Educating Students with Visual Impairments in Vermont

Vermont Association for the Blind
and Visually Impaired
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http://www.doe.virginia.gov/special_ed/disabilities/sensory_disabilities/visually_impaired_blind/visually_impaired_guidelines.pdf

NOTES

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Policy guidance on educating blind and visually impaired students was issued as an OSEP memorandum 96-4 (November 3, 1995) to respond to concerns that services for some blind and visually impaired students were not appropriate to address their unique educational and learning needs, particularly their needs for instruction in reading, writing, and composition, as well as orientation and mobility and other self-help skills. This policy guidance provided some background information on these students and their unique needs, and applicable requirements of Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Part B) were explained.

On June 8, 2000 and May 22, 2017 OSEP provided an update to the November 3, 1995 report and provided important background information to educators in meeting their obligations to ensure that blind and visually impaired students receive appropriate educational services in the least restrictive environment appropriate to their unique needs. A description of procedural safeguards also was included to ensure that parents are knowledgeable about their rights, including their right to participate in decisions regarding the provision of services to their children

This Vermont guidelines booklet was written to address the basic guidelines for providing TVI, COMS, CATIS and CVRT services to children in Vermont. “Given that the type of visual impairments among students is extremely diverse, as is the population of students, we know that students with similar visual impairments will function and learn differently.” For even more OSERS policy guidance, go to *Educating Blind and Visually Impaired Students: Policy Guidance from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS)* at http://www.afb.org/info/programs-and-services/public-policy-center/education-policy/educating-blind-and-visually-impaired-students--policy-guidance-from-osers/1235

Chapter 1

Unique Educational Needs of Students Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired

It is the vision of the Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (VABVI) that everyone will understand the unique educational needs of students who are blind or visually impaired. Our system operates within a framework of high expectations for every learner with support from educators, families and the community.

Vision is the primary learning modality and source of information for most children. No other sense can stimulate curiosity, integrate information, or invite exploration in the same way or as efficiently and fully as vision does. A child who comes into the world without a dependable visual system, or without any vision at all, has to navigate through the incomplete messages received through the other sensory modalities in order to put together a whole picture of the world. The visually impaired child needs to determine how to organize this incomplete information. Then, the child must respond to what may remain a confusing view of the world.

Students with visual impairments have unique learning needs that must be addressed if they are to access the general education core curriculum and become independent, productive citizens. Thus, educators face a significant challenge in providing educational services that will enhance successful post-school outcomes. See Appendix A for a detailed description of the unique needs of students who are blind or visually impaired. This information can be used as a general framework for assessing each student with visual impairment and for planning and providing instruction and services to meet the assessed needs. Assessment and provision of services are addressed in the following sections of these guidelines.

Making appropriate decisions about the development and implementation of programs and services for students with visual impairments requires a clear understanding of their unique learning needs and the intervention necessary to develop successful transition goals for adult independence. Administrators and Special Educators must have knowledge about specialized personnel, materials, equipment and educational settings to ensure appropriate individual educational program planning for this unique student population.
Students with visual impairments are a heterogeneous group. Two individuals with the same visual impairment will function differently. Some have mild vision impairments, while others are totally blind. Some have visual impairment as their only disability, while others have additional sensory, cognitive, and/or physical challenges. Some students were born with visual impairment while others lost their sight due to a variety of causes**.** Of the many ways that impaired vision affects learning, the three that have the most impact on education are:

1. Learning to access information that is acquired casually and incidentally by sighted learners. In addition to the general education that all students receive, students with visual impairments, starting at birth, need an Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) to meet needs directly related to their vision disability (NASDSE, 1999). These nine ECC areas include instruction in:

Compensatory Skills

Orientation & Mobility (O&M)

Social Interaction

Career Education and Planning

Assistive Technology (including low tech, such as optical devices)

Independent Living

Recreation and Leisure

Sensory Efficiency

Self-Determination

2. Need for experiential learning. Even before sighted babies learn to crawl, they watch and visually organize their world. They begin to categorize objects in their environment as large or small, same or different, rough or smooth. They attempt to find a way to come into contact with objects out of arm's reach. When a child has a visual impairment, he or she often depends on the intervention of parents, teachers, and others in order to experience objects that are not within reach. A system for organizing the environment can occur, but only with the assistance of knowledgeable parents and teachers.

3. Development of alternative skills. Most areas of the public-school curriculum and environment have been developed with sighted students in mind. Your local TVI can assist with modifications and accommodations for students who are blind or visually impaired giving them access to the general curriculum and access to their environment.

4. Concept Development and Academic Needs

Visual impairment will often impede a student's development of visual concepts and learning of academic subjects. Special concept development and academic needs that may need to be addressed include:

- Developing a good sense of body image.
- Understanding the following concepts: laterality, time, position, direction, size, shape, association, discrimination, sequence, quantity, sensations, emotions, actions, colors (to the best visual ability), matching and classifying).
- Developing listening skills appropriate to the level of the student's functioning, including the development of auditory reception, discrimination, memory, sequencing, closure and association skills.
- Developing auditory comprehension and analysis skills appropriate to the level of the student's functioning, such as the development of the ability to understand character,

understand setting; recognize feelings, recognize climax, foreshadowing, and purpose; and distinguishing fact from opinion.

- Becoming familiar with the format of and knowing how to use reference materials in the student's primary reading medium or media.
- Being able to interpret accurately maps, charts, graphs, models and tables.
- Developing skills for note taking during a lesson.
- Developing writing and recording skills for note taking from material originally intended for print, e.g., use of material that has been recorded or is read aloud
- Developing the ability to organize notes and other study materials.
- Developing the ability to organize one's time.
- Developing the ability to select and use a reader.
- Being able to acquire materials in various learning media, e.g., Braille, large type, aural media, or electronic format.

5. Literacy and Communication Needs

A student with a visual impairment will usually require alternative modes for instruction in reading and writing. He or she will need special skills in using alternative strategies, learning media, and specialized equipment and materials to communicate effectively (link with "Determining the Appropriate Reading Medium"). Communication needs that should be addressed where appropriate include:

- Being skilled in reading using appropriate modes (e.g., Braille, print, or recorded format) for such purposes as gaining academic information and pursuing personal, career and recreational interests.
- Developing skills in writing for personal needs, using appropriate modes (e.g. Braille, print, keyboarding, handwriting, word processing) for such purposes as note taking, recording phone numbers and addresses, taking messages, and writing travel directions and personal notes.
- Being proficient in typing and computer access skills.
- Being able to write one's own signature legibly.
- Being able to operate a range of multimedia devices, susch as radios, talking book machines, recorders and CD players.
- Being skilled in using a recording device for recording lectures or for recording phone numbers and addresses.
- Being cognizant of, and able to use, appropriate special devices for reading and writing, such as slates and styli, optical aids, closed-circuit television systems, electronic note taking devices, computers adapted with speech, enlarged type, or Braille, and other voice, video and data information technology.
- Being cognizant of, and able to use, appropriate special devices for mathematics and science, e.g., the abacus, talking calculators, electronic Braille note taking devices, specialized measuring equipment and computers adapted with speech, enlarged type or Braille

6. Socialization

Affective education needs that should be addressed include:

- Recognizing that each person is unique and different from every other person.
- Understanding that people who are visually impaired have the same emotions as everyone else.
- Being able to identify one's feelings.
- Being able to express one's feelings to others directly and in a socially acceptable manner.
- Having feelings is self-wort and well-being.
- Recognizing one's own strengths and weaknesses in a realistic manner.
- Acknowledging both positive and negative feelings in oneself and in others and understanding that both types of feelings are legitimate.
- Being able to identify and appropriately express one's likes and dislike.
- Being able to understand and recognize teasing and developing appropriate ways of handling it.
- Being aware of alternative ways to respond to the feelings and behavior of others.
- Feeling that one is a valuable, contributing member of society.
- Being able to identify and understand a wide range of feelings in oneself and in others, e.g., happiness, guilt, frustration, boredom, confusion, anger, embarrassment and pride.
- Being aware that the way a person feels about himself or herself is reflected in the way he or she treats others.
- Being aware that each person must establish his or her own set of values and live with them.
- Being aware of the concept of peer pressure and determining the appropriateness of conforming to peer pressure.
- Being able to identify and share feelings about his or her visual impairment in relation to being accepted by one's peers.
- Understanding the ways in which a person can become victimized by allowing others to make choices in his or her life.
- Understanding the long-range results of too much dependence on others.
- Being aware of the connection between being in control of one's life and taking responsibility for what happens in life.
- Being able to feel comfortable asking for help from others when it is appropriate.
- Understanding the difference between allowing others to help when it is not needed and deciding to ask for help when it is needed
- Being an effective self-advocate

Chapter 2

The Expanded Core Curriculum

In addition to the general education curriculum, the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) is the body of knowledge and skills that are needed by students with visual impairments due to their unique, disability-specific needs. The ECC should be used as a framework for assessing students, planning individual goals and providing instruction.

A. Description of each ECC area:

Compensatory Skills: Are communication modes needed to express and receive information, including:

- Access to literacy and mathematics through braille (including literary, United English Braille, Nemeth and other braille codes) and/or print, handwriting skills, and auditory skills. The regulations implementing IDEA 2004 state that, "In the case of a student who is blind or visually impaired, the IEP team must provide for instruction in Braille and the use of Braille unless the IEP team determines, after an evaluation of the child's reading and writing skills, needs, and appropriate reading and writing media (including evaluation of the child's future needs for instruction in Braille or the use of Braille), that instruction in Braille or the use of Braille is not appropriate for the child." 34 CFR §300.324(a)(2)(iii)
- Communication needs that will vary depending on degree of functional vision, effects of additional disabilities, and the task to be done. Many students with low vision use regular print with magnification devices. TVI's can use the Learning Media Assessment to determine when a student is a braille reader or large print reader. Some students need both print and braille. Students with deaf blindness or multiple/other impairments may have alternative communication systems such as tactile sign language, symbol or object communication, or calendar boxes.
- Specialized instruction in concept development may be significantly impacted when visual observation is limited. It is essential to offer specific and sequential hands-on lessons to build a broad base of experiences. In higher grades, there are many abstract mathematical, geographical, and scientific concepts that must be taught with alternative

strategies and materials, including United English Braille or Nemeth Code and tactile graphics.

- A child with little or no vision may have fragmented understandings of the world without systematic tactile exploration and clear verbal explanations. Some concepts are totally visual, such as colors, rainbows, clouds, and sky. Some are too large to experience completely, such as a building, mountain ranges, and oceans. Other items are too tiny or too delicate to understand through touch, including small insects, a snowflake, or an item under a microscope. Fragmented concepts can impede social, academic, and vocational development.

Orientation and Mobility (O&M): Safe and efficient travel throughout the environment is a critical component in the education of students with visual impairments.

The Orientation & Mobility evaluation and subsequent instruction should begin in infancy with basic spatial concepts, purposeful and exploratory movement, and progress through more independent age-appropriate motor and travel skills in increasingly complex environments. Vision provides the primary motivation for infants to begin to move their bodies, to raise their heads to see people, to reach toward objects, to move through the environment, and to begin to play. Significant delays and differences in meeting motor milestones can impact overall development. The child who is blind needs to know how classrooms or other environments are arranged in order to independently move with confidence. Systematic orientation to a space may be needed before the placement and function of furniture and objects are understood. As the student gets older, more advanced age-appropriate travel skills such as street crossings, bus travel, and community experiences are needed. Students with multiple impairments benefit from O&M instruction that facilitates purposeful movement and increases independence to the greatest degree possible.

Social Interaction Skills: Around 80% of communication is non-verbal. A visual impairment can socially isolate a student, impede typical social interactions, or limit social skill development. A student with a visual impairment may not be able to see facial expressions and subtle body language to participate in conversations and activities. Social skills that sighted children are able to observe and imitate may need to be taught to a child with a visual impairment including appropriate body language, social etiquette, and the development of relationships.

Career Education and Planning: Students with visual impairments need to be taught about the variety of work and career options that are available since they cannot casually observe people in different job roles. Students need opportunities to explore their strengths and interests in a systematic, well-planned manner. This training may include the acquisition of specialized skills and equipment to compete in the job market. Students must be prepared for a wide range of

vocational choices and the adaptations, including technological devices, which make them attainable. It is important to have opportunities to job shadow for concrete experience of different career choices and to learn about other persons with visual impairments who have successful vocational outcomes.

Assistive Technology (including Optical Devices): Technology permits students with visual impairments to access the general curriculum, to increase literacy options, enhance communication and learn employable skills. There are a variety of high and low-tech assistive technology solutions designed specifically for students with visual impairments that require specialized instruction. These devices include but are not limited to: electronic Braille note takers, screen reader software, screen enlarging software, Braille displays, auditory access to printed materials, colored transparencies, tactile symbols, calendar systems, video magnifiers, magnification devices and access to social media. Additionally, many mainstream technology options now have accessibility built-in (such as screen readers on mainstream smartphones and tablets). Students must learn how to customize commercially available technology to their needs.

Independent Living Skills: Home living, organization, time management, personal hygiene, and money management skills are critical for successful transition from school to independent living and employment. Young children begin learning basic skills in independent living from visual observation and imitation. Most students with visual impairments, however, will need specific instruction and adaptations to standard equipment, such as modifications to read oven markings and to cook independently and safely. Depending on the level of vision, cognition and other individual characteristics of a student, adaptations may range from minor highlighting to tactile clues for matching clothing. Students can learn to apply make-up and perform other grooming activities with magnifying lenses, specially marked containers, and highlighted dials on electric shavers. These skills are not typically evaluated or taught in a sequential and systematic basis in general education settings. When they are taught in special education classrooms, they are rarely adapted for the visual needs of students who are visually impaired. Family members may require assistance and guidance to implement the proper adaptations that will permit independent practice and mastery of new skills within the home.

Recreation and Leisure Skills: Students with visual impairments need to be exposed to and taught recreation and leisure activities that they can enjoy as children and throughout their lives. Students are often not aware of the options or the possible adaptations that would allow them to participate in these activities. Such skills include both individual and organized group activities for students at all ages and levels, within and outside of the school environment.

Self-Determination: Self-determination includes personal decision-making, self-advocacy, problem solving and assertiveness. These skills lead to competence, as opposed to learned helplessness and are important components of positive self-esteem. Generally, low societal expectations for people who are blind can be overcome with specialized instruction in developing self-determination skills so that students can meaningfully participate in their educational and transition planning and make positive adult lifestyle, job, and other life choices upon graduation.

Sensory Efficiency (includes visual, tactual, and auditory skills): Students who are blind and students with low vision need systematic instruction to learn efficient use of their senses:

- ***Visual Efficiency:*** Instruction in *visual efficiency* must be individually designed and may include using visual gaze to make choices, tracking car movements when crossing the street, responding to visual cues in the environment, and/or using optical devices such as magnifiers and telescopes.
- ***Tactual Skills:*** For students who are blind and functionally blind, an increased reliance upon *tactual* skills is essential to learning. These skills should be considered as part of the IFSP/IEP development. It takes more detailed "hands-on" interaction and repetition to tactually understand a concept, such as relative size, that may be readily captured with a glance.
- ***Auditory Skills:*** Systematic instruction in *auditory* skills is critical for successful mobility and learning. Students must learn to effectively use their hearing to respond appropriately to social cues, travel safely in schools and across streets, learn from recorded media, and use echolocation for orientation.
- In addition to the three main senses, gustatory (taste), olfactory (smell), vestibular (balance), and proprioceptive (position and movement of body) skills can be critical for children with complex needs.

B. Evaluation and Instruction in the ECC

Each eligible student who is visually impaired is entitled to receive educational programs that reflect evaluation and instruction in ECC areas to derive lasting practical benefits from the education provided by school districts. A structured evaluation of each of the ECC areas is critical to measuring success and ensuring independence. There are a variety of formal and informal evaluations that can appropriately determine the student's functioning level in these vision-specific topics. Instructional needs in the ECC areas can be addressed using a variety of service delivery models. Collaboration between professionals will ensure comprehensive services. Although TVI and the O&M specialist are the primary resources for instruction in the ECC, family members, occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech-language pathologists, classroom teachers, and other personnel can also play important roles in providing the needed instruction.

Instructional time. It is difficult to find time within the typical school program for addressing all needed elements of the core curriculum and ECC. Flexibility within the school schedule may be required. The ECC may need to be addressed in many ways, including:

- incorporation of ECC goals within the core content areas
- extension of preschool (for children ages 3 – 5)
- additional years in school and entitlement through age 21
- after-school enrichment programs
- summer enrichment programs

Instructional accommodations/modifications. In addition to the specific areas of the ECC, students with visual impairments may need accommodations to access the same assignments as their peers. These accommodations may include extended time, specialized instruction, specialized materials, and environmental adaptations to reach the same levels of performance as sighted students. Individualized instruction for certain skills that may be difficult to learn in a

large group setting may be needed for concepts such as map skills, advanced mathematical concepts, and spatial concepts. Specialized equipment and materials may also be needed, such as a braille writer, dark and/or raised line paper, a long cane, an abacus, specialized software for computers, low vision aids, and electronic equipment for auditory access to print material. For most students, accommodation needs to be designed so that success in the general curriculum can be attained without lowering expectations. Some students may also need modifications to the general curriculum to develop an appropriate individual program.

Accessible instructional materials. For many students with print disabilities, the limitations of print materials create barriers to access and therefore to learning. In 2004, Congress passed amendments to IDEA requiring printed textbooks, printed core materials, and other educational materials to be converted to alternate formats (Braille, large print, electronic text, and audio recordings) to meet the unique learning needs of students with print disabilities.

Cultural and linguistic diversity. Increasing numbers of students in Vermont represent diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious groups, including students who are visually impaired. Individual cultural groups may not share in the beliefs and practices of the majority population; therefore, educational personnel must be sensitive to cultural responses to disability and work with families to understand how their beliefs may differ with that of the school. For example, it may be necessary to alter the methods used in human guide techniques to conform to cultural expectations about appropriate touch.

Outside of the regular school day: If your school district provides instructional services for special education after school or during schools days off, the contact hours may be counted only if the services cannot be provided or are unavailable at any other time (e.g., a TVI lesson may occur during a teacher in-service day or an orientation and mobility lesson may be provided outside the regular school day because the student may need practice traveling in periods of darkness/daylight savings time/winter).

C. Specialized Instruction vs Related Service Provider. *Special education* means specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability; *related services* support the child in benefitting from special education. Specialized instruction provided by a teacher of the blind and visually impaired to students found eligible with “visual impairment including blindness” is special education. This service should be documented on the IEP as specialized instruction rather than as a related service. Regardless of whether it is his or her primary, secondary, or tertiary disability, a child wih a visual impairment requires specially designed instruction to ensure access to the general curriculum. Ensuring access to the general curriculum by adapting or helping the general education teacher adapt instructional strategies and the curriculum is a special education service. There is no federal or state definition of the term “vision services” despite its continued popular use. School personnel and IEP teams should be clear and specific about the services to be provided for a child from the TVI and avoid use of the term “vision services.”

Orientation and Mobility (O&M) training may be considered special education, or specially designed instruction, if it involves “travel training” of students who are blind or visually impaired provided by a professional certified in O&M. O&M may also be considered a related service.

Chapter 3

The Population of Students Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired

The population of children who receive services due to blindness or visual impairment is extremely diverse. These children display a wide range of vision challenges and varying adaptations to vision loss. Regarding the degree of vision loss, the population includes students who are totally blind or have varying degrees of residual vision. For some individuals, blindness or visual impairment is their only disability While for others, blindness or vision impairment is one of several identified disabilities that will affect, to varying degrees, learning and social integration. For example, some children who are blind or visually impaired also have hearing, mobility, emotional, or cognitive disabilities.

In addition, persons with similar degrees of vision loss may function very differently. Each person faces unique obstacles. This is because adaptations to vision loss are shaped by individual factors. Therefore, in addition to nature and the extent of vision loss, a variety of factors need to be considered in designing an appropriate educational program for a blind or visually impaired child, and these factors could change over time.

The challenge for educators of blind and visually impaired children is how to teach skills that sighted children typically acquire through vision. Blind and visually impaired students have used a variety of methods to learn to read, write, and acquire other skills. For example, some students use braille exclusively; others use large print or regular print with or without low vision aids. Still others use a combination of methods, including braille, large print, low vision aids and devices with computer-generated speech. Others have sufficient functional vision to use regular print, although with difficulty.

In order to receive an appropriate education, it is generally understood that students who are blind or visually impaired must be provided with specialized instruction in a variety of subjects, including language arts, composition, science and mathematics. However, in order to be educated in these subject areas effectively, blind and visually impaired children must be taught the necessary skills to enable them to learn to read and to use other appropriate technology to obtain access to information. It also is very important for blind and visually impaired children to receive appropriate instruction in orientation and mobility as early as possible. Providing these children with needed orientation and mobility services at the appropriate time increases the likelihood that they can participate meaningfully in a variety of aspects of their schooling, including academic, nonacademic, and extracurricular activities. Once these individuals are no longer in school, their use of acquired orientation and mobility skills should greatly enhance their ability to move around independently in a variety of educational, employment, and community settings. These skills should also enhance the ability of blind and visually impaired students to obtain employment, retain their jobs, and participate more fully in family and community life.

The population of students with visual impairments is very diverse. They:

- May be totally blind or have varying degrees of low vision
- May receive services from ages birth through 21 years
- May be born with a visual impairment or may have acquired a visual impairment later in their lives
- May or may not be learners on the academic level of their sighted peers
- May have a stable or progressive visual impairment
- May have any number of other disabilities (mild to severe cognitive impairment, physical disabilities, mental health, emotional or behavioral problems, autism and/or learning disabilities) or have hearing impairments (deaf blindness)
- May have a visual impairment due to ocular or neurological conditions
- May have families who speak a language other than English
- May have additional medical needs and considerations
- May have near normal visual function but experience barriers due to ocular motor challenges

Adaptation to vision loss is shaped by many factors such as:

- availability and type of family support
- degree of intellectual, emotional, physical, and motor functioning
- degree of early intervention and access to appropriate instruction designed for the unique learning needs of a child with visual impairment. Therefore, in addition to the nature and extent of vision loss, a variety of factors needs to be considered in designing an appropriate educational program for a child who is blind or visually impaired, and these factors may change over time (Riley, 2000).

Chapter 4

Eligibility and Referral Guidelines

VT AOE Eligibility: VABVI services for children follow the VT AOE regulations. The following definitions were copied from the Vermont Special Education Rules, June 2013: https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-series-2360-special-education-rules.pdf

Additionally, the VT AOE implemented Special Education Rule changes in 2022. https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-regulation-changes-for-july-2022-adverse-effect-memorandum.pdf

- **Visual impairment,** including blindness, means an impairment in vision as evaluated by an optometrist or ophthalmologist, demonstrated by:
    - Partial sight and blindness
    - Visual acuity of 20/70 or worse in the better eye with correction,
    - Reduced visual field of 20°
    - A diagnosis of cortical visual impairment

    - A diagnosis of a degenerative condition that is likely to result in a significant loss of vision
    - Other vision conditions that may adversely affect a child's educational performance, such as convergence insufficiency disorder
- **Deaf blindness** means concomitant hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness.
- **The OSEP Issues Visual Impairment Memo 2017** expanded the definition of visual impairments to include, "in addition to the VT AOE specific state established criteria, any other impairment that, even with correction, which adversely affects a child's educational performance. While it is permissible for a State to provide examples of the types of conditions that would meet the State's criteria for visual impairment including blindness, the SEA or LEA may not preclude eligibility teams from considering whether other vision conditions, even with correction, adversely affect the child's educational performance such that the child requires special education and related services under the IDEA." https://sites.ed.gov/idea/files/letter-on-visual-impairment-5-22-17.pdf or search "OSEP Issues Visual Impairment Memo 2017."

VABVI Children's Services Referral Guidelines:

- **Ages:** VABVI staff provide services to children with visual impairments from birth through twenty-one years
- **Function at the Definition of Blindness:** Students with reduced visual performance due to brain injury or dysfunction may qualify, as determined by an eye care specialist or neurologist, for example, students with Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI) who function as visually impaired. https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-special-education-idea-policy-regarding-visual-impairment-including-blindness-clarification-memo_0.pdf
- **Who can refer a child?** Referrals are welcome from parents, case managers, school personnel, and any medical staff. All referrals are reviewed by the VABVI Director of Children's Services. Once all the required documentation has been received then a Teacher of the Visually Impaired will be assigned to complete a Functional Vision Assessment.
- **How to Obtain an Application?** A copy of the VABVI children services application can be obtained at our web site https://www.vabvi.org/application-for-children-services or by calling the Director of Children's Services at 1-800-639-5861 ext. 225.

Chapter 5

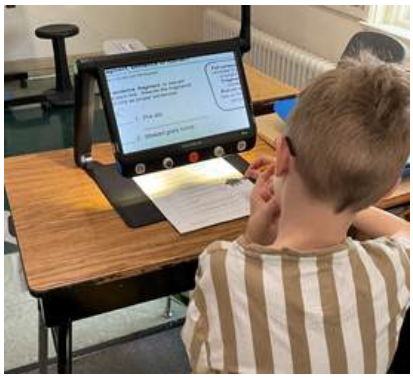
Evaluations of Students with Visual Impairments

The one-time initial assessment for new student referrals is free in Vermont from a VABVI Teacher of the Visually Impaired or Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist. Assessments VABVI can provide include, but are not limited to:

- **Functional Vision Assessment**
- **Learning Media Assessment (large print vs braille)**
- **Cortical Visual Impairment Assessment**
- **Orientation and Mobility Assessment**
- **Daily Living Skills Assessment**
- **Social Skills Checklist**
- **Assistive Technology Assessment**
- **Assessment of Braille Literacy Skills**

Before the initial provision of special education and related services to a child with a disability under Part B, a full and individual initial evaluation must be conducted in accordance with 34 CFR Secs. 300.532 and 300.533. Evaluations and assessments specific to children with visual impairments should be conducted by a licensed Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments, and/or a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist.

The IDEA Amendments of 1997 require that a variety of assessment tools and strategies must be used in the evaluation process to gather relevant functional and developmental information about the child. This includes information provided by the parents, to assist in determining (1) whether the child is a child with a disability, and (2) the content of the child's IEP, including the extent to which the child can be involved and progress in the general curriculum, and for a child of preschool age, to participate in age appropriate activities. Through the evaluation process, determinations also can be made about the range of accommodations and modifications necessary for a blind and/or visually impaired child to access the general education curriculum, or a specifically designed curriculum, created in response to relevant evaluations.



An assessment of a child's functional vision generally would include the nature and extent of the child's visual impairment and its effect, for example, how it affects the child's ability to learn to read, write, do mathematical calculations, and use computers and other assistive technology. It will also address the child's ability to access the general education curriculum and engage in age appropriate activities. For children with low

vision, this type of assessment also might include an evaluation of the child's ability to utilize low vision aids, as well as a learning media assessment and a functional vision assessment. For children who are blind and for children who have low vision, the assessment of vision would be closely linked to the assessment of the child's present and future reading and writing skills, needs, and appropriate reading and writing media. This information would be used by the IEP team in determining whether it would be appropriate to provide a blind or visually impaired child with instruction in braille or the use of braille.

An appropriate assessment of blind and visually impaired children, including those with other disabilities, also must address each child's ability to access and thrive in the general education curriculum as their sighted peers. This information could be obtained from an assessment of academic performance that would focus on the child's ability to learn to read. Areas may include reading comprehension, composition, science, mathematics, and computing.

It is especially important to address a blind or visually impaired child's ability to access the general education curriculum, particularly in situations where the child has additional disabilities. The findings of the evaluation impact the IEP, which focuses specifically on participation in the general education curriculum. Sighted students with visual impairments need for any supplementary aids and services, such as accommodations, modifications, or devices to facilitate the blind or visually impaired child's involvement in the general curriculum. This information is needed regardless of whether a child will be educated in a regular classroom or in a separate classroom or school. The evaluation also should identify any necessary program modifications or supports for school personnel needed for a student or to ensure that the student's unique needs arising from blindness or visual impairment or other identified disabilities are appropriately addressed in the IEP.

Additional assessments may be necessary to determine whether a child should receive specific instruction in other compensatory skills. Possible assessments for this purpose could include assessments of hearing, general intelligence, or communicative status. A child's need for orientation and mobility services and the appropriate method or methods for acquiring the requisite skills also should be assessed, and this generally would be accomplished through an assessment of motor abilities, level of independence, vision and communicative status, which should be conducted as early as possible. This is especially important because parents and organizations representing the interests of blind and visually impaired individuals have reported that, in some instances, these students are not receiving appropriate orientation and mobility services and that appropriate evaluations of their needs for these services are not being conducted. In all instances, the results of all assessments administered to the child, including those administered to determine the child's needs resulting from one or more disabilities other than blindness or visual impairment must be considered as the child's IEP is developed.

Chapter 6

Qualifications of Personnel Working with the Visually Impaired

- **TVI** = Teacher of the Visually Impaired. Qualified TVI's have graduated from a Bachelors or master's degree specifically for Teachers of the Visually Impaired and are licensed by the Vermont Agency of Education (VT AOE). For more specifics, refer to Vermont endorsement #67 and the corresponding Vermont Endorsement Standards. https://education.vermont.gov/documents/edu-educator-quality-transcript-review-worksheet-teacher-visually-impaired
- **CATIS=** Certified Assistive Technology Instructional Specialist for People with Visual Impairments, work with individuals who have a visual impairment learning to use assistive technology. They have graduated from a bachelor's or master's Degree program in Assistive Technology for the Blind and Visually Impaired and certified by the Association for the Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP)
- **COMS** = Certified Orientation & Mobility Specialists, work with children and adults to increase independent travel skills. They have graduated from a bachelor's or master's Degree specifically for Orientation and Mobility and are certified by the Association for the Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP).
- **CVRT** = Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapists work with transition aged students and adults to master independent living skills. They have graduated from a bachelor's or master's degree specifically for Vision Rehabilitation Therapists and are certified by ACVREP.

The National Association of State Directors of Special Education described the 11 key elements (pages 81-108) in their *Blind and Visually Impaired Students Educational Service Guidelines* when identifying qualified staff working with this population:

I. Professional personnel should have the specialized knowledge, skills, and attributes needed to provide educational and orientation and mobility services to students who are blind and visually impaired.

II. Educators should be knowledgeable about establishing parent-professional partnerships.

III. Educators should work collaboratively with professionals and other members of the student community.

IV. Teachers of the Visually Impaired should be knowledgeable and proficient in literacy and communication modes (including Braille reading and writing and use of optical devices) for students who are visually impaired.

V. Educators should be sensitive to the issues surrounding ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds of the students they serve.

VI. Qualified education personnel, such as TVIs and COMS, must be available to provide educational services. More clearly defined:

VII. 'The intensity of instruction provided by qualified TVIs and COMS and other personnel must reflect the assessed need of students. If a first grade student is blind and needs instruction in braille, the amount of time available to the student from the TVI must be based on the student's needs, not on the amount of time allocated by the school district or available in the teacher's schedule…. At no time should personnel be asked to adopt an IEP program that bases the number of service hours on administrative allotment rather than child needs. Without this instruction, blind and visually impaired students cannot be expected to compete academically and socially with their sighted peers nor can they be expected to enter the workforce upon leaving school.'

VIII. COMS must be available to provide related services to students who are visually impaired, including those with complex needs.

IX. Professional personnel shall ensure appropriate participation of support personnel such as paraprofessionals, Braille transcribers and orientation and mobility assistants.

X. Educators shall be knowledgeable about assistive devices and technology including Braille, speech, and low vision technology.

XI. Educators must be expected to engage in ongoing professional development.

XII. Educators who specialize in working with students who are blind and visually impaired are entitled to performance reviews by people knowledgeable in the education of these students.

XIII. Educational administrators need to develop strategies to attract and retain certified personnel who specialize in working with students who are visually impaired.

For in depth descriptions of each of these 11 elements please refer to this book.
Pugh, G.S., & Erin, J. (Eds.). (1999) *Blind and Visually Impaired Students. Educational Service Guidelines.* Watertown, MA: Perkins School for the Blind.

Chapter 7

Roles & Responsibilities

"For a child to become proficient in Braille, systematic and regular instruction from knowledgeable and appropriately trained personnel is essential. For blind and visually impaired children, including those with other disabilities, IEP teams must ensure that the instructional time allocated for Braille instruction is adequate to provide the level of instruction determined appropriate for the child." OSERS, 2000, p. 36589.

A. Role of the Teacher of the Visually Impaired

Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVI's) are team members for all students with visual impairments, including those with deaf-blindness and/or additional disabilities. The educational needs of these students vary widely. The TVI plays a critical role in helping students, teachers, paraprofessionals, family members, and related service personnel from initial evaluation to direct instruction or consultation.

Assessment and evaluation:

- Conducting the Functional Vision Assessment (FVA) and the Learning Media Assessment (LMA)
- Conducting or participating in Assistive Technology evaluations
- Referring students for Orientation and Mobility (O&M) evaluations
- Referring students for low vision exams conducted by low vision practitioners
- Interpreting evaluation and assessment results regarding the impact of a visual impairment
- Evaluating student progress and providing progress notes
- Assisting other professionals in developing appropriate evaluation and assessment intervention strategies

Direct instruction in the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC):

- Providing direct instruction in visual efficiency, tactile symbols, Braille, assistive technology, auditory skills, social skills, use of near and low vision devices, and other areas of the ECC dysfunction
- Supporting families of young students as they help their children reach developmental milestones with adapted strategies specific to needs related to visual impairment.
- Providing support to the student to facilitate development of self-esteem, self-determination, and social acceptance

Supporting educational teams:

The TVI will educate, support, and collaborate with family members and other members of the instructional team who work with the student. The TVI will convey professional opinions in a

diplomatic, collaborative manner in order to ensure that appropriate programming is recommended for the student with a visual impairment.

- Supporting families in developing early childhood goals and objectives related to visual impairment
- Supporting transitions of services from early childhood settings or homes to preschool, preschool to elementary school, elementary school to middle school, middle school to high school and high school to adulthood
- Ensuring that necessary skills are taught for transitioning from school to adult life
- Providing direct instruction, co-teaching, and participating in other collaborative efforts
- Consulting with parents, teachers, and other professionals in the home, community, and school on providing instruction in the ECC areas
- Modifying the environment to accommodate specific visual needs
- Modeling appropriate instructional techniques
- Providing, creating, and acquiring adapted materials
- Maintaining current eye reports on each student and interpreting ophthalmological information for the educational team
- Providing in-service training and consultation to the educational team in school and top professionals in applicable community settings (e.g., community-based instruction and community-based employment)
- Recommending adapted strategies for access in participation in the school community, ensuring that a vision-specific support system is in place for transitioning from school to adult life
- Building independence and success in home, community, and school environments
- Participating as a member of the children's IEP team

Administrative/record keeping duties:

- Referring to each eligible student to VABVI after securing a signed parental release to share information and maintaining records on all evaluations, IEPs, and progress reports
- Ensuring that each student has an updated FVA, low vision assessment, and O&M, LMA AT evaluation
- Attending IEP meetings
- Ordering, receiving, distributing, and returning adapted textbooks as appropriate for each student
- Completing and submitting visit summary reports monthly
- Maintaining inventory on materials on loan from VABVI
- Providing VABVI with copies of recent eye examination reports
- Updating any change in contact information for students open with VABVI

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, 20 U.S.C. § 6319 (2008) (NCLB), mandates the provision of highly qualified professionals. In cases where the TVI is not the student's highly qualified instructor in academic content areas, the TVI should collaborate with the academic teacher.

See Appendix C for a Perkins webcast about the Role and Value of the TVI.

B. Role of the Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS)

Movement, independent or supported, is critical for learning. Orientation and Mobility (O&M) is recognized in IDEA 2004 as a related service, which may be required to assist a child with a visual impairment. O&M specialists provide services that enable students who are visually impaired to attain systematic orientation to and safe movement in school, home, and community environments. They are critical members of the team for students with visual impairments who have identified O&M needs. The IEP team may consider an O&M assessment for every initial evaluation and triennial evaluation for a student who is identified as legally blind. It is important that O&M specialists have the competencies necessary to provide effective services to students. There are currently two organizations that certify O&M specialists: the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals http://www.acvrep.org/ascerteon/control/index and the National Blindness Professional Certification Board http://www.nbpcb.org. Although there are no laws in Vermont that require licensure for O&M specialists, VABVI requires certification from all hired COMS employees.

Assessment and evaluation:

- Conducting the O&M assessment
- Evaluating student progress and providing progress notes

Direct instruction in the ECC:

- Encouraging purposeful movement, exploration of immediate surroundings, and motor development for young children with visual impairments
- Teaching spatial and environmental concepts and use of information received by the senses (such as sound, temperature, and vibrations) to establish, maintain, or regain orientation and line of travel (e.g., using traffic sounds at an intersection to cross the street)
- Providing support to the student to facilitate development of self-esteem, self-determination, and social acceptance
- Orienting students to unfamiliar environments
- Instructing in efficient use of low vision for movement
- Teaching efficient use of low vision devices
- Teaching use of mobility tools, including the long cane and adaptive mobility devices, for safely negotiating the environment
- Providing travel experiences in the community, including residential and business environments and public transportation systems

Supporting educational teams:

- Supporting families of young children in encouraging gross and fine motor skills, sensory skills, basic concepts, and other developmental milestones
- Ensuring continuity from early childhood intervention services to school-age programs
- Ensuring that appropriate vision-specific supports are in place and the necessary skills are obtained for transitioning from school to adult life
- Modifying the environment to accommodate specific mobility needs
- Modeling appropriate O&M techniques for other team members
- Providing, creating, and acquiring adapted materials, such as tactile maps and mobility devices

- Providing in-service training and consultation to other team members in home, school, and community settings
- Recommending O&M strategies for access to the general education curriculum, such as physical education class and participation in school and community extra-curricular activities

Administrative/record keeping duties:

- Maintaining records on all evaluations, IEP, and progress reports and attending IEP meetings

C. Role of the Certified Assistive Technology Instructional Specialist for People with Visual Impairments

Teachers of the visually impaired are skilled and knowledgeable in the area of assistive technology. However, Certified Assistive Technology Instructional Specialists for People with Visual Impairment (CATIS) have additional advanced training specifically in the area of assistive technology. They can help support teams in assistive technology assessment, tool acquisition, instruction to the learner, team and family, and evaluation of technology programming.

Assessment:

- Ensures the following during an evaluation:
    - The individual has received a clinical low vision evaluation (when appropriate)
    - Is using the prescribed optical systems
- Conducts a thorough interview to determine the individual's goals (personal, vocational, educational), needs and desires
- Conducts a task analysis to determine the specific tasks required to help the individual accomplish their goals for independent living, employment and education

Many of the tasks that the individual will need to accomplish will fall into one of the following categories:

    - Accessing printed information
    - Accessing electronic information
    - Performing written communication
    - Accessing mobile navigational information
    - Participating in leisure & recreational activities
    - Maintaining personal, business, and health records
- Assesses any current hardware and software to determine if features are available that might assist the individual in accomplishing the desired tasks
- Determines if the individual has the necessary knowledge and skills or can learn the skills necessary to successfully use the technology tool(s) to accomplish the desired task:
    - Sensory skills
    - Motor skills
    - Cognitive skills

- Analyzes the information gathered and makes recommendations for specific technologies and instructional strategies necessary for the individual to have the greatest opportunity to achieve their stated goals

Instruction:

General:

- Guides individuals to make appropriate, informed decisions on the most appropriate and efficient toolsets based on their abilities, needs and goals
- Applies learning styles and learning theory to suit the individual
- Creates a training plan specific to individual's abilities, goals and needs
- Instructs in integrating assistive technology, devices, hardware and software into daily activities that enhances daily life or the educational or work environment
- Instructs in multiple ways via hands-on experience or lecture, (best practices for children and adult principles)
- Instructs in home, classroom, other school environment, workplace or community
- Adjusts scope, structure and pace of instruction based upon learning styles and capacity for new information
- Adjusts scope, structure and pace of instruction based upon changes and advances in technology
- Instructs in planning, implementation, and record keeping for short-term and long-term instruction
- Instructs in local, regional and national assistive technology resources and teaches strategies for troubleshooting
- Provides resources for further learning

Desktop and Laptop and Mobile Computing Environments:

Instructs in:

- General computer configuration hardware and software basics and standard operating systems
- Built-in accessibility software options
- Third-party accessibility software
- Use of appropriate environmental modifications such as ergonomics, illumination and size control, speech output settings, tactual markings
- Orientation to a keyboard using tactual and/or visual cues
- Different input technology (keyboard only, keyboard and mouse, braille displays, voice recognition) related to productivity, recreation and special accessibility programs
- Maintenance and troubleshooting including updates, configurations, malware, anti-virus and exploration based on the ability, goals and needs of the individual
- Appropriate maintenance of assistive technology devices
- AT solutions for various platforms

Configuration

- Configures and individualizes computers and portable devices as needed, including, but not limited to: installation of software; email functionality; account setup; folder

management; disabling and removing unneeded and inaccessible third party software, and installation of antivirus software
- Customizes Operating Systems for compatibility with AT and other third party applications
- Installs and customizes various AT solutions to meet the required needs and goals for individuals
- Configures systems and devices for remote training and instructional purposes as needed
- Installs and removes computer components as needed such as hard drives, memory and sound cards
- Connects peripheral devices and access points via technologies such as Bluetooth, Wi-Fi and NFC
- Maintains and troubleshoots hardware and software solutions

Exploration:

- Explores and reviews mainstream and AT hardware and software tools at every available opportunity through public beta testing, free trials, vendor online training
- Explores assistive technologies that do not yet have training courses and manuals and develops use case and training materials for others
- Knows the major publications, conferences and web resources related to assistive technology to update CATIS practice
- Presents and participates in conferences and educational events on evolving technology
- Develops network of tools to keep abreast of new developments in devices, software, services, and accessibility tools for individuals with visual impairment, mainstream technology and user-group communities (i.e. follow AT technology sources on social media)
- Collaborates with software and hardware companies to promote accessibility
- Learns accessibility features of mainstream electronic applications and devices
- Participates in beta testing opportunities to promote access and partnerships

D. Role of the Paraprofessional for Students with Visual Impairments

The decision to assign a paraprofessional to a student is made by the IEP team after careful consideration of what accommodations or modifications are necessary for the student to make progress toward IEP goals. Paraprofessionals need specific and ongoing training in order to effectively support the student's learning. Although No Child Left Behind requires minimum educational levels for paraprofessionals, additional specific training on the impact of visual loss is important for effective instructional support for a student who is blind or visually impaired. The roles of paraprofessionals vary with the specific student or classroom being supported. However, they must support the student with visual impairment and/or deaf blindness in accordance with specific guidance from the TVI and/or COMS. Without proper orientation and supervision, paraprofessionals can inadvertently act as a barrier between the student and peer involvement and can detract from the student's progress toward independence. Over-reliance on a paraprofessional over time can result in students' exhibiting passivity and unnecessary dependence on adults.

Classroom paraprofessionals may be hired to provide overall support to the larger class with particular duties for a student with visual impairment and/or deaf blindness. Their role may include assistance for activities of daily living, health and safety, and/or access to the environment. Some programs employ paraprofessionals to provide assistance with material preparation, which may include, but is not limited to copying, highlighting, enlarging, and scanning materials.

Paraprofessionals who work with students with deaf-blindness should receive training including information on deaf-blindness in general and also on the specific communication and learning strategies that are appropriate for individual students. Often students with deaf blindness require assistance to connect with what is happening in the environment beyond what they can personally see or hear, often using highly individualized communication systems. Intervener training is available online. For more details contact the New England Consortium on Deaf blindness (https://www.perkins.org/services/nec).

Paraprofessional job functions differ according to role, but in general, duties include:

- working under the direction of vision professionals and staff to modify instructional materials, including use of Braille translation or magnification software
- storing and distributing large print, Braille, and audio books under teacher supervision
- assisting teachers with instruction and activities
- reinforcing O&M skills for movement of students between instructional locations or activities
- increasing access for students with deaf blindness to their immediate environment and implementing a meaningful communication system
- assisting students in becoming increasingly independent

E. Role of the Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist (CVRT)

It is estimated that seventy to eighty percent of all we learn is incidental through what we see and hear. A sensory impairment impacts a child's development significantly and is not just limited to the core academic skills of a school-based education. Children are impeded from learning basic skills of daily living and personal management, by not being able to observe and see their family, peers and teachers going about these daily tasks. As important as having access to one's academic education, it is equally important to have access to direct instruction in these areas. In Vermont, Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapists (CVRTs) teach adaptive independent living skills, enabling transitioned aged students and adults who are blind or have low vision to perform a wide range of daily activities. CVRT's are certified through the Academy of Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professional (ACVREP).

The CVRT provides instruction in areas such as:

- Home and personal management
- Adaptive communications skills including braille and computer access
- Orientation in the home
- Home mechanics
- Diabetic and health management
- Leisure activities

- Use of low vision devices and training techniques

Direct Instruction and Ongoing Assessment and Support:

- Utilizing the Transition Checklist, provided by the TVI, the CVRT will follow up on targeted skills by providing instruction and ongoing assessment and recommendations
- The CVRT will attend IEP Meetings as requested to review progress and set collaborative goals
- The CVRT can provide instruction at both the school and in the home as requested by the team
- The CVRT will provide instruction, assistance and advice to families and school team in the continued support and maintenance of targeted goals by telephone, electronic, or in-person meetings

F. Role of the Family in the Individualized Education Program

Quality education is fostered by collaboration between educators and families. One goal of early intervention services is to support parents and caregivers in developing competence and confidence to help their child learn and develop. Family members may continue to need suggestions and support as their child enters school in order to adapt to the environment so that their child has access to information that other children gain through vision. Coordination of all team members, including family members, helps to assure a shared focus on student success. Family members bring knowledge of their child but also needed information about the unique needs of and services for students with visual impairments in order to be informed participants on the team. Information about specific teaching strategies, materials, and activities will need to be shared with family members to ensure consistent approaches and to support and facilitate quality interactions between family members and the child. Families of students with visual impairments have the same rights and responsibilities as families of all students with any disabilities. For example, state and federal special education regulations require school divisions to afford the parents of a child with a disability an opportunity to participate in meetings with respect to the identification, evaluation, and educational placement of the child. 34 C.F.R. §§ 300.501(b) and (c); 8 VAC 20-81-170 A.

Chapter 8

Services for Birth to 3-Year-Old

Teachers of the Visually Impaired work closely with the Children's Integrated Services Early Intervention (CIS), the lead Vermont agency, delivering services through a regional network of family services providers across Vermont for infants with disabilities and those experiencing developmental delays. The TVIs role and responsibilities includes monitoring whether the infant or toddler is reaching their visual milestones, assessing their interaction with objects, people and their environment. The TVI will also evaluate the impact of a visual impairment on developmental milestones across a variety of domains. TVI's provide evaluations, direct instruction, consultation and collaboration before, during, and after team meetings. For a complete list of TVI roles and responsibilities, please refer to the previous chapter. TVIs are members of the instructional team for all children birth to 21, with visual impairments.

VABVI and CIS promote interagency collaboration and a coordinated system of activities, policies, and procedures to support services for infants. The local CIS service coordinator arranges evaluations, coordinates the interagency team for effective delivery of services, sets up meetings, and ensures that records are accurate and up to date. Services for children aged 3 years are family driven and occur in the child's natural environment, focusing on the needs of the child within the family. The One Plan, also known as the Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP), is a single service plan for all services. The One Plan documents the relevant and meaningful goals and objectives for each child, the setting of each service (home, day care and/or other community setting), the frequency of services and the list of service providers. The family's routines and the child's daily living experiences are relevant factors when writing the One Plan.

Obtaining an application: A referral can be made to the Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired by the parent, service provider or medical staff, provided they have parental approval to do so. A copy of the application can be obtained at our web site https://www.vabvi.org/application-for-children-services or by calling VABVI at 1-800-639-5861 ext. 225.

Chapter 9

Educational Placements for Students with Visual Impairments

"There is no best placement for a child with a visual impairment. There is a best placement for each individual child at a particular time in her/his life. Therefore, we cannot adequately meet the needs of students who are blind or visually impaired unless we have a full continuum of services of placement options. NASDSE, 1999, page 26.

Children under the age of three are provided with early intervention services by CISEI in a setting deemed most appropriate to each family's situation. The most appropriate setting is determined as being the placement supporting the family in achieving desired outcomes for their child with as little disruption as possible to daily routines and family life. For school age students, IDEA 2004 and its federal and state implementing regulations guide the placement. "Part B regulations require public agencies to make available a continuum of alternative placements, or a range of placement options, to meet the needs of students with disabilities for special education and related services. The options on this continuum, which may include regular classes, special classes, separate schools and instruction in hospitals and institutions, must be made available to the extent necessary to implement the IEP for each student with a disability." (34 CFR paragraph 300.115 and 300.16).

The educational team should determine all appropriate learning environments based upon each student's individual educational needs. By law, the team must consider the least restrictive environment (LRE) for each student. LRE is typically interpreted to be the placement as close to the child's home as possible in a setting with nondisabled peers and with an appropriate program to meet essential needs of the individual child. Consideration should include both the core and expanded core subjects for a student with a visual impairment. The law requires the educational team to first look at placement in all general education settings, with supplementary services, program modifications, and supports from school personnel and outside service providers as needed.

After considering educational needs in both the general curricula and expanded core curriculum, the educational team must carefully select from an array of potential settings. Collaborative settings, itinerant teacher services, self-contained classrooms, Extended School Year (ESY) programs and/or placement at a school for the blind, which has a residential component, are all options to be considered by the educational team. Student's needs and her/his family's valued life outcomes should drive placement decisions. Any service delivery option may be the most appropriate for an individual student at any given time, and the appropriate placement option may change over time for a particular student. (34 CFR paragraph 300.116). Adapted from 2010 Guidelines for Working with Students Who are Blind or Visually Impaired in Virginia Public Schools

Chapter 10

Transitions

Basically, there are three major educational transitions when working with children:

1. Transitioning from early intervention services at age 3 to Early Childhood Special Education Services (ECSES). ECSES is administered through local school districts. This includes the transition from a One Plan (also known as the IFSP) to an IEP or a 504 plan. TVI will help the team create a smooth transition into early childhood services by continuing to provide direct instruction and consultation as well as an in-service for the new preschool providers. Just as the TVI wrote objectives for the One Plan, the TVI will also be available to write goals, objectives and accommodations for the IEP or 504 plan.

2. Transition from ECSES to Kindergarten. The TVI will help create a smooth transition into kindergarten by continuing to provide direct instruction and consultation as well as an in-service for the new schoolteachers, including all the teachers, (classroom, PE, art, music, SLP, PT, OT and so on) working with the student. The TVI will continue to write goals and objectives for the IEP or 504 plan as needed.

3. Transition into adulthood. Transition planning is required in the IEP for students by age 16. VABVI and the Vermont State Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) collaborate regarding transition services for students ages 14-22 and these services are designed to assist students with visual impairments to make a smoother transition from high school into adult life. There are a few transition programs available in Vermont that are specific to incoming grants; therefore, they will not be detailed here. For more information you can contact your local TVI. Some of the related areas addressed in the transition programs are:

- Employment exploration
- Post-secondary education
- Expanded Core Curriculum (described more in depth in Chapter 2):
    - Orientation & Mobility
    - Socialization
    - Independent Living
    - Recreation & Leisure
    - Assistive Technology
    - Career Education

    - Self-determination
- Dressing for success
- Taking control of health needs
- Community integration
- Self-assessment and constructive criticism
- Job skills development via summer employment opportunities

A TVI may provide direct instruction on pre-vocational skills, independent living skills, technology, and self-advocacy skills as determined by the educational team prior to graduation. DBVI offers vocational counseling, coordination of services and assistance with access to programs to help secure and maintain employment. For more information about DBVI, here is their website: www.DBVI.vermont.gov

Chapter 11

Accessible Instructional Materials

Students with visual impairments should receive materials at the same time as their sighted peers; otherwise they are at a distinct disadvantage compared to the sighted peers.

TVI's help IEP and 504 Teams determine the appropriate accessible format for students with visual impairments and will work with the schools to identify the best practice of obtaining the accessible formats. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) states that State and/or Local Education Agencies (SEA's and LEA's) **"will provide instructional materials in an accessible format to blind persons or other persons with print disabilities in a timely manner"**. (National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard-related sections; Part B, Sec 612(a)(23)(B) and Sec. 613(a)(6)(B)).

It goes on to say, **"… Timely access to appropriate and accessible instructional materials is an inherent component of public agencies' obligations under the Act to ensure that FAPE is available for children with disabilities and that they participate in the general education curriculum as specified in their IEPs."** (Section § 300.172(b)(3)) Timely access is defined as students with visual impairments receiving materials at the same time as their sighted peers.

In 1996, Congress passed the **Chafee Amendment** (now Sec. 121 of the Copyright Act), which provides in part that it is not an infringement of copyright for an authorized entity to reproduce or to distribute copies or phono-records of a previously-published, nondramatic literary work if such copies or phono records are reproduced or distributed in specialized formats exclusively for use by blind or other persons with disabilities. The Chafee Amendment "allows authorized entities to reproduce or distribute copies…of previously published nondramatic literary works in specialized formats exclusively for use by blind or other person with disabilities."

https://www.loc.gov/nls/who-we-are/laws-regulations/copyright-law-amendment-1996-pl-104-197/

This means that:

- the auxiliary aid or service provided must permit the person with the disability to access the information. For example, if a blind student is able to read Braille, then written material in Braille would be accessible for that student. If homework assignments are available on-line, then the on-line program used by the school must be accessible to students who are blind. Similarly, if a student can only read in enlarged print, then large print or tools to magnify print would be accessible.
- the auxiliary aid or service must be provided in a timely manner. That means that once the student has indicated a need for an auxiliary aid or service or requested a particular auxiliary aid or service, the public school district must provide it (or the alternative, as discussed above) as soon as possible.
- the auxiliary aid or service must be provided in a way that protects the independence of the student with the disability. For example, if a blind student requested an accessible electronic book (e-book) reader to complete in-class reading, instead of using a reading aide, the school district should provide the e-book reader because it would allow the student to go through the material independently, at his own pace, and with the ability to revisit passages as needed.

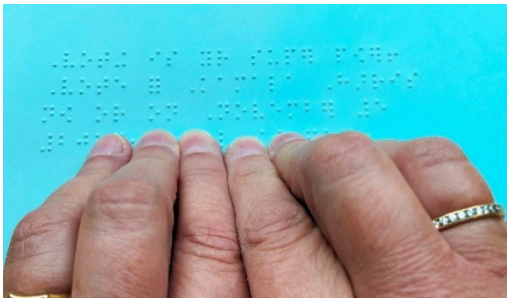
(Adapted from http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-faqs-effective-communication-201411.pdf)

Vermont's Accessible Educational Materials Center (AEMC)

VABVI is a depository for new and used accessible materials from APH for registered VABVI students. The TVI's work with local school districts and other public and private agencies to procure and produce alternative format educational materials, such as Braille books. These specially adapted materials are available for loan for the school year from VABVI, such as:

- Braille books
- Large print books
- Perkins Braillers
- Braille paper

- CCTV's /VisioBook (from APH)
- Light boxes
- Tactile Atlas
- Sound Sources
- Adaptive PE materials
- Braille and larger print rulers
- Early childhood 3D books
- And more…



For a longer item list, please refer to the following APH catalog link. You must order these items through a TVI to obtain them through the APH Quota system, as described in the FAQ chapter of this booklet. http://shop.aph.org/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/Home_10001_11051

Chapter 12

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How does a student get referred to the Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (VABVI)?

To make a referral for children's services call the Director of Children's Services toll free1-800-639-5861 ext. 225. You can also download the application https://www.vabvi.org/application-for-children-services Referrals can be made by parents, teachers, ophthalmologists or other medical staff.

2. How is it determined whether a student will read braille

A certified Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI) must determine each student's literacy medium. This evaluation includes recommendations for the use of visual, tactual, and auditory learning media. Decisions on whether a student should learn and use braille for literacy includes evaluating the efficiency with which the student gathers information from various sensory channels, the types of general literacy media the student uses, or will use, to accomplish reading and writing tasks, and the literacy media the student will use for reading and writing.

3. Do all students with visual impairments need IEP goals and objectives in all areas of the expanded core curriculum?

Given that the expanded core curriculum (ECC) identifies critical skills that are impacted by the presence of a visual impairment, there is a need to provide assessment in all areas of the expanded core curriculum to determine whether or not instruction is needed. IDEA requires consideration of present levels of performance in both academic and functional areas. The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) has endorsed the term "expanded core curriculum" to describe areas that should be included in the comprehensive evaluation of students with visual impairments.

4. How does a student qualify for VABVI services?

VABVI follows the rules and regulations of the VT AOE, as described in Chapter 4. Students must have a visual acuity of 20/70 or worse in the better eye or a peripheral field loss of 20 degrees or less. Students who have a diagnosed progressive eye disease also qualify, as do students who are functionally blind, as in the case of some students with cortical visual impairments or convergence insufficiency.

5. If a student has a mild visual impairment and a slight hearing impairment, does he qualify as deafblind?

Yes, for the purposes of receiving specialized supports for children with combined hearing loss any degree of vision and hearing loss in childhood requires unique approaches from individuals highly skilled in this low incidence population. Interventions simply for hearing or vision loss will not be enough to mitigate potential barriers for these students. We work closely with the New England Consortium on Deaf blindness (NEC). Early identification and registration of this special population of students is critical to ensure long term education success. Teachers at the Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired can help families and teams connect with NEC for vital educational supports, family supports, and transition supports at no cost to schools or families.

6. Are there specific roles for paraprofessionals working with students who are braille readers or are deafblind?

When an IEP team determines that a paraprofessional is needed as a member of a student's educational team, there is careful consideration of the specific training needs by that individual to support implementation of the IEP. For example, students learning braille may require a para to learn braille software programs, while students with deaf blindness may require an intervener.

7. Will a TVI attend the IEP, 504 or One Plan meetings?

Yes, TVI's are expected to attend each meeting as the person most knowledgeable about the visual impairment and address the issues related to and impacted by the visual impairment.

8. At what age does VABVI begin to work with children?

TVIs from Children's Services work with children from birth through age 21 across a variety of educational and therapeutic settings. VABVI also has an Adult Services department which can serve support students and beyond transition age to adulthood.

9. How much time should be provided by a TVI, COMS or CATIS?

Determination of the amount of service time and the type of service delivery is based upon the assessed needs of the student, the educational setting, the types of skills to be taught, and other factors. It is an individualized decision for each student.

10. How does a school order braille, large print books or audio?

All book orders should go through the TVI. VABVI has access to the Accessible Textbooks Department at the American Printing House for the Blind (APH) and their Louis Database. This allows us to locate textbooks in braille and large print across the nation. If the books are produced by APH, then they are most likely to be FREE, when purchased through the quota system. The APH Accessible Media Producers Database (AMP) is a self-listing directory of producers of accessible formats such as braille, tactile graphics, large print, e-text and audio. VABVI is also familiar with many alternative sites for locating accessible books, such as Book share for students on IEPs, Learning Ally for audio books and so on.

11. What is the APH Quota system?

Through the Federal APH Quota system, some textbooks, adapted educational products, and assistive technology devices are provided to eligible and registered VABVI clients in educational settings ranging from early intervention programs for visually impaired infants and toddlers to specialized center-based educational services, as well as general education settings. Braille and large prints books produced by APH and available for purchase through the Federal Quota system can be identified through an online APH catalog and must be ordered through a TVI.

12. What is a CCTV?

The term CCTV is short for a "Closed Circuit Television" Also commonly referred to as a video magnifier. The CCTV is a low vision device which can have the ability to enlarge both near and distant print or focal points through different camera lens viewing odes which are displayed on a display screen. CTCV's afford a wide range of a wide range of magnification levels color contrast customization and additional accessibility option like Optical Character Recognitino (OCR) that can offer text-to-speech conversion of print sources. TVI's often recommend CCTVs as an alternative to large print books because of their versatility, lower cost in the long run and their transferrable application in an effective accessibility tool in employment settings. To be employable, students who are blind or visually impaired need to be able to access and use assistive technology. TVIs are knowledgeable about accessibility solutions for individuals who are blind or visually impaired. TVIs can provide training and support to students and facilitate access to a range of assistive technology resources.

Chapter 13

Unique Social/Emotional Needs of Students Who are Blind or Visually Impaired

2010 Guidelines for Working with Students Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired in Virginia Public Schools. Reproduced with permission from the Virginia Department of Education

Social Emotional Needs

Visual impairment often affects a student's self-concept, observation of behavior in social situations, involvement in recreational activities and sexuality. The student with a visual impairment may, therefore, have special needs for socialization, affective education, recreation

and sex education. These students will also need to learn to deal with the psychological implications of visual impairment.

Family Life Education

Family Life Education needs that should be addressed may include:
Being able to identify with his or her own gender;

- Being able to identify with his or her own gender.
- Being knowledgeable about appropriate grooming and personal hygiene techniques;
- Being able verbally and tactually, with the use of models, to identify human male and female body parts and organs of the reproductive system, using correct terminology;
- Being knowledgeable about appropriate childcare procedures and adaptations that may be necessary for a parent who is visually impaired through contact with real infants and children.
- Being aware of verbal and nonverbal communications that relay sexual messages to others, e.g., the use of body language.
- Being knowledgeable about strategies for prevention of physical and sexual abuse, including inappropriate touching and rape.
- Being knowledgeable about the genetic factors related to someone's vision. This means understanding that in some cases visual impairment can be passed onto a child. It is their choice to have genetic counseling or not if they were to ever try to have a child. Having visual impairment is not inherently something that should be avoided.
- Being aware of the responsibilities associated with premarital sexual relations, marriage, and parenthood; and
- Being able to express and discuss any concerns related to one's visual impairment and relations with the opposite sex, e.g., dependency, not being able to drive, financial concerns, and genetic factors.

Psychological Implications

How well a student understands and accepts his or her visual impairment may be determined by addressing the needs in this area, including:

- Being able to recognize that one has a visual impairment.
- Being knowledgeable about one's own eye condition.
- Being able to explain one's eye condition and vision-related needs to others.
- Understanding the vision process.
- Understanding and accepting any physical limitations caused by visual impairment.
- Understanding how low vision aids can assist in improving visual abilities and accepting the use of appropriate low vision aids.
- Accepting the use of alternative techniques and apparatuses for obtaining sensory information, where appropriate, e.g., use of Braille, the long cane, adaptive technology, and low vision aids.
- Being knowledgeable about personal eye care, e.g., medications, hygiene, regular eye exams, and low vision assessments; and
- Having realistic knowledge of current treatment as it relates to one's visual impairment.

Performing personal hygiene skills:

- Performing basic personal hygiene tasks, e.g., toileting, care of teeth and hair, and bathing needs; and
- Using personal service businesses to care for one's own needs and to make appointments, e.g., for barber or beauty shop services.

Performing dressing skills:

- Dressing and undressing, including tying shoes and fastening buttons and zippers
- Selecting appropriate clothing and planning clothing purchases

Caring for one's own clothing:

- Using techniques for clothing storage and identification of colors and patterns sorting laundry, and using a washer and dryer
- Using services such as shoe repair, performing minor repairs on clothing and hemming and ironing clothing.

Practicing housekeeping skills:

- Locating and using housekeeping areas in the home, such as kitchen, dining area, and bedroom, and assisting in basic upkeep, such as putting out the trash and setting the table.
- Performing many basic housekeeping tasks, such as vacuuming and scheduling regular maintenance.
- Being able to make basic home repairs.

Preparing food:

- Identifying kitchen appliances and performing basic

- pouring, stirring, measuring, and spreading techniques.
- Using kitchen equipment, such as a stove and oven; preparing and cooking menus: following recipes; and preparing complete meals.

Practicing eating skills:

- Locating food on the plate.
- Using utensils properly; being familiar with passing food, serving oneself at buffets, and using cafeterias; ordering food from restaurant menus; and understanding tipping; and
- Accessing restaurants, cafeterias, and buffets.

Managing money:

- Identifying coins and knowing coin equivalents; and
- Handling money in public, planning a budget, using checking and savings accounts, using automatic teller machines (ATMs) and other electronic banking and money management systems, and having one's own system for money management.

Practicing social communication skills:

- Conducting basic social interactions, including communicating needs; and
- Conversing appropriately with familiar persons and strangers.

Practicing skills in using telecommunications:

- Identifying one's own telephone number and placing an emergency call.
- Using directory assistance, using various types of telephones for personal and business calls, arranging for one's own telephone service, and displaying good telephone etiquette; and
- Understanding fax communications and E-mail.

Practicing written communication skills:

- Understanding that written communication is used to convey information ideas.
- Writing a signature and personal and business letters, using a system for recording information, and using basic office supplies correctly.

Understanding changes in time:

- Responding to a daily schedule.
- Knowing events that occur during the daytime compared to nighttime
- Knowing how to tell time and use clock and watches, knowing automatic time (weeks or months) scheduling one's own time, and keeping appointments.

Being able to organize systematically:

- Organizing time, activities, and personal belongings at home, at school, and in the community.

Career/Vocational Needs

To be successfully employed, the student with a visual impairment will often need guidance to prepare for the world of work. Assessment and instruction in career awareness and vocational education, including adaptive skills, will often be needed for an individual to succeed in the workplace. Some career/vocational needs that may be addressed include:

- Understanding oneself in terms of the characteristics and attributes that make up one's individuality and recognizing one's uniqueness as a person and building one's self-esteem.
- Knowing the difference between work and play and when each is appropriate.
- Understanding the importance of doing a job to the best of one's ability
- Understanding work ethics, including getting to work on time.

- Understanding the necessity of responsibility and commitment in the workplace.
- Being able to fill out a job application or giving the necessary information to another person.
- Being familiar with the development and use of a résumé.
- Knowing that money is a medium of exchange and related to work and developing concepts of financial management.
- Knowing and using personal information skills, including a legal signature.
- Maximizing one's capabilities in developing skills in technology and in using adaptive devices, such as computers, note-taking devices, and calculators.
- Being familiar with jobs held by one's family members and the jobs available in the school and the community, particularly jobs held by visually impaired people.
- Experiencing hands-on work experiences through chores, paid jobs on or off campus or after school (particularly in the private sector), or in simulated work environments.
- Being able to interact appropriately with supervisors, coworkers, and the public.
- Participating in skill training at a job-entry level in a variety of experiences to assist in determining realistic occupational choices.
- Determining post-secondary education needs: whether to attend college or technical school or go to work.
- Knowing how to contact the Department of Rehabilitation for referral, training, and/or placement.
- Being able to use and train readers.
- Knowing sources for having materials transcribed and for obtaining specialized books, materials, and equipment.
- Being able to organize time and materials to maximize learning.
- Obtaining and managing financial assets for postsecondary education.
- Being self-reliant in managing postsecondary education.
- Being able to serve as one's own advocate in obtaining necessary services, adaptations, and equipment needed for success in a job, during job training, or in college; and
- Knowing and using laws prohibiting discrimination based on disability, including "equal access" and "reasonable accommodation.

Appendix B

Cogswell-Macy Act (pending)
H.R. 4822, S. 2681

This bill amends the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Many "schools are not prepared to help children who are deafblind, deaf or hard of hearing, blind, or visually impaired develop to their full potential. To ensure that these students receive the education they deserve, the Alice Cogswell and Anne Sullivan Macy Act (H.R. 1120) was re-introduced in Congress in February 2017 and is on track to be introduced in Congress in October 2020. The Cogswell-Macy Act is the most comprehensive special education legislation for students with sensory disabilities to date. This act seeks to expand the resources available to these students, and their parents and educators, through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)."

- Ensure that students who are deafblind, blind, visually impaired, or deaf or hard of hearing receive the expert instruction and services they need to succeed in school and beyond.
- Require states to identify, locate, and evaluate children who are blind, visually impaired, deaf or hard of hearing, or deafblind, regardless of whether they have additional disabilities.
- Enhance accountability at the state and federal levels.
- Establish a national collaborative resource center: the Anne Sullivan Macy Center on Visual Disability and Educational Excellence.

To read the complete Cogswell-Macy Act go to https://cogswellmacyact.org/

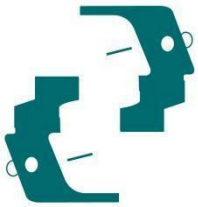
Appendix C

Video Link to the Role and Value of the Teacher of the Visually Impaired

While Chapter 17 describes the role and responsibilities of a TVI, here is a twenty minute video link “presented by Marla Runyan, Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI) and Olympic athlete walks us through her experience as a child with a visual impairment and the impact of the TVI in her education. As a TVI herself, Marla discusses the importance of making the curriculum not only accessible but also meaningful for the child with a visual impairment.”

http://www.perkinselearning.org/videos/webcast/role-and-value-teacher-visually-impaired

STATEWIDE SERVICES



VERMONT ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

1-800-639-5861

Offices located in:

- ☆ **Berlin**
- ☆ **Brattleboro**
- ☆ **Rutland**
- ☆ **South Burlington**