

Pilot Grant for using IPAD technology with deafblind teens in rural and urban settings.

Pilot program using IPAD technology with deafblind students age 13-22 to increase communication, social skills, and improve transition experiences to adult living

Why use IPAD's? They are cost effective, come preloaded with voiceover (screen reading software), magnification, and Braille drivers. Local technology supports are available in communities and special applications are easy to download.

Teachers, students, and parents will use pre-post assessment, and focus groups to evaluate program effectiveness.

Students will be able to use communication applications such as Skype, Face to Face, instant messaging to improve independent communication skills, self advocacy, self determination, and technology skills.

Program Components:

1. Target students in middle and high school who are deafblind and at least functionally academic with basic technology and communication skill sets.
2. Develop IPAD applications to assist in bridging communication barriers (examples may include: picture/symbol communication, sign language translation, and social network applications)
3. Create online community for this low incidence population across the United States by using blogs, mentoring, peer to peer online meetings)
4. Share information and training
5. Use instant messaging, face to face communication, Skype with peers, classroom teachers, and employers to bridge communication barriers.
Example: A classroom teacher sends, presentation to student for real time access to information, student uses IM to ask questions or clarify information missed.
Example: A student uses the device with peers who have smart phones to communicate during lunch, athletic events, and other social settings.
Example: Deafblind students communicate in the afternoons with deafblind peers and share common experiences and new knowledge.
Example: Deafblind teens participate in vocational training using device to communicate with employers.

Proposed Outcomes:

1. Reduce isolation by creating community for deafblind teens
2. Improve self esteem and social skills
3. Increase technology skills, self advocacy, self-determination to increase employability skills
4. Provide input for development of future technology applications from deafblind teen consumers
5. Remove social and communication barriers for deafblind teens

Using mainstream media and technology reduces cost, increases access for deafblind students, improves technology support, and appears more socially acceptable by reducing technology fears from the general population.

The pilot program will be implemented by teachers of the visually impaired, teachers of the hearing impaired, teachers of deafblind, and parents of deafblind students who have completed a preprogram assessment and agree to participate in at least 3 online focus groups and a post program assessment.

Timeline: Program will run for 2 years to allow students time to gain skill sets and improve efficiency using devices. Students would evaluate existing applications and provide input for future application development to meet their unique needs.

Evaluation: Technology evaluations that include communication technology assessments, social skills assessments, independent living assessments, student and parent evaluations.

Submitted by: Jamie Wheeler M.Ed. a teacher of the visually impaired serving visually impaired and deafblind students in Texas. I have completed a graduate degree from Texas Tech University in deafblindness and have 16 years of experience in the field of visual impairment and deafblindness. I am also a member of the pilot program in Texas to develop mentor/protégé's for educators of the deafblind.