array of services specifically related to students with visual impairments, but not for individual students. Some have other responsibilities which may include more general tasks related to low-performing schools, state accountability measures and transition. These responsibilities vary from ESC to ESC.



For the purposes of this survey, professionals who are certified *and* employed in both visual impairments and orientation and mobility (dually certified) are counted as a part-time VI teacher and a part-time O&M specialist. These specialists are embedded in VI teacher data and the O&M data. Specific information on dually certified VI professionals is listed in Table 4 on page 5. Information about the number of combined direct service providers has been adjusted for dually certified professionals.

The number of O&M specialists has declined by 11% in 2 years while the number of students needing O&M has increased by 14% in that same period.

**Table 2: Direct Service Provider: VI teachers**

	2009		2010		2011	
	Individual	FTE <sup>1</sup>	Individual	FTE <sup>1</sup>	Individual	FTE <sup>1</sup>
Full-time VI teachers	492		523		522	
Part-time VI teachers	209		168		171	
<b>Total VI Staff</b>	<b>701</b>	<b>596.5</b>	<b>691</b>	<b>607.0</b>	<b>693</b>	<b>607.5</b>

<sup>1</sup>. FTE = .part-time x .5 + full-time for all charts

The total number of *individuals* (full- and part-time) who work as a teacher of students with visual impairments increased very slightly (2 individuals) in the past year. It also decreased by 1% over the past two years, since 2009. During that same 2-year period the number of students increased by 593 students. The information about the changes in the number of full-time VI teachers and the FTE is essentially static as well. The portion of part-time VI teachers increased by a modest 2%.

**Table 3: Direct Service Providers: O&M specialists**

	2009		2010		2011	
	Individual	FTE <sup>1</sup>	Individual	FTE <sup>1</sup>	Individual	FTE <sup>1</sup>
Full-time O&M specialists	117		118		126	
Part-time O&M specialists	108		94		101	
<b>Total O&amp;M Staff</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>227</b>	<b>176.5</b>

<sup>1</sup>. FTE = .part-time x .5 + full-time for all charts

The number of O&M specialists (individuals and FTEs) increased this year by 7%. Although an increase indicates increased capacity to meet students' needs, this increase follows a 6% decrease in 2010, or a less than 1% gain overall. This is alarming when balanced by the fact that the number of students receiving O&M services increased by 7% in a single year (2011) and by nearly 14% over a two year period (between 2009 and 2011).

The number of VI professionals who provide work directly with children has decreased in the past 2 years.

The total percentage of students who have been received an O&M evaluation and then O&M services has been steadily increasing by an average of 1% per year. It is projected that the increase will continue. Even though the number of O&M specialists increased this year, availability of adequate staff is problematic due to the rate of student population growth and change, along with reports of increased caseloads.

### Dually certified VI professionals

Dually certified VI professionals are those who are certified and function both as an O&M specialist and as a VI teacher. While many professionals may hold both certifications, not all dually certified professionals serve in both capacities. This survey gathers data only about those who *function* both as a VI teacher and an O&M specialist. This year's data shows a slight decrease from last year. Since 2004 the number has fluctuated between 72 and 62, with an average of 67, this year's total. This change is not considered significant. It likely reflects a shift in staffing needs within districts.

**Table 4: Dually Certified Professionals**

	2009	2010	2011
Dually certified	65	69	67

Dually certified professionals are unique and offer districts maximum flexibility. Administrators are able to modify work assignments according to the needs of the district and the students for a particular year. The changes between 2009 and 2011 likely reflect changes in staffing needs statewide.

At first glance, hiring dually certified staff may seem highly desirable. However, dually certified professionals also face unique challenges and best succeed when administrators have an understanding of both professions. Data show that

administrators are highly likely to assign dually certified professionals a full-time VI caseload as well as a significant O&M caseload. Since these are two separate professions, there is evidence that when either professional domain is overloaded the students' learning will be compromised. Dually certified professionals report frustrations in these situations, sometimes to the point of letting a certification lapse or changing employment.

Dually certified VI professionals offer the benefit of increased flexibility, but also increased challenges for administrators. Successful administrators understand that these are two different professions.

### **The role and impact of full- and part-time VI professionals**

Texas has a long history of using both full- and part-time VI professionals. Part-time VI professionals have advantages.

- They allow districts with a small number of students with visual impairments to meet their local needs.
- They can increase flexibility in districts that have just a bit more, or a bit less than a caseload can reasonably handle and still provide quality services.
- They may be either employed by the district on a part-time contractual basis or have duties unrelated to visual impairments as a portion of their job responsibilities.

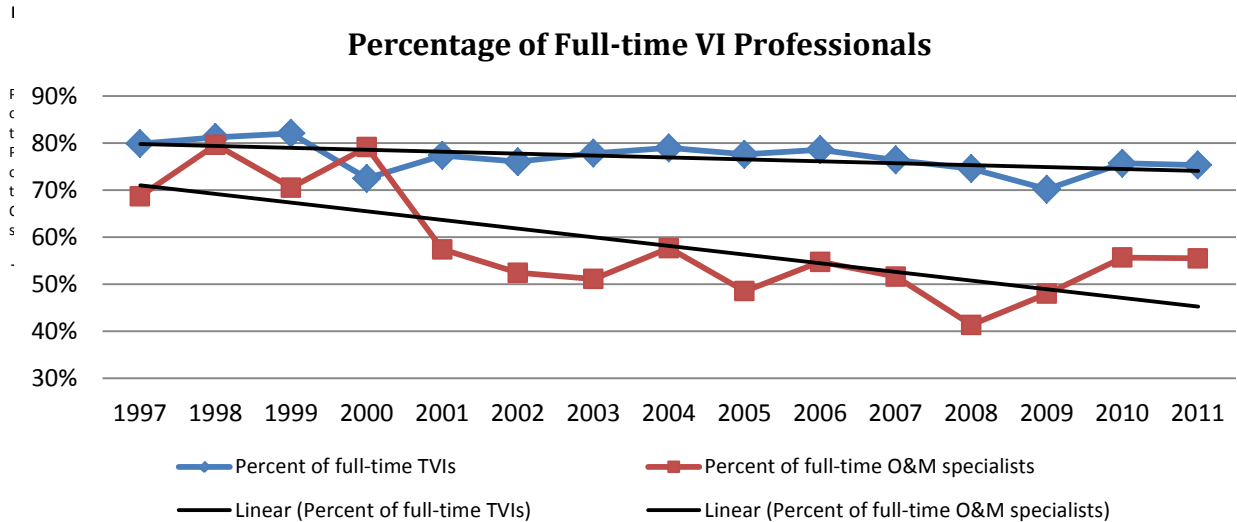
Disadvantages include various challenges to meeting the needs of the students.

- Due to other commitments and/or responsibilities, part-time staff are at-risk for not being able to provide the full caseload management necessary for even small caseloads.
- It is especially difficult for those holding both generic special education and visual impairment certifications that have one or two students in their resource room along with an array of other students, most of whom require tutoring.
- Students with visual impairments require specialized instruction in skills necessary to access the general curriculum and expanded core curricula. The expanded core curricula (ECC) are the disability-specific educational domains for students with visual impairments. Teachers with part-time VI caseloads may find it challenging to provide these services.

([http://www.nhpdvcve.org/docs/TipSheet\\_2\\_ECC.pdf](http://www.nhpdvcve.org/docs/TipSheet_2_ECC.pdf), for a 2 page factsheet on the ECC.)

Federal law requires instruction in the home, school and community in academic and functional domains that go beyond the standard curricula and the classroom. The challenge is how to provide specialized consultation and instruction designed for students with visual impairments and necessary for students to maximize their independence on a part-time basis.

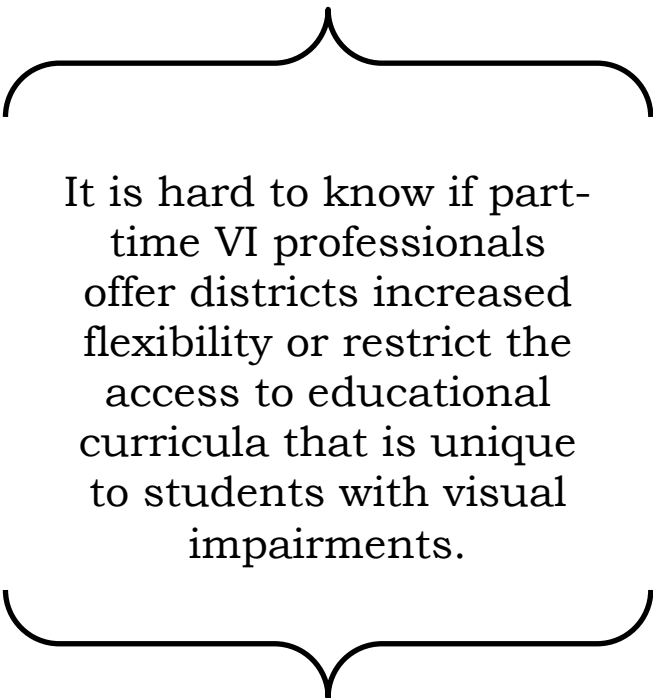
Dually certified VI professionals are included in each of the disciplines. While these VI professionals may be employed full-time in a district, they must split their time and expertise between two different, although related professions. It takes a skillful and knowledgeable administrator to understand the challenges faced by these professionals and to ensure that neither area is slighted.



Statistically, the prevalence of a full-time VI teacher has been inching downwards since 1997. Currently 75.3% are full-time. The percentage peaks and dips from year to year; however in 1997 80% were full-time. It is hard to know if as the numbers of VI professionals grow this change is reflecting more diverse and flexible local needs, or limited availability, limited instruction in the ECC and/or administrative limitations.

The scenario is quite different for O&M services. Overall, the number of O&M specialists increased by 7% in the past year but only by 1% over the past two years. The percentage of full-time O&M specialists showed no real change in the past year (from 55.7% down to 55.5%).

Over the years, the trend-line indicates percentage of full-time O&M specialists has declined dramatically. Overall, it has fallen from a high of 80% in 1998 to its lowest point of 41% in 2008. Currently it is at 55.5%. Although historically the trend-line for full-time specialists is decreasing, the percent of full-time O&M specialists did not change in 2011. It is strongly hoped that the number of full- and part-time O&M specialists will continue to increase. Only then will students statewide receive adequate access to orientation and mobility specialists.



It is hard to know if part-time VI professionals offer districts increased flexibility or restrict the access to educational curricula that is unique to students with visual impairments.

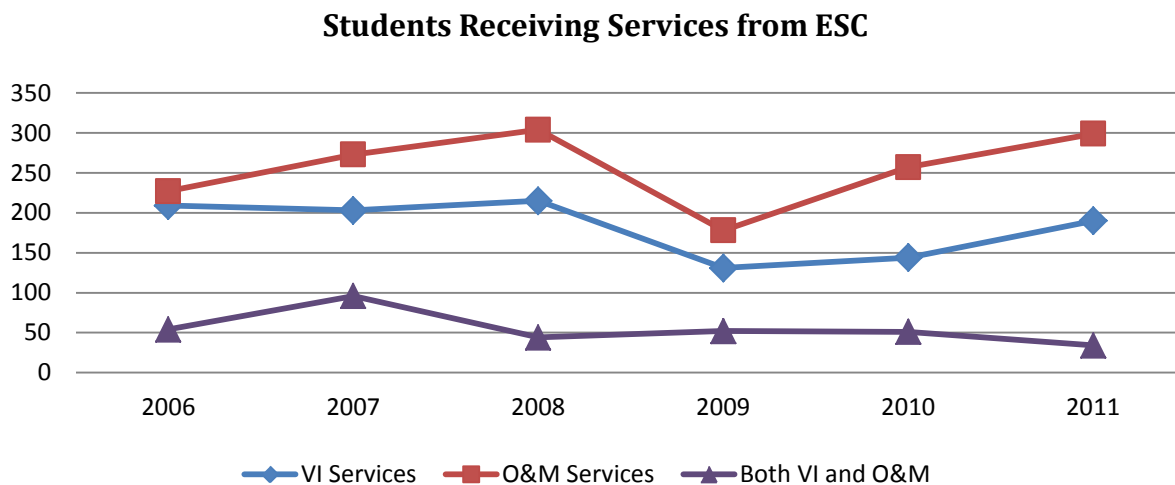
It is difficult to project the implications of changes in the full- and part-time ratios. A statistical trend line indicates that overall, the prevalence of full-time VI professionals is decreasing slightly for VI teachers and significantly for O&M specialists. Does this indicate an increase in flexibility and local services, or restrictions in the variety of educational experiences available to students with visual impairments? In the meantime, the number of students with visual impairments and students needing O&M services is increasing. VI professionals whose time is split with other responsibilities and/or responding to different employers may be challenged when it comes to adequately meeting the VI-specific needs of their students. These elements will be watched more closely in the future to determine if a trend exists and the possible implications of such a trend.

### **Direct service from ESCs**

Each regional service center (ESC) provides an array of services to districts. Some services include direct services to students with visual impairments; the ESC staff is listed on the IEP. Of the 11 regions that provide any type of direct services four provide VI services to 190 students, 11 provide O&M services to 299 students and an additional 34 students get both. Seven ESCs provide at least 50% of the O&M services delivered in that region.

**Table 5: Students Receiving Services from ESCs**

	2009	2010	2011
VI- only services (4 regions)	131	144	190
O&M-only services (11 regions)	178	257	299
Both VI and O&M (3 regions)	52	51	34
<b>Total</b>	<b>361</b>	<b>452</b>	<b>523</b>



The number of students who receive ESC-based services has increased by 16% in the past year and 45% over the past two years. This is a significant increase. Of the eleven regions that provide direct services, nine experienced increases. One region which had historically provided only O&M services is now providing VI services in order to help districts meet their needs. The increases range from 5% to 30% per region.

The need for services from the ESC depends on many factors, including population size, region/district agreements and regional service delivery options. This makes it difficult to point to a single cause in the recent increase. However, given recent fiscal issues, it could be posited that districts are turning to regional service centers for some of their VI services. While many factors can affect the number of students served by ESCs and not districts, the district's ability to meet the needs of their students is a primary one.

The possible concern about services from ESCs is that districts fail to "own" those students and that with reliance on the ESC districts are challenged to become knowledgeable about the student's specific needs and to build VI expertise within the district. The primary goal is that the students get all the services they need to become

independent, functional adults. This requires coordinated services by a broad array of educators, not just VI professionals. This critical function may be limited if the VI teacher is miles away and/or the district does not see itself as an active player.

Statewide data on the number of students who receive O&M has been collected since 2001. Since that time, the number of students has increased by 79%; from 1,684 to 3,020. The number of students who receive O&M from the ESC has increased from 266 to 299, or an increase of 12% since 2001. Statewide, districts are expanding their ability to serve students locally, while still heavily relying on ESCs when that service delivery system works best for that district.

Eleven regions provide O&M services, the most common service provided. These regions include Regions 1, 2, 5, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19. Eight regional O&M specialists have caseloads of 20 or more students. In one west Texas region the O&M specialist has 44 students scattered around the region. While a caseload of 20 students in an urban or suburban setting may be feasible if not ideal, a caseload of 20 or more in a region that is larger than many states is alarming. The average caseload for regional O&M specialists is 27 students. It is a challenge to provide an appropriate level of services to that many students in large geographical areas and to provide training in home, school and community settings as the law requires.

In addition to providing direct services, ESCs also are a *major* part of the state's infrastructure that ensures access to high quality VI services. Regional VI specialists are critical players in the provision of technical assistance, leadership, workshops, and materials for VI professionals, families and students. Additionally the region may assist in braille production and act as a crucial source of information and guidance and information on VI-related issues for regional special education administrators.

## **Cultural diversity**

Texas is a diverse state and needs a diverse workforce. This survey asks about African-American, Hispanic, and Asian VI professionals. It also queries the number of Spanish-speaking VI professionals. The results are listed below.

**Table 6: Culturally Diverse VI Professionals**

**Hispanic VI professionals**

	2009	2010	2011
VI teachers	72	83	61
O&M specialists	10	11	11
Dually certified	7	6	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>77</b>

**Spanish-speaking VI professionals**

	2009	2010	2011
VI teachers	84	95	92
O&M specialists	12	10	11
Dually certified	9	7	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>108</b>

**African-American VI professionals**

	2009	2010	2011
VI teachers	23	25	24
O&M specialists	11	11	14
Dually certified	1	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>38</b>

**Asian VI professionals**

	2009	2010	2011
VI teachers	8	8	7
O&M specialists	0	0	1
Dually certified	1	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>

This year there were overall decreases in all cultural diversity groups. Within specific categories the changes were more varied, with some increasing, maintaining or decreasing.

In September 2011 there were 24 VI teachers and 14 O&M specialists who are African-American, a slight decrease for TVIs and an increase for O&M specialists. The Hispanic VI professionals included 61 VI teachers, 11 O&M specialists and five dually certified professionals, for an overall decrease of 23% in a single year and 13% decrease in the past two years. Ninety-two VI teachers, 11 O&M specialists and five dually certified professionals speak Spanish. This is a 4% decrease from last year. As of 2011, there are seven Asian VI teachers and one O&M specialist.

This year the number of Hispanic VI professionals decreased from 100 to 77 individuals, or by 23%.

Recruiting and retaining culturally diverse educators remains a serious issue in Texas and around the country.



## Attrition

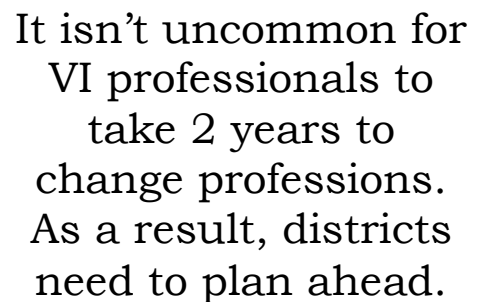
School districts and VI professionals must be responsive to the general economy. While the number of VI professionals increased slightly, the increase was not commensurate with student population growth over the past two years. Issues related to the economy and other factors discussed below may help account for the gap between growth of the student numbers and the number of VI professionals to serve them.

## Attrition Factors

Much has been written about the existing and increasing rate of educators leaving the field. VI professionals are rare and difficult to find. Therefore, retention is of critical concern. Unlike other disciplines, even other high-need areas like math, when a VI professional is unavailable there is typically no one else in the district with the specific expertise needed to assess and meet the visually impaired student's unique educational needs. As a result, students' progress and independence may suffer when there is sub-standard access to critical services from a highly qualified professional.

Several factors affect recruiting and attrition in the VI fields. Below are some of those factors.

- Most VI professionals are mid-career professionals with an average of seven years of professional experience in other careers and are likely to have shorter careers in this second field.
- Most educators and other likely candidates are unaware that the field exists. Blindness is a low incidence field with a very small population. Therefore, special recruitment challenges exist. People must be aware of the field and its possibilities before they can become a VI professional.
- It is not uncommon for mid-career professionals to need two or three years before they decide to initiate VI training, and then another one or two years to be trained. Making such a change mid-career is a big decision.
- Distance education options are making it easier to access training for mid-career professionals who may not be able to leave their home and jobs for training.



It isn't uncommon for VI professionals to take 2 years to change professions. As a result, districts need to plan ahead.

- Because VI professionals are so critical to student learning, a change of even one person, in any single district, can have dramatic effects on the annual yearly progress of students.
- Changes in the number of those who *function* as dually certified may or may not reflect attrition of dually certified professionals. Rather, it may reflect a change in how the VI professional functions this year.
- Economic factors drive attrition and hiring. The recession greatly affected the entire educational workforce. There are many reports of educators in general and specifically VI professionals in specific, delaying retirement for two to four years. Additionally, many districts have had to look at serious cost-cutting factors including reducing their workforce.
- As a profession, education is an aging field. According to the National Education Association 37% of educators are over 50 and are either close to or are eligible for retirement.

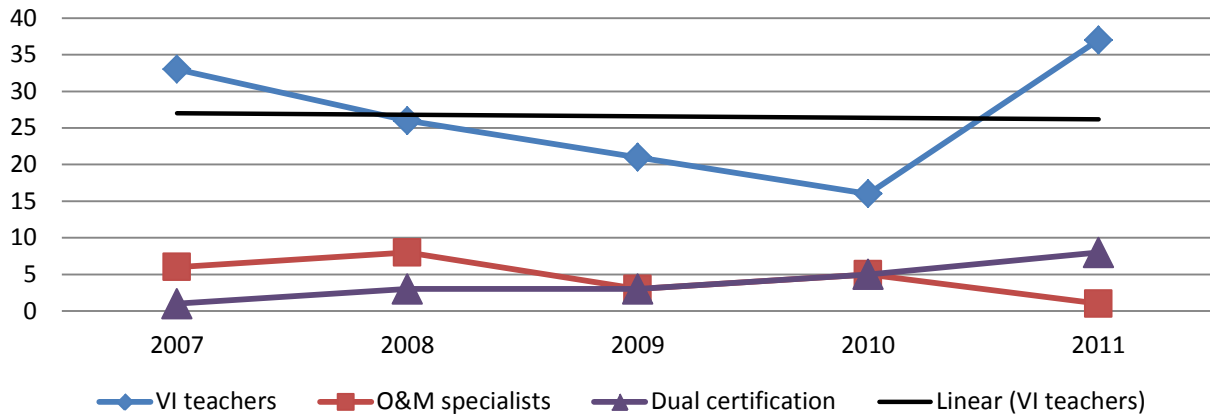
Attrition increased substantially in 2011. The question remains: Is this the start of the record retirements predicted by experts?

As a result, it is important to consider and analyze the existing and projected attrition rates when considering personnel needs for the future. Typically it takes at least two years to recruit and train a VI teacher and a bit longer for O&M specialists. (VI teachers have a probationary certificate option, O&M specialists do not.) Significant under-projections of 3-year attrition can affect longer-term planning for VI professionals and discounts the time needed for recruitment and training.

**Table 7: Attrition within the Past Year (1-Year attrition)**

	2009	2010	2011
<b>VI Teacher</b>	21	16	37
<b>O&amp;M Specialist</b>	3	5	1
<b>Dual Certified</b>	3	5	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>46</b>

### Attrition Within the Past Year (1-year Attrition)



After three years of reductions in attrition, the number of VI professionals who left the field increased markedly in 2011. Over the past two years multiple reports have stated that eligible retirees have been delaying their retirement, according to American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), Pew Research Center and other data sources. One state, Florida, projects that the number of teachers needed to accommodate expected attrition and growth will increase by 81% in the next 9 years.

This sudden and significant increase raises these questions: Is this the start of the expected increase in teacher attrition? Will districts be able to adequately meet the needs of their students with visual impairments in two to four years?

Will the increase witnessed this year be the first step in accelerating attrition in education? It seems inevitable that it will, especially since VI professionals come to the field from another career or certification area with an average of 7 years prior experience. Consequently, VI professionals are in their mid-career even on their first day in the VI field.

Projecting attrition is difficult. Over the past 11 years regional VI consultants have under-projected the attrition of VI teachers by 18% and O&M specialists by 75%.

## Projected 3-year attrition

The VI consultants at the ESCs are the best and *only* source for this information. However, historically (since 2000) their projections are well below actual attrition by a significant margin (18% for VI teachers and 75% for O&M specialists). In general, they must rely on others for the information. Some people may be reluctant to share their plans or their plans may change in the interim period. Nonetheless, this is the best source for information on attrition for VI professionals. This data specifically addresses those who will leave the field, not move from school-employment to private contractual work, change districts or retire and re-hire in the same or different district.

**Table 8: Projected 3-Year Attrition by Job Assignment**

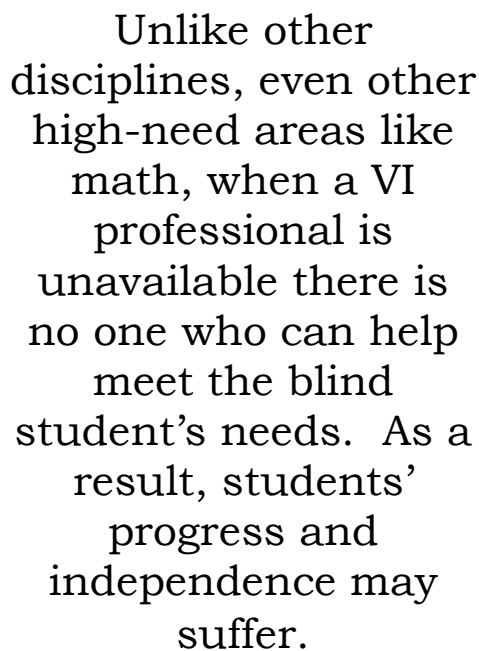
Projections made in:	2009	2010	2011
<b>VI Teacher</b>	86	81	100
<b>O&amp;M Specialist</b>	11	11	16
<b>Dual Certified</b>	18	10	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>128</b>

In 2011, the VI consultants at the ESCs projected that 128 VI professionals will leave the field within the next 3 years. This is a 26% increase from 2010. Even assuming that this projection may be low, given data from past data trends, at least 14% of *existing* VI professionals are projected to be retiring or otherwise leaving the field by 2014.

Given that VI professionals have an average of seven years of experience prior to becoming VI certified and the historical trends showing projected vs. actual attrition, it is possible that the ESC projection is overly optimistic and that many more VI professionals will leave the field within the next 3 years.

### VI teachers - attrition and growth

Data from the past 15 years projects that the student population will increase by 3% per year



Unlike other disciplines, even other high-need areas like math, when a VI professional is unavailable there is no one who can help meet the blind student's needs. As a result, students' progress and independence may suffer.

over the next 3 years or 815 more students for a total of 9,603 by 2014. Using the most commonly accepted caseload formula (see page 30), an additional 85 FTEs with VI teacher certification will be needed statewide to meet the growth. If the current ratio of full- to part-time teachers continues, the number of VI teachers needed to total 85 FTEs may be closer to 97 individuals.

In addition to serving the expected growth, Texas will need to replace VI teachers who leave the field, mostly for retirement. It is

projected that 112 individuals with VI credentials (VI teachers and dually certified professionals) will leave the field by 2014. As documented above, this is likely a low projection as historically the projections have been 18% below actual 3-year attrition. The attrition could be closer to 132 full- and part-time individuals certified in visual impairments (VI teachers).

Combining projected growth and attrition, Texas will need between 197 and 229 individuals with VI certification in the next 3 years to replace those who are likely to leave and respond to anticipated growth.

In October, 2011 there were 72 people seeking VI certification. Of those, 40 (55%) are already working as VI teachers and will not contribute to filling the gap. Assuming all finish their program, only 32 VI teachers will be available to meet the anticipated need for new personnel due to attrition and growth. Based on a review of past data, these numbers are expected to be similar over the next 3 years; that 96 people will complete their certification program. With an expected 197 – 229 teachers needed over the next three years and a likelihood of only 96 available to fill the gap, Texas is facing a significant gap.

Growth = 97 new TVI FTEs  
+  
Attrition = 132 to be replaced  
**Total needed= 229 VI teachers**

With 96 new VI teachers available over next 3 years, how will we fill the gap?

## O&M specialists – attrition and growth


Since 2001, the first year data was collected, the percentage of students who receive O&M services has increased by approximately 1% per year. The 2011 *Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments* indicated that 34% receive O&M. It is projected in the next 3 years that 37% of all students, or an additional 533 students, will need O&M instruction.

Applying a standard caseload formula (see page 31) means an additional 56

FTEs will be necessary to meet the increased need for orientation and mobility services. In Texas, full-time-equivalent positions can be quite different from the number of individuals needed to equal the FTEs, especially with O&M specialists. In 2011, 56% of O&M specialists were employed full-time. If the current ratio of full- to part-time individuals is applied, the number of O&M specialists needed to result in 56 FTEs is likely to be closer to 72 individuals.

The regional VI consultants project that 28 people with O&M expertise (O&M specialists and dually certified professionals) will be leaving the field by 2014. If the 75% margin of error applied, the more likely attrition will be closer to 49 individuals. If projected growth is combined with the 3-year adjusted projected attrition and based on the caseload formula, it is likely Texas will need between 84 and 129 additional full- and part-time O&M specialists over the next 3 years.

In October, 2011 there were 39 undergraduate and graduate students seeking O&M certification. Candidates must complete their entire program before they can start working as an O&M, which typically takes about 2 years. O&M certification is a national certification and valid in any state. It is also valid for all ages, not just students. Many new O&M specialists will take positions in adult agencies, not schools. It is hoped that over the next 2 years that all 39 will find educational jobs and be able to help fill the expected gap. Even so, that still leaves a gap of 43 and as many as 90 positions.

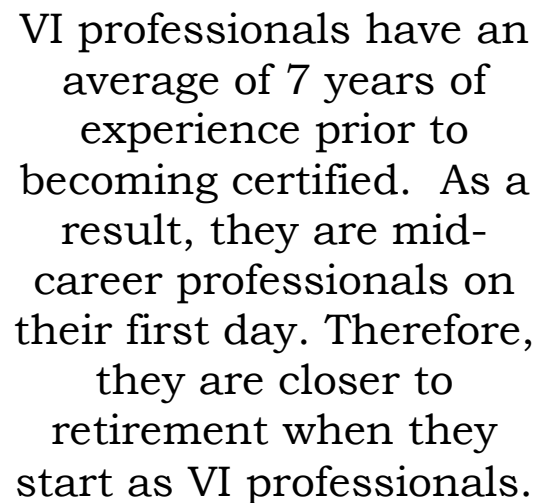


Growth = 56 new  
+ O&M FTEs  
Attrition = 49 to be  
replaced  
**Total needed= 105 O&M  
specialists**

With 39 in training, how  
will we fill the gap?

## Projected vs. Actual Attrition

The most recent time frame for which a complete set of data is available is 2009-2011. In 2007 there was a substantial increase in projected attrition. It went from 79 to 113 VI professionals. The projections remained relatively unchanged for the next two years. However, serious economic factors first became apparent in 2008-2009 and the recession was clearly evident in 2009-2010. In 2009 the number of people who left the field the previous year dropped substantially from 37 to 27. This remained essentially unchanged in 2010. This change is consistent with current research into delayed retirement. While clearly VI professionals have been delaying retirement, ultimately they will retire.



VI professionals have an average of 7 years of experience prior to becoming certified. As a result, they are mid-career professionals on their first day. Therefore, they are closer to retirement when they start as VI professionals.

In 2009 it was projected that 115 people would leave the field by 2011. The actual loss in the most recent and complete 3-year cycle of data (2009 -2011) shows the projection was short by 16 people. This time span (2009-2011) includes two years when attrition took a significant dip: 2009 and 2010. In 2008 27 people left the field, a 23% reduction from the previous year. 2010 saw another 26 VI professionals leave the field. It is hoped that these vacancies were filled with the approximately 50 people who completed their certifications the previous year. However there is no guarantee that those who completed came from, or were hired by districts that experienced the attrition. Nor is there any information on how many of the new “completers” already had a probationary certificate and were working as a VI teacher.

Since the start of the great recession in 2008 the number of eligible retirees who delayed retirement due to economic reasons increased. This trend continues, according to the American Association of Retired Workers (AARP) and others. In fact, according to a new study (Oct. 2011) from the AARP, 33% plan to delay retirement for economic reasons. In light of the larger economic factors, the gap between the projected attrition and the actual attrition is not surprising.

Surprising or not, the fact remains that VI professionals are an aging population who will retire. This is evidenced by the closing gap in the projected and actual retirements.



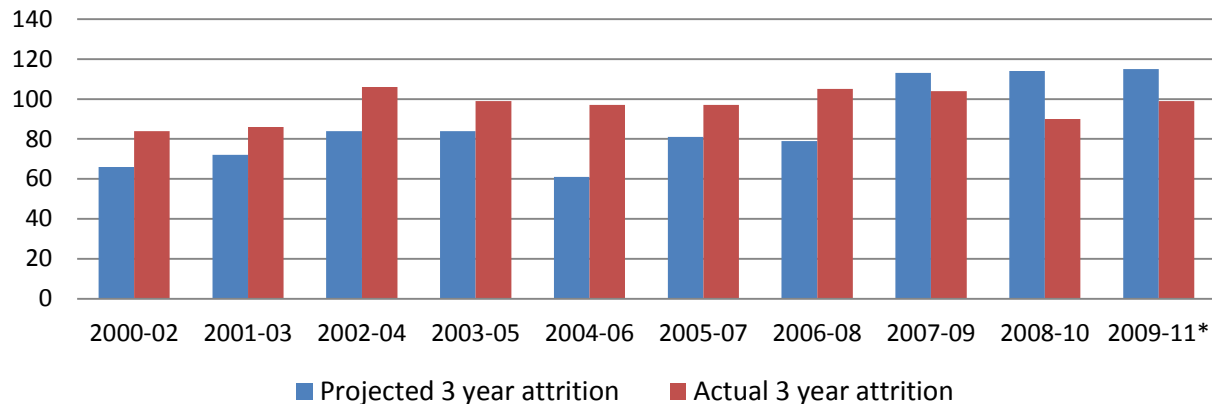
**Table 9: Projected and Actual Attrition by Job Responsibility**

	2005- 2007	2006- 2008	2007- 2009	2008- 2010	2009- 2011
Projected VI teacher	60	57	87	88	86
Actual VI teacher <sup>1</sup>	79	82	80	63	74
Projected O&M specialist	10	8	13	11	11
Actual O&M specialist <sup>2</sup>	15	19	17	16	9
Projected dually certified	11	14	13	15	18
Actual dually certified	3	4	7	11	16
TOTAL 3-year Projection	81	79	113	114	115
TOTAL 3-year Attrition	97	105	104	90	99

<sup>1</sup> Over the past 10 years, on average VI teacher projections have been underestimated by 18%.

<sup>2</sup> Over the past 10 years, on average, O&M specialist projections have been underestimated by 75%.

**Projected vs. Actual Loss of VI Professionals Over Three Years**



\* 2009-2011 is the last year for which a complete set of data is available.

Historically O&M specialists have consistently exceeded the projected attrition and dually certified specialists are under projected levels of attrition. This is the second cycle that this has not been true. However, the gap between projection and actual is closing. Consistent anecdotal reports support that many O&M specialists are closer to retirement when they initially become O&M specialists. This profession often spoken of as a good pre-retirement option since part-time contracting in this field is a viable option.

## Anticipated Need

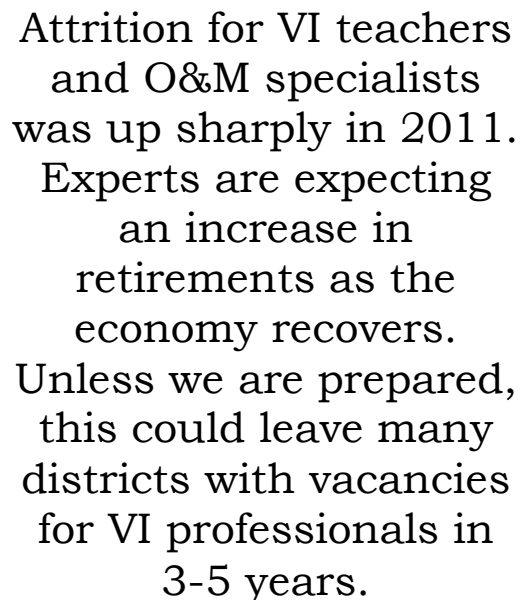
A basic construct in assessing need is to realize that most VI professionals are not classroom teachers; they are primarily itinerant specialists in visual impairments who work in a variety of schools, community settings and homes. In addition to direct services, they also provide critical consultations on the functional impact of a specific visual impairment on a student in specific settings and ensure that appropriately modified materials are available. Additionally, they must travel to the student and provide instruction in the home, school and community environments, not in a single classroom.

Understanding the difference between classroom teachers and VI professionals is crucial when assessing the current and future need for specialists in visual impairments.

Interpreting and understanding the need for educational professionals traditionally further relies on several factors, including the number of posted positions, recommendations from knowledgeable professionals and recommended student/teacher ratios. Below are data from each of these areas.

## Posted positions

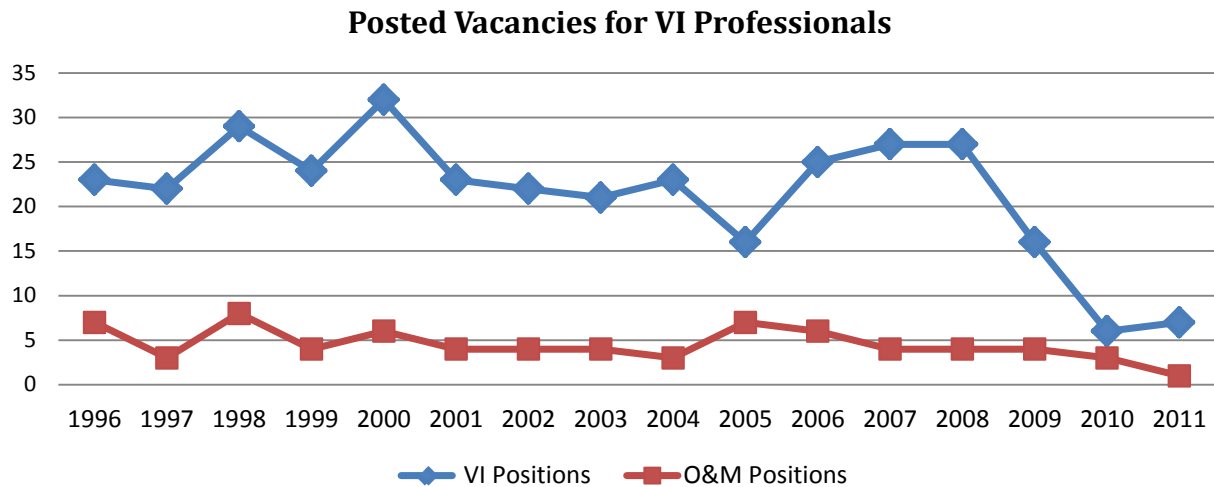
The respondents at each ESC and at TSBVI were asked how many part- and full-time positions were posted in their regions or at TSBVI in September 2011. This data was collected in October after all regular hiring for the academic year has been completed. These positions remained unfilled and active because districts were unable to find a VI professional or the positions were opened after the start of the school year.



Attrition for VI teachers and O&M specialists was up sharply in 2011. Experts are expecting an increase in retirements as the economy recovers. Unless we are prepared, this could leave many districts with vacancies for VI professionals in 3-5 years.

**Table 10: Posted Positions**

	2009	2010	2011
VI teachers	16	6	7
O&M specialists	4	3	1
Dually certified	0	1	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>



The chart above shows the posted level of need between 1996 and 2011. Statistically, the trend of having unfilled posted positions in September is decreasing, and decreased overall in 2011. This may be due to various factors, such as those listed below.

- Administrators are better able to recruit from within the district and enroll the candidate in a training program, thus avoiding the need to post a position.
- Administrators are able to recruit candidates prior to the start of the school year.
- Administrators are not confident they will be able to fill a position, so they are reluctant to advocate for or post a new position.
- Due to economic factors administrators are reluctant or unable to seek additional VI professionals.

These postings may be new positions or positions that have been vacated the year before. For all of these reasons, reviewing posted positions has not been a good indicator of true need for VI professionals.

## Recommendations by knowledgeable professionals

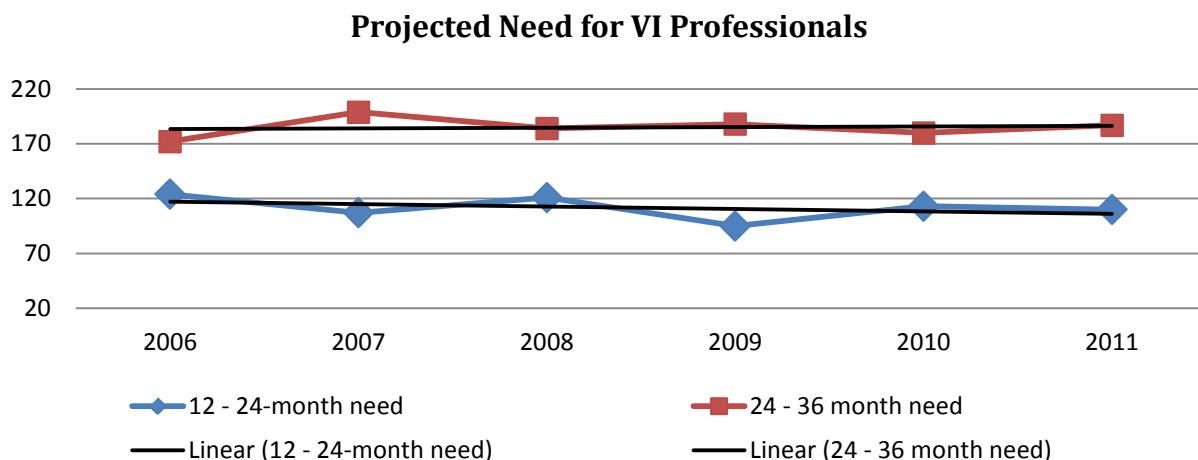
VI consultants and TSBVI staff were asked how many VI teachers, O&M specialists, and dually certified personnel were needed in their area in addition to those already in training. Regional VI consultants are the experts in visual impairments for their region. The results are indicated in the table below. The survey asked about projected need, not about positions available. However, historically positions follow the availability of VI professionals.

**Table 11: Projected Short-term Need: 12 - 24 Months**

	2009	2010	2011
VI teachers	56	68	68
O&M specialists	28	27	25
Dually certified	11	18	17
<b>Total Need</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>110</b>

**Table 12: Projected Longer-term Need: 24-36 Months**

	2009	2010	2011
VI teachers	116	109	123
O&M specialists	46	37	44
Dually certified	26	34	20
<b>Total Need</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>187</b>



It is helpful to review the longer-term need (24-36 month) in conjunction with the 3-year actual and the projected attrition. While the numbers do vary from year to year in each professional area, adding a statistical trend-line can assist in evaluating the changes over time. In the past six years the projected need for VI professionals has remained fairly stable at an average of 185 VI professionals.

In a recent separate survey, regions overwhelmingly reported increases in caseloads or increases in non-VI responsibilities.

When considering the needs, VI consultants are advised to reflect on real attrition over the past year and anticipated or projected growth and attrition (those who are expected to permanently leave the field).

There are two ways to assess the short- and longer-term projected needs, either by professional expertise or by job assignment. The terms “VI teacher” or “O&M specialists” indicate a type of expertise as expressed through the certification in a professional discipline. Those in the “dually certified” category hold both certifications and function in both professional disciplines. Many, many more people hold dual certification than are reflected in this report. Only those whose job responsibilities are in both disciplines are considered “dually certified” in this report.

Functioning as a dually certified VI professional primarily reflects district need and therefore is a job assignment and not a unique discipline. For the purposes of this section of the report, the data reported will be by professional discipline or area of expertise, not by job assignment. Dually certified VI professionals function as part-time VI teachers and part-time O&M specialists. As such they will be added to both areas as part-time VI teachers and O&M specialists.

**Table 13: Projected Shorter-term Need by Area of Expertise**

	2009	2010	2011
VI teachers	67	86	85
O&M specialists	39	45	42

The decrease in shorter term need (12-24 month) over the past two years is surprising. In a separate survey of regional VI consultants all but two regions reported caseloads were increasing and/or VI professionals were being given additional responsibilities in non-VI areas, thereby cutting back on their VI responsibilities. Given that caseloads

and attrition has increased over the past year it was expected that need for VI professionals would also increase.

**Table 14: Projected Longer-term Need by Area of Expertise**

	2009	2010	2011
VI teachers	142	143	143
O&M specialists	72	71	64

When the VI teachers are combined with the dually certified VI professionals, the projected need for those certified to provide VI services shows no significant change over the past three years. This lack of change is surprising given that during that time 748 additional students identified have been added to the *Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments* and an additional 815 students are projected to be enrolled.

Of the 143 new VI educators needed over the next three years, it is expected that 112 will be replacing existing VI teachers and dually certified professionals who are likely to leave the field. This leaves a remainder of 31 full-and part-time VI educators to meet the needs of 815 new students. The average caseload for the 815 projected new students would be 26 students per FTE, well beyond any recognized recommendation for caseloads.

In October 2011, 39 people were seeking O&M certification. It is hoped that all 39 will find educational jobs in Texas and are able to help fill the expected gap. O&M certifications are not limited by age range and are good in any state. There is no guarantee that all will find jobs working with students in Texas

### **Projections, accuracy and impact: VI teachers**

To assess the projected need, whether it is for VI teachers or O&M specialists, it is necessary to analyze data on student growth and projected attrition. Over the past 10 years, the projected attrition for VI teachers has been under-estimated by 18%. If this

margin of error is applied, then it is more likely that 118 VI teachers will leave, reducing VI resources even more than projected. Assuming accuracy, 25 full- and part-time VI teachers will be needed to meet the needs of 815 additional students scattered all over the state; a huge challenge.

It is important to remember that *all* of the 67 dually certified VI professionals and 25% of VI teachers are part-time. Of the 143 VI educators projected as needed, 56 or 39% are likely to be part-time. It appears that 143 VI professionals with educational expertise in the next three years is a minimum if students are to meet their legally mandated educational goals.

### **Projections, accuracy and impact: O&M specialists**

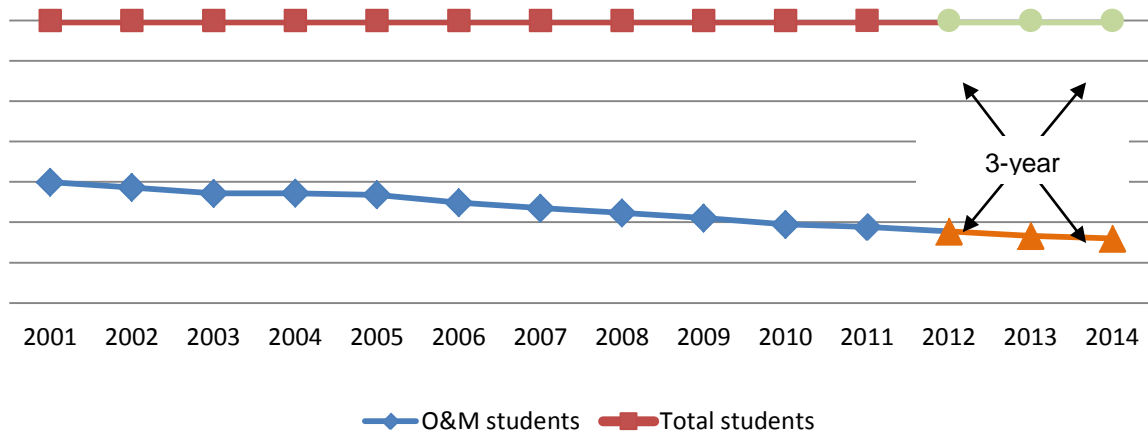
The expressed projected need for those with orientation and mobility expertise is also likely to be low.

As of January, 2011 there were 3,020 students receiving O&M services, or 34% of students with visual impairments. The total percentage of students getting O&M services is increasing about 1% per year. The number of students who have had an O&M evaluation is also increasing at the same rate: 1% per year. Currently 55% have had an evaluation within the past three years.

By comparison, the number of students with visual impairments is increasing at an average rate of 3% per year. The result is a 2% gap in the growth rate which compounds every year. The chart below illustrates how the percentage of students getting services is not keeping up with student growth. It is projected that 3,553 students will be receiving O&M services by 2013. This is an increase of 260 students. It is impossible to know how many of the projected 9,261 students with visual impairments may actually need O&M services, since the level of evaluation has not kept pace with the student population increase.

In the chart, the increasing number of students with visual impairments is kept as a constant. The number of students who are receiving services is shown relative to the entire population of students with visual impairments. Included in the chart below are projections based on historical data (the green circles and orange triangle). It is clear that the gap is increasing. Without changes it will only get worse.

### Students Receiving O&M Services Relative to All VI Students



Of course, it is possible that changes in the population of students with visual impairments are such that an adequate number of students are receiving O&M services or that the gap won't continue to expand. However, a key impact of visual impairments is limitation to orientation and mobility, of being able to observe and anticipate the environment and modify body movements accordingly. With only 55% of the students having an orientation and mobility evaluation it is not possible to verify that all students who would benefit from O&M services are getting them.

Recommendations on the need for O&M specialists do not seem to be keeping pace with the growth of VI students.

### Interrelationship of projected need and attrition

The need for VI professionals, attrition and student growth are inextricably connected. Need is based on factors related to student growth and attrition.

Below are tables showing attrition within the past year, projected attrition over the next three years, and longer-term (36 months) need by professional discipline as reported by ESC consultants. The O&M and dually certified data remains essentially the same,



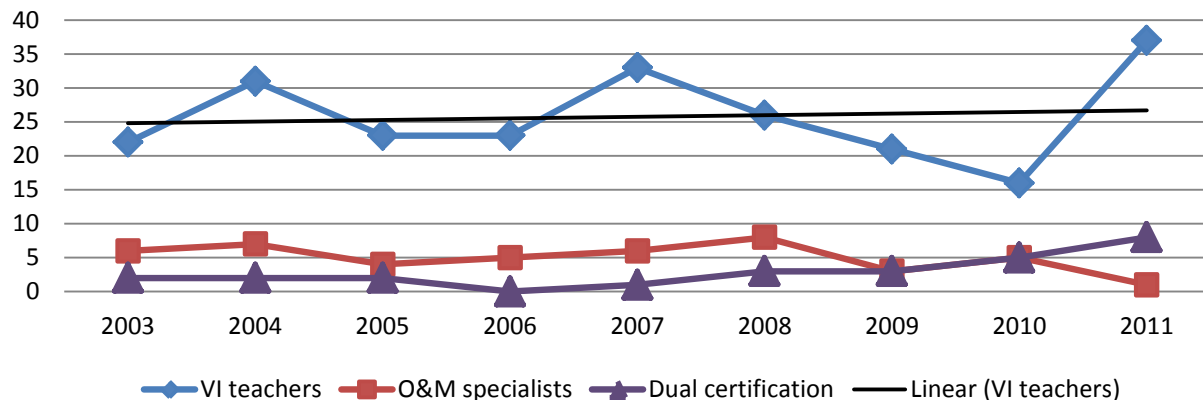
showing little significant change from year to year, even though students continue to increase. However the VI teacher data shows changes. Notice the slope of the trend lines. The slope of the projected attrition and projected need are nearly identical.

Attrition is also affected by factors commonly cited as important for retention. For VI professionals among the most important retention factors are administrative support and caseload size. In a separate survey regional VI specialists report that:

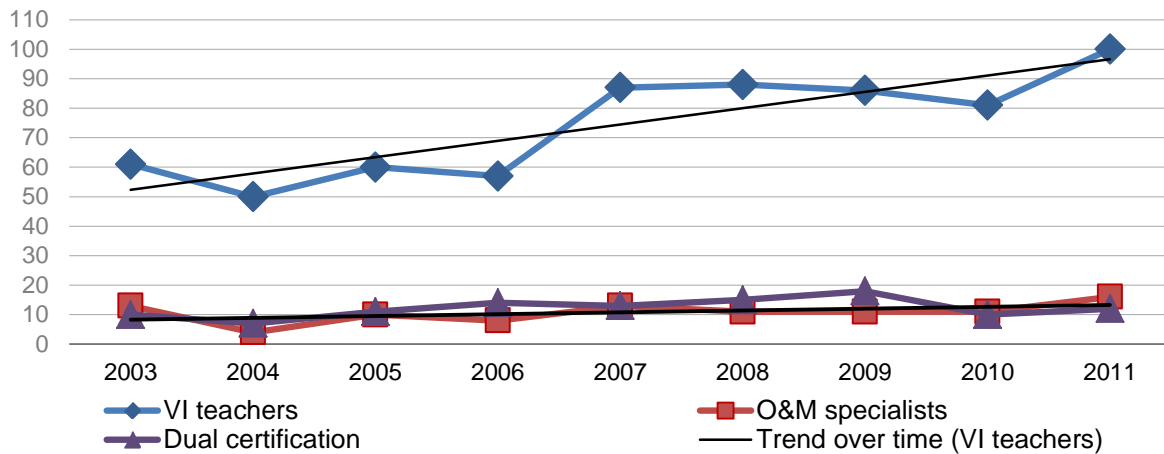
- Caseloads are increasing and/or new responsibilities are being added,
- the need for additional VI professionals are clear, and
- new positions are not being approved.

The question remains, will these caseload increases cause people to retire or leave the field in frustration? As the economy recovers people may feel more able to retire. Given that the Texas budget for the biennium 2011-13 was significantly reduced, overall educational hiring has been reduced. As a result, VI programs, among the smallest in education, feel significant negative pressure.

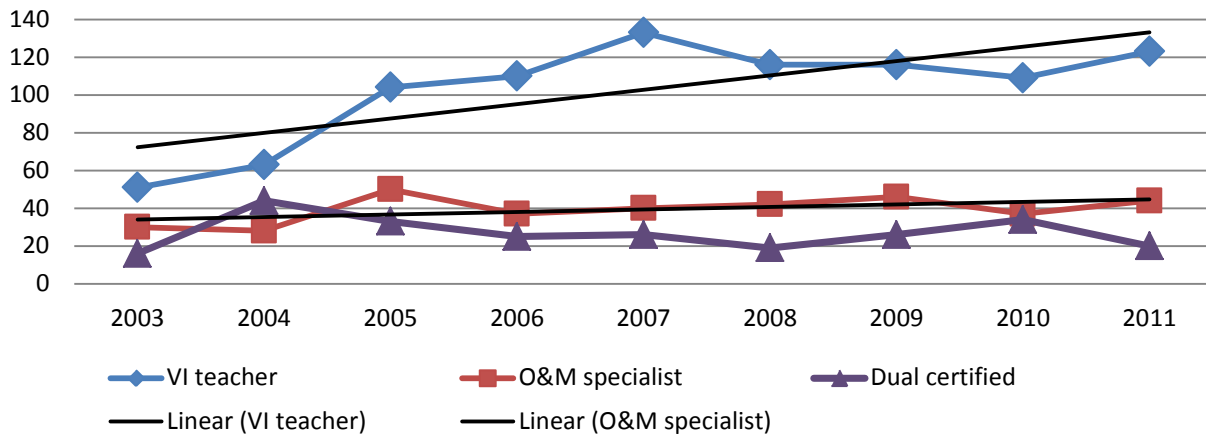
### Attrition Within the Past Year (1-Year Attrition)



### Projected 3-Year Attrition



### Longer-term Need



Data on the number of students who receive O&M has been collected since 2001. In 2011, 34% are getting services, an average increase of 1% per year. If statistical forecasts are accurate, it is projected that 37% will be receiving services by 2014. Each student will need adequate access to a fully qualified O&M specialist.

The lack of change in the projected need O&M specialists is noteworthy. At this point, there are no reliable statistical projections on the percentage of students with visual impairments who are at-risk for needing O&M services at any given time. Further, not all students with visual impairments currently receive O&M evaluations. In fact, according to the data gathered from the *2011 Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments*, only 55% of visually impaired students were evaluated for O&M

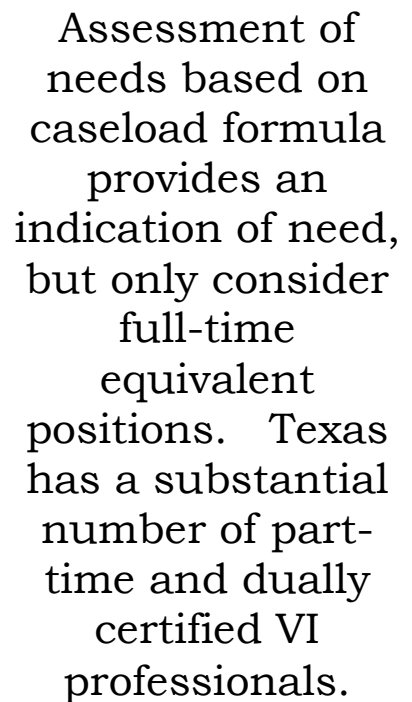
skills within the previous 3 years. Still, the number of students who receive O&M grows each year. Additionally, when compared to actual attrition, the projected rate of attrition for O&M specialists is under-projected by 75%. Therefore, it is difficult to explain the lack of growth in reported need for O&M specialists (including dually certified professionals) by ESC specialists.

## Recommendations using a caseload formula

The American Foundation for the Blind's *Program Planning and Evaluation for Blind and Visually Impaired Students: National guidelines for educational excellence* (1989), and the *National Plan for Training Personnel to Serve Children with Blindness and Low Vision* (2000) recommend that caseloads for VI teachers and O&M specialists be restricted to 8 – 12 students per full-time equivalent (FTE) position.

### VI teachers

In January 2011 there were 8,788 students with visual impairment in Texas identified on the *2011 Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments*. Based on that figure, and in light of the recommended 8 – 12 students per teacher ratio, Texas has a need for between 732 and 1,099 full-time equivalent (FTE) VI teachers who provide direct service to the students. The mean in this span is 915. Currently there are 608 full-time equivalent (FTE) VI teachers. Therefore using this measure, Texas is lacking between 125 and 491 full-time-equivalent VI teachers. The mean of this range is 308 FTEs.



Assessment of needs based on caseload formula provides an indication of need, but only consider full-time equivalent positions. Texas has a substantial number of part-time and dually certified VI professionals.

Relying solely on FTE data does not accommodate for the number of *individuals* needed. Approximately 25% of the VI teacher workforce is employed as a VI teacher on a part-time basis. (Of the 171 part-time VI teachers, 67 are dually certified and also provide O&M services. The remaining are either contractual specialists or are employed by the district in some other capacity.) The number of *individuals* needed to fill 308 FTE positions would be *much* higher. Based on current full- and part-time ratios, the number of individuals needed is closer to 352 full- and part-time VI teachers.

In October 2011, 84 people were enrolled in a training program for VI teachers. Fifty-one completed their programs since October of the previous year. While this completion rate is higher than average, it is significantly lower than caseload formulas project as the number of new VI professionals needed.

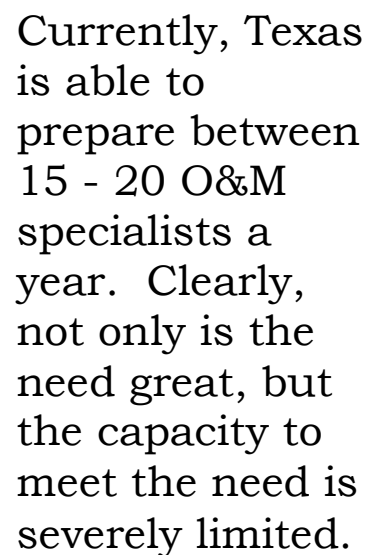
In fact, it appears that as university costs continue to rise, the ability of universities to help support training is reduced. Enrollment was down in October 2011 by 16% from the previous year. Given the paucity of jobs and increased university costs, it may be expected that enrollment will remain depressed for the next couple of years. Therefore, the capacity to prepare new, additional or much needed VI teachers is also reduced.

### **O&M specialists**

Determining the need based on a comparison of the data for orientation and mobility services is more complicated. According to the American Foundation for the Blind 8 - 12 students is the recommended caseload for O&M specialists. However, not all students need O&M services each year and in Texas only 55% have had an evaluation within the past three years.

The January 2011 *Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments* indicates that 3,020 students were receiving O&M services. Starting with the assumption that all students who would benefit from O&M currently receive it and basing calculations on the suggested 8 -12 students per O&M specialist, Texas has a need for between 252 and 378 full-time equivalent (FTE) O&M specialists, with a mean average of 315 FTEs. Currently 177 FTE O&M specialists provide services to students. As a result, Texas is lacking between 75 and 201 FTEs O&M specialists. The mean of this range is 138 FTEs. However, given that only 55% of students have been evaluated, it must be noted that the first assumption (that all students who need O&M services are getting them) may not be valid.

Also, the impact of part-time O&M specialists is more significant than for VI teachers. Approximately 45% of the O&M specialists in Texas provide educational services on a part-time basis. These individuals may be dually certified or private contractors working with



Currently, Texas is able to prepare between 15 - 20 O&M specialists a year. Clearly, not only is the need great, but the capacity to meet the need is severely limited.

districts and non-educational agencies or organizations. Therefore, even the estimated need for 135 FTEs should be considered *very* conservative. The number of *individuals* needed to fill 135 full-time-equivalent positions would be *much* higher. Based on current ratios, the number of individuals needed is closer to 178 full- and part-time O&M specialists. It takes approximately two years to prepare an O&M specialist; there are no probationary or temporary certifications. Currently, Texas is able to prepare between 15 - 20 O&M specialists a year.

**Table 15: VI Professionals Needed Based on Caseload Formula (Mean of range)**

	2009	2010	2011
VI teachers (FTE)	257	276	308
VI teachers (likely individuals needed for FTE equivalent)	302	314	352
O&M specialists (FTE)	106	135	138
O&M specialists (likely individuals needed for FTE equivalent)	139	174	178

## Capacity to Prepare VI Professionals

Texas is fortunate to have two collaborative partners who train VI professionals; Texas Tech University (TTU) and Stephen F. Austin State University (SFASU). Both programs have graduate programs for VI teachers and O&M specialists. SFASU also has an undergraduate program for O&M specialists that is funded by the Rehabilitation Services Administration. Both programs serve students throughout the state with a combination of face-to-face, interactive television and internet courses.

The combination of distance learning options and student support has had a major impact on the number of VI professionals in Texas. Enrollments increased substantially with the development of distance learning options and fluctuate depending on levels of student support.

In October 2011, a total of 112 students were registered for courses leading to a VI certification. Seventy-three were seeking VI certification and 39 were seeking O&M certification. Eleven students were seeking both certifications. In the past year 51 individuals completed VI training and 24 completed O&M training.

In 2008 the State funds were increased. However subsequent and significant increases in tuition and other university-related costs have negated those gains. Enrollments

have declined since 2009, the year following the increased grant. In 2011, the number of people registered for courses decreased by 16%.

Two factors are cited as causes: limited jobs and limited funding. Reports from ESC consultants around the state indicate that fewer jobs are available, that caseloads are bigger and/or VI professionals are being given non-VI responsibilities. Candidates access a variety of funds to pay for the university training; either through funding awarded by the Texas Legislature via Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, very limited federal funds and/or private loans.

Existing scholarships are not sufficient to address the needs of the applicants. The tuition set for 2011 also reflected a significant increase. As a result, existing funds are not having the same impact that they had even two years ago. It is not expected that enrollments will be increasing, despite the anticipated student growth in Texas and the need for qualified VI professionals. In fact, it may be a struggle to maintain current levels of enrollment.

No alternative certification venues provide training in areas related to visual impairments.

Clearly, the capacity to prepare VI professionals is not sufficient to the need.

## Summary

This report reviewed characteristics of and indicators of need for VI professionals. In September 2011, Texas had 909 individuals (829.9 FTE) providing vision-related services, either directly to students or in a leadership and/or technical assistance capacity. After adjusting for dually certified professionals (67) there are 853 individuals providing direct service either on a full- or part-time basis. The total includes the following full- or part-time individuals:

- 693 VI teachers (607.5 FTEs)
- 227 O&M specialists, (175 FTEs)
- 67 dually certified professionals

In addition, there are:

- 56 regional or statewide leadership/technical assistance specialists (45.9 FTEs). While the number of individuals remained static, the amount of time they spend providing VI-related services (FTEs) was reduced from 50.6 to 45.9 FTEs, or by 9%.

This is an annual increase of 2% from the 2010 report, but overall a 1% decrease from 2009. The VI teacher category did not show significant improvement, only increasing by two individuals overall. The O&M specialists increased from 212 to 227 individuals, or a 7% increase. The number of part-time VI professionals in both professions seems to be increasing at a greater rate than the number of full-time VI professionals.

In September 2011 there were 24 VI teachers and 14 O&M specialists who are African-American. The Hispanic VI professionals included 61 VI teachers, 11 O&M specialists and five dually certified professionals. Ninety-two VI teachers, 11 O&M specialists and five dually certified professionals speak Spanish. There are seven Asian VI teachers and one O&M specialists. Overall this was a reduction in the cultural diversity of VI professionals, especially Hispanic VI teachers.

An examination of the attrition, projected attrition, growth, and need indicates challenges ahead. The attrition rate increased this year from 26 to 46 VI professionals. VI teachers had the biggest change. In 2010 16 VI teachers left the field the previous year; in 2011 37 left, a significant increase. This may be the start of an increasing rate of retirements among VI professionals.

The projected 3-year attrition rate was estimated at 128, or 14% of all VI professionals. Further analysis of the data over the past decade indicates that although the regional VI consultants are the best predictors for attrition, even they under-estimate attrition for VI teachers by 18% and O&M specialists by 75%. Therefore it is likely that as delayed retirements are realized, attrition over the next three years will be substantially increased.

A long-term examination of growth patterns predicts that students with visual impairments will increase by 3% each year or by 815 students in 2014. In addition, statewide reports of increased caseloads do not bode well for retention over the next few years.

This report assessed need based three methods: including the number of “posted” positions in September, by using a caseload formula and recommendations from VI consultants at the ESCs. However, neither the posted positions nor caseload formula are considered a reliable or accurate indicator of need. Based on data gathered since 1996, the data have proven to be a poor predictor of need.

This report considers the recommendations of the VI specialists at the regional service centers to be the best indicators of real need in Texas. These professionals have

extensive knowledge of their districts and region. Their estimates indicate a growing shortage of VI professionals. Without dramatic increases in university programs the difficulty in meeting the needs of students with visual impairments will continue to get worse.

**Table 16: Summary of Need by Area of Expertise**

	<b>VI teachers</b>	<b>O&amp;M specialists</b>	<b>Total (adjusted for 67 dually certified)</b>
12-24 month need projections	85	42	110
24-36 month need projections	143	64	187

All three types of indicators of need were reviewed in this document: posted vacancies, recommendations by regional consultants, and caseload formulas. All provided very different data. While each source reveals a different set of numbers, what is clear is that regardless of the method used, Texas has a clear and ongoing need for VI professionals.

Regardless of the strategy used to measure need, it is apparent that Texas has a clear and significant need for new and additional VI professionals and that need will continue to grow. These positions must be filled to ensure that students with visual impairments have the skills to succeed.



## Appendix

### Methodology

The survey asked about the number of people *functioning* as VI professionals. These individuals may be VI teachers, O&M specialists or both. Those *functioning* in both roles are referred to as being dually certified. The VI professionals provide instruction to students in a direct or consultative capacity and/or provide leadership, or technical assistance from regional educational service centers (ESCs) or Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI). Those in leadership or technical assistance roles may be full- or part-time positions.

Texas employs both full- and part-time VI professionals. Full-time professionals are those who work .6 FTE or more. Part-time professionals are those who work .5 FTE or less. This method has been used by TEA and is considered to be an adequate estimate of the number of full-time equivalent VI professionals. Part-time VI professionals are a significant proportion of the Texas workforce (29.8% of the VI teachers and 42% of the O&M specialists).

When relevant, information about full-time equivalent (FTE) positions is also presented. The number of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff was determined by multiplying the number of people employed in part-time positions by .5 and adding the result to the number of people employed as full-time VI professionals (Part-time X .5 + Full-time = FTE).

The descriptive and need data reflect statewide totals, on a combination of VI teachers and O&M professionals. Data on each profession is also included separately. When appropriate, data on dually certified VI professionals is also presented.

People who provide O&M and VI services (dually certified) are counted as part-time VI and part-time O&M. Although they may be full-time employees of a district or cooperative, dually certified professionals are considered part-time VI teachers and part-time O&M specialists. As a result dually certified individuals appear on both the VI and O&M tables as part-time professionals. This results in a variance between the data listed in the Statewide Totals table and the combined totals of the Direct Service Provider tables. Simply adding together the discipline-specific totals would result in double counting some individuals. Statewide totals are adjusted for dually certified professionals.

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