



2017 Ohio Guidelines for Working With Students Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired

The Ohio Guidelines provide information regarding services to support the implementation of educational goals for students who are blind or visually impaired.

The Ohio Guidelines for Working With Students Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired (revised for 2017) is an update to the 2015 Ohio Guidelines for Working With Students Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired, which was adapted from the 2010 Guidelines for Working With Students Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired in Virginia Public Schools. Comments or questions regarding these guidelines may be addressed to Jennifer Govender, Outreach Specialist, Outreach Center for Deafness and Blindness (The Outreach Center) at the Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence (OCALI), 470 Glenmont Ave, Columbus, OH 43214; jennifer_govender@ocali.org

NOTICE The guidance in the 2017 Ohio Guidelines for Working With Students Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired is not binding for local educational agencies or other entities. Except for the statutes, regulations, and court decisions that are referenced herein, the document is exemplary, and compliance is not mandatory.

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Preface

The Ohio State Board of Education’s vision is “for all students to graduate from the PK-12 education system with the knowledge, skills, and behaviors necessary to successfully continue their education and/or be workforce ready and successfully participate in the global economy as productive citizens. Ultimately, all students will graduate well prepared for success” (Ohio Department of Education [ODE], 2017 Our Vision section, para. 2).

Regardless of whether a child or young adult is blind or visually impaired, has a physical disability, or has no disability at all, educators must develop and implement educational programs and provide services that meet the needs of the student. Educators and families of students who are blind or visually impaired must have a clear understanding of these students’ unique learning styles and the interventions necessary to ensure that students can “successfully continue their education and/or be workforce ready and successfully participate in the global economy as productive citizen” (ODE, 2017).

Students who are blind or visually impaired may require individualized programs to be successful in the general education curriculum. In addition to the general education curriculum that all Ohio students receive, students who are blind or visually impaired, birth through 21, also need an expanded core curriculum (ECC) to meet the needs directly related to their visual impairments (refer to the Expanded Core Curriculum section of this document).

Having a clear understanding of the unique learning needs of students with visual impairments allows all team members involved to make appropriate decisions about the development and implementation of educational supports needed. Some of the key features for students with visual impairments include specialized personnel, materials, equipment, and educational settings to ensure appropriate individualized education. Qualified personnel are an integral part of the educational team for every student with a visual impairment, which include certified teachers of students with visual impairments (TVI) and certified orientation and mobility specialists (COMS). Further, as advocates for their child, parents and caregivers need knowledge and support to be able to make effective, informed decisions and to effectively participate in their child’s educational planning.

The purpose of the *2017 Ohio Guidelines for Working With Students Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired* is to provide decision-makers and families with a set of guidelines and information regarding services needed to support the implementation of educational goals for students who are blind or visually impaired. The document sections highlight recommended standards and guidelines, along with an explanation of the components found in high-quality programs. As a resource for educators and families interested in serving the educational needs of students who are blind or visually impaired, it will be posted, modified, and updated as needed on [The Outreach Center for Deafness and Blindness website](#).

Acknowledgments

The *2017 Ohio Guidelines for Working With Students Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired* is an update of the 2015 version. References to federal law have been updated to reflect the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the *Ohio Operating Standards for the Education of Children With Disabilities (2014)*.

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IDENTIFICATION: CHILD FIND, SCREENING, EXAMINATION, AND REFERRAL

Child Find (Ohio Administrative Code 3301-51-03)

Vision screening and eye examinations are essential for detecting a visual impairment. A vision screening does not, by itself, indicate the presence of a vision loss, but the results may signal a need for additional assessments to determine the presence of a visual impairment. **The information gathered through screening becomes the baseline for what an optometrist or ophthalmologist may address in a follow-up clinical exam.** Early detection, diagnosis, and treatment of any degree of vision loss helps improve communication and connection with the world.

[The American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus](#) has published a list of vision screening recommendations, including tests for children ages newborn through 5 years and older.

Comprehensive eye evaluations can be completed through local optometrists. The American Optometric Association's [searchable database](#) may be accessed to locate nearby optometrists.

InfantSEE®, a public health program managed by Optometry Cares® – the AOA Foundation, is designed to ensure that eye and vision care becomes an essential part of infant wellness care to improve a child's quality of life. Under this program, participating optometrists provide a comprehensive infant eye assessment between 6 and 12 months of age as a no-cost public service.

Further, the Ohio Department of Health has developed guidelines for vision screening to take place each year for preschool and K-12 students. As part of the requirements, school-aged students who do not pass the vision screening are referred for an additional exam.

According to the Ohio Department of Health's Vision Screening Guidelines and Requirements, the Ohio Revised Code (section 3323.19) requires that a student identified with disabilities and who is receiving services for the first time under an individualized education program (IEP) undergo at least one comprehensive eye examination, conducted by either an ophthalmologist or an optometrist, upon entrance to any educational program meeting standards set by the State of Ohio. The eye examination must occur within three months of the student being identified with disabilities. However, no student who has not undergone the eye examination required under this section shall be prohibited from initiating, receiving, or continuing to receive services prescribed in the student's individualized education program.

Early Intervention Program (Part C of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act [IDEA])

When a child under the age of 3 is identified with a visual impairment, a referral may be made to Ohio's Part C, [Early Intervention \(EI\)](#), program. The Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) serves as the lead agency. **Early Intervention is a statewide program that provides coordinated EI services to families of eligible children under the age of 3 with developmental delays or disabilities, including blindness or visual impairment.** If a child is found in need of EI services, an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is developed with the service coordinator. **The IFSP is a written plan for providing EI services needed to meet functional outcomes to an infant or toddler with a disability and to the child's family.** Additional information may be found in *Ohio Early Intervention Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) Guidance*.

Child and family outcomes are identified through an assessment process, and the IFSP subsequently identifies the services and supports necessary to reach them. Identified EI services begin within 30 days the IFSP being signed by the family and service providers.

If the family chooses to transition from Part C to public school special education services, a formal transition plan must be developed. This plan begins with a transition conference to be held at least 90 days before the child's third birthday as part of the IFSP process. At this time, the team completes a transition plan to determine steps and services needed to support the established outcomes. The family's EI service coordinator initiates the transition process and the school district works with local EI programs to ensure a smooth transition.

School Age (Part B)

Guidance for services provided to students age 3 through 21 is provided through Part B of IDEA. **Eligibility is determined through a multi-factored evaluation (MFE) process.** Screening is part of the identification process at any age. At school age, each school district is responsible for establishing procedures, including timelines, to document the evaluation of learners enrolled in the district, including transfers from out of state. In addition, school districts establish an MFE team responsible for processing referral requests for learners suspected of having a disability. If any person, including parents or caregivers, interacting with a child suspects a disability, that person may request an evaluation by contacting the special education administrator. **When a learner is determined eligible for special education and related services, an individualized education program (IEP) is developed.**

DEFINITIONS AND ELIGIBILITY STANDARDS

School-age learners who are blind or visually impaired can be very diverse. For example, they may:

- Range from 3 through 21 years of age;
- Be totally blind or have varying degrees of low vision;
- Have a stable or degenerative visual impairment;
- Be born with a visual impairment or may have acquired a visual impairment later in life;
- Have additional disabilities, including autism, emotional disturbance, intellectual disability, among others
- Demonstrate vision-related issues that have an adverse impact on their educational performance.

Definitions

According to [Ohio Operating Standards for the Education of Children With Disabilities \(2014\)](#):

“Visual impairment,” including blindness, means an impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child’s educational performance.

- a. The term “visual impairment” includes both partial sight and blindness.
- b. The term “visual impairment” does not include a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes, such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia and developmental aphasia. (3301-51-01 (B)(10)(d)(xiii))

“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. (3301-51-01 (B)(10)(d)(iii))

According to the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), “States may not use criteria or other definitions for ‘visual impairment including blindness’ that result in the exclusion of children who otherwise meet the definition in [34 CRF §300.8 (c)(13)]*” (Ryder, 2017, p. 2).

***Ohio recognizes this requirement in its eligibility specification and definitions. That is, eligibility for services is based on how the impairment impacts education, not necessarily on diagnosis, acuity, or field of vision. The focus is always on how to support a learner with services to increase access and achievement.**

To further clarify, learners with vision loss have a wide range of visual abilities, which may vary, depending on circumstances. According to Lewis and Allman (2000), three broad categories are used to describe a learner’s visual impairment.

- **Total blindness** – A learner with total blindness cannot visually detect light so he/she uses other senses and tactile and auditory information to learn. For reading, the learner’s primary reading medium is braille.
- **Functional blindness** – A learner with functional blindness has some useful vision, but requires specialized instruction to effectively use his/her vision. Generally, the learner uses tactile, auditory, and visual methods to learn, but uses braille as the primary reading method. The learner can often read print, but not well enough to sustain efficiently for long periods of time. Learners in this category may have a wide range of visual abilities – from only light perception to the ability to read print textbooks.
- **Low vision** – A learner with low vision has the ability to see print and use it as the primary reading medium. A low-vision learner often utilizes specialized optical devices such as magnifiers or telescopes, or instructional methods such as bold line markers or special seating arrangements to achieve visual efficiency. The primary method of learning for the low-vision student is visual.

Legal Blindness Defined for Federal Quota

The Federal Act to Promote the Education of the Blind enacted by Congress in 1879 provides accessibly educational materials (AEM) to eligible students who meet the definition of legal blindness. Additional information regarding Federal Quota may be found in the AT and AEM section of this document.

To be eligible to participate in the [Federal Quota Program](#), students MUST fulfill the following requirements:

- **Meet the Definition of Blindness (MDB)** – central visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with correcting glasses or a peripheral field so contracted that the widest diameter of such field subtends an angular distance no greater than 20 degrees; or **Function at the Definition of Blindness (FDB)** – visual performance reduced by brain injury or dysfunction when visual function meets the definition of blindness as determined by an eye care specialist or neurologist.
- “Be enrolled in a formally organized public or private, nonprofit educational program of less than college level.”

NOTE: School-aged students must be enrolled with the registering school or agency on the first Monday in January. Adult students must be registered for at least three months of instruction during the preceding calendar year (an accumulation of 12 weeks).

Several factors to remember are:

- There is NO chronological age requirement for eligibility.
- Students must be working at less than college level.
- Students cannot be registered by two schools or Federal Quota accounts.
- Adults to be registered must be receiving a minimum of 20 hours of instruction per week in an educational program. Social and leisure programs do not qualify as instruction. However, student practice to develop skills may be included in instructional hours. For these purposes, an adult is a student over school age as determined by respective state law.

Visual Loss and Social Security Disability Eligibility

If a child is legally blind, the family may be eligible to receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits on his or her behalf. These benefits can be used to cover daily expenses such as food, clothing, shelter, and medical care. As part of the SSI application process, the Social Security Administration (SSA) will evaluate the severity of the child’s condition using the requirements found in their manual of disabilities, referred to as the Blue Book. Childhood vision impairments are evaluated under Blue Book section [102.00 – Special Senses and Speech](#). **If a child’s eligibility for benefits is in question, consider scheduling an evaluation with an optometrist or ophthalmologist who has subspecialty training in low-vision rehabilitation and can help explain the medial requirements.**

The diagnosis of legal blindness refers to a person’s visual acuity or visual field and does not refer to the learner’s ability to use his/her vision functionally.

Visual acuity is an important part of a complete eye examination. Visual acuity refers to:

- Clarity or clearness of a person’s vision;
- Measure of how well a person can see;
- Numerator (top number) that indicates the distance in feet at which a person stands from a chart a person (usually 20 feet); and
- Denominator (bottom number) indicates the distance from which a person with normal eyesight could read the same line correctly.

A person with 20/200 visual acuity can see at 20 feet what a person with 20/20 visual acuity sees at 200 feet. A person with a distance visual acuity of 20/20 is said to have “typical vision.” In addition to what can be seen straight ahead, a person’s visual field includes what he or she can see above, below, and to either side. Learners who are legally blind have a wide variety of abilities. They may be print readers or braille readers, or they may use a combination of accessible educational materials and assistive technology to be successful in their educational environment.

EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION GUIDELINES

For learners with a suspected visual impairment, eligibility is determined by an MFE conducted by an interdisciplinary team. **A variety of assessment tools may be used to gather information about the learner in functional, developmental, and academic areas. Families are encouraged to provide the school district with an eye doctor's report for review, which can provide information about current and future changes with visual conditions.** Ohio special education regulations require that assessments be technically sound and administered by qualified professionals in the area of visual impairments.

During initial and subsequent evaluations, the teacher of students with visual impairment (TVI) can provide input that will help to ensure the use of appropriate evaluation tools and methods and analysis of evaluation results as they relate to visual impairments. Collaboration with a TVI also ensures that the educational needs of the student are recognized during the assessment procedure and the information acquired through the assessments accurately reflects the student's ability (Pugh & Erin, 1999).

Additional information related to specific timelines and requirements for initial evaluations can be located in the [Ohio Operating Standards for the Education of Children With Disabilities](#) and [A Guide to Parent Rights in Special Education](#).

“When determining a child’s vision status, the Local Educational Agency’s (LEA) evaluation should be thorough and rigorous. Such evaluations should include a data-based media assessment, be based on a range of learning modalities (including auditory, tactile, and visual), and include a functional visual assessment” (Ryder, 2017, p. 4).

When conducting an evaluation or developing an IEP for a learner with a visual impairment, factors for the MFE/IEP team to consider include:

- Cause and age of onset of visual impairment;
- Degree of visual impairment;
- Other disabilities and medical conditions;
- Family and cultural characteristics;
- Physical and psychological maturity of learner;
- Environmental characteristics;
- Sensory development (visual, auditory, tactual, kinesthetic);
- Social development;
- Concept development and reasoning;
- Listening skills and study skills;
- Leisure and recreation;
- Orientation and mobility;
- Use of media for literacy in reading and writing;
- Career education;
- Visual efficiency skills;
- Motor development;
- Independent living skills;
- Assistive technology devices and services;
- Communication modes;
- Academics; and
- Low-vision aids.

Evaluation Tools

The following evaluation tools may be utilized to evaluate a learner with a visual impairment:

Functional vision assessment (FVA). As a part of the initial evaluation, the TVI conducts an FVA to analyze how a learner performs visually in a variety of environments, both familiar and unfamiliar. The FVA includes a functional evaluation of peripheral fields; color and contrast discrimination; light sensitivity and preference; visual motility; near and distance acuity and discrimination, with recommendations for instruction and accommodations. **Input from a COMS as part of the FVA may include recommendations concerning the need for instructional services for current and future mobility needs. The FVA should be conducted prior to other assessments so that other team members are able to consider visual factors before conducting their assessments.**

Clinical low-vision evaluation. Results of the FVA may indicate the need for a clinical low-vision evaluation. An eye care specialist (e.g., optometrist, ophthalmologist, or certified low-vision therapist [CLVT]) with specialized training in low vision may conduct a clinical low-vision evaluation and prescribe low-vision devices, as needed. **Results of a clinical low-vision evaluation will yield information that will enable the specialist to make recommendations to the team regarding appropriate low-vision devices and suggestions for how to accommodate for lighting, glare, and contrast.**

Learning Media Assessment (LMA). The LMA may be conducted to determine if specific visual, tactual, and/or auditory learning media are appropriate for a learner. A TVI should conduct this assessment. The goals of the LMA are to examine:

- Efficiency in terms of how the student gathers information from various sensory channels;
- Types of general learning media the student uses, or will use, to accomplish learning tasks; and
- The literacy media the student will use for reading and writing (Koenig & Holbrook, 1995).

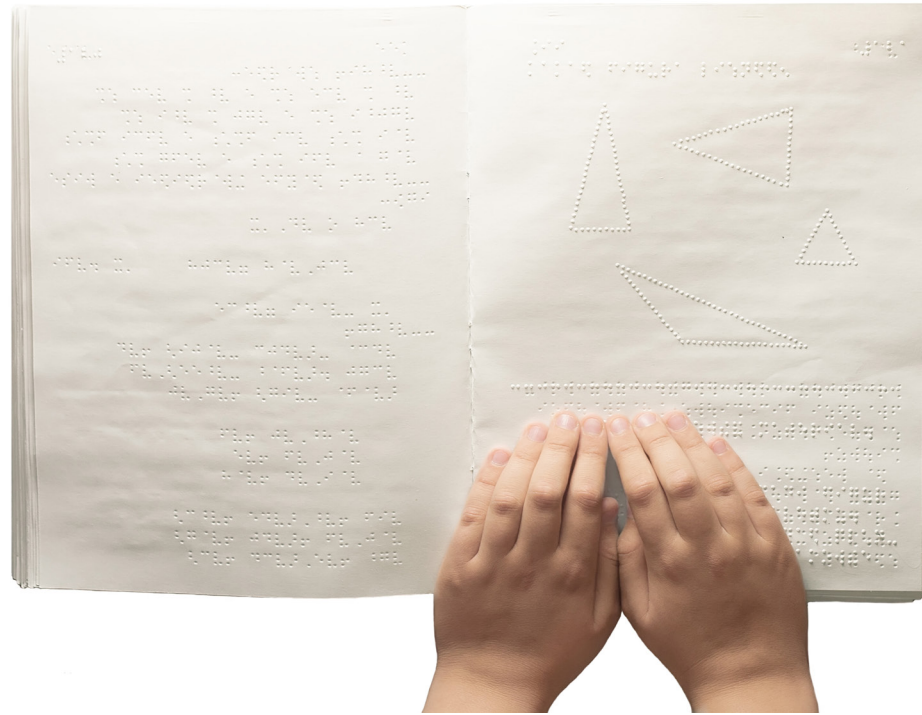
Reevaluations

A reevaluation provides parents and district personnel with the opportunity to review the learner's progress on academic and functional goals in response to special education services and to determine whether the student continues to be eligible for special education. The reevaluation must occur at least once every three years. However, a reevaluation may occur more often if the parents and the team believe there is a need.

In some cases, a reevaluation is necessary when the student's initial evaluation was conducted at a very young age and the team is concerned that the initial results do not reflect the his or her current abilities or skills. A reevaluation might also be recommended when the learner has demonstrated a significant improvement or decline in academic performance or behavior, or has failed to make progress.

As learners with visual impairments grow older, there may be significant changes in the demands on visual and sensory functioning. These changes can be identified as part of the formative assessments that happen in the course of a school year. It is important to monitor progress to determine how a learner is functioning in new environments and whether new evaluations are needed. To assess the learner's ongoing educational needs, the TVI and COMS, as appropriate, may:

- Perform the FVA and the LMA to determine appropriate modifications and accommodations for instruction;
- Conduct orientation and mobility evaluations to establish or reevaluate the need for orientation and mobility (O&M) instruction;
- Evaluate the mastery of appropriate Expanded Core Curriculum goals; and
- Use all data to develop appropriate program recommendations.



EDUCATIONAL PLANS FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE BLIND OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED

Once the interdisciplinary team has completed the appropriate evaluations, the team determines whether the learner is, or continues to be, a learner with a disability and in need of (a) accommodations that can be provided in a 504 Plan or (b) special education and related services that can be provided in an IEP.

- A [504 Plan](#) is a plan developed for learners with a disability who do not require specialized instruction but need the assurance that they will receive equal access to public education and access to the learning environment. The document is created to outline the student's specific accessibility requirements and is updated annually.
- An IEP is a plan or program developed for a learner who has a disability identified under the law and requires specialized instruction and related services. The document includes a statement of the learner's present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, measurable annual goals, including academic and functional goals, special education and related services, accommodations, modifications, and accommodations that are necessary to measure the student's true academic achievement and functional performance on state and districtwide assessments. The document is updated annually.

Based on the results of the evaluations and multiple sources of information, the team may determine that a learner qualifies under the category of visual impairment and will be provided specialized instruction through an IEP. **An IEP is required for any learner being considered eligible for special education as a result of a visual impairment.**

IDEA includes a list of special factors to be considered by every student's IEP team. Two factors focus specifically on students with visual impairments:

- Instruction and use of braille; and
- Consideration of assistive technology and devices.

Determining Braille Needs

Once an LMA has been conducted and the team has made a determination about the appropriateness of print and braille instruction, for learners who qualify for services as students with visual impairments, the IEP form "Children With Visual Impairment" has to be completed specifying one or more reading and writing media in which instruction is appropriate to meet their educational needs as part of the IEP process.

Based on the evaluation results, IEP goals are written to support the student's best learning media. **When braille is the chosen mode of access, direct instruction from a TVI is essential for a learner to be able to engage in braille literacy. According to Erikson et al. (2008), readiness, the concept that children must display certain prerequisite behaviors before being introduced to braille or print, is a myth. On the contrary, these authors claim, braille awareness should begin as early as possible.**

Braille instruction is considered based on the learner's individual needs. Learners for whom braille is identified as the medium for instruction, benefit from systematic and regular instruction from knowledgeable and appropriately trained personnel without delay. **To maximize a learner's full literacy potential, teams should recognize that braille literacy is comparable to print literacy; that is, students with vision loss require comparable levels of literacy instruction using braille as their typically sighted peers do who are using print.**

Vision Therapy

Students who are prescribed vision therapy by an eye care professional, often an optometrist who specializes in vision therapy, should receive that intervention from a medical professional. Medical services such as vision therapy are excluded as a related service under IDEA and do not fall under the TVI's professional responsibilities. The Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER; www.aerbvi.org) provides guidance on this topic in the document *The Role and Training of Teachers of Students With Visual Impairment (TSVIs) as a Special Educator and Why TSVIs Do Not Provide Vision Therapy Services*.

EXPANDED CORE CURRICULUM

The expanded core curriculum (ECC) refers to experiences and concepts casually and incidentally learned by sighted students that need to be systematically and sequentially taught to learners who are visually impaired.

In addition to the general education curriculum in which all Ohio learners participate when they begin school, learners who are blind or visually impaired need an ECC to meet their needs directly related to their visual impairment, beginning at birth. The ECC areas include:

- Assistive technology skills, including optical devices
- Compensatory skills that permit access to the general curriculum
- Career education and planning
- Recreation and leisure skills
- Orientation and mobility skills
- Social interaction skills
- Sensory efficiency (including visual, tactual, and auditory skills)
- Self-determination
- Independent living skills

For more information, refer to *What Is a Core Curriculum?* (American Foundation for the Blind; www.afb.org).

The presence of a visual impairment requires that the skills included in the ECC be thoroughly evaluated and systematically taught by teachers with specialized expertise. Without specialized instruction, students with vision loss may not be aware of the activities of their peers or may fail to acquire other critical information about their surroundings (Pugh & Erin, 1999).

As the IEP is developed, the team should consider the following knowledge and skills related to the ECC.

Assistive Technology Skills

Assistive technology (AT) allows students with visual impairments to access the general curriculum, increase literacy options, and enhance communication. A variety of high- and low-tech assistive technology tools and software has been designed specifically for learners with visual impairments who require specialized instruction.

These devices/software include, but are not limited to:

- Electronic braille notetakers;
- Colored transparencies;
- Tactile symbols;
- Calendar systems;
- Video magnifiers;
- Screen reader software;
- Screen enlarging software;
- Braille displays;
- Auditory access to printed materials; and
- Magnification devices.

For more information, refer to the Assistive Technology for Students Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired section of this document or to the [Assistive Technology and Accessible Educational Materials \(AT&AEM\) Center](#) at OCALI.

Compensatory Skills

So-called compensatory skills are needed to access the general curriculum. This includes learning experiences such as concept development, spatial understanding, study and organizational skills, speaking and listening skills, and any adaptations necessary for accessing all areas of the existing core curriculum, to include access to printed materials.

Many learners with low vision use standard print with magnification devices. Some learners may require both print and braille. Learners with multiple disabilities, including deafblindness, may use a tactile or [object symbol system](#) for literacy.

A student's communication needs vary depending on the degree of functional vision, effects of additional disabilities, and the task to be completed. Learners with deafblindness and other disabilities may use [alternative communication systems](#) such as tactile sign language, symbol or object communication, augmentative communication devices, or calendar boxes.

Specialized instruction in concept development may be of significant importance when visual observation is limited. These learners benefit from instruction offered with specific and sequential hands-on, sensory-based lessons to build a broad base of experiences. In the higher grades, many mathematical, geographical, and scientific concepts must be taught with adapted materials and strategies for students who are unable to learn from pictures and visual diagrams. **A learner with little or no vision may have fragmented understandings of the world without systematic tactile exploration and clear, verbal explanations.** Some concepts are fully visual, such as colors, rainbows, clouds, and the sky. Some are too large to experience completely, such as buildings, 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. Further, some items are inappropriate to explore through touch such as wild animals or toxic substances. Due to these challenges with direct exploration, the resulting fragmented concepts can impede social, academic, and vocational development.



Learners with visual impairments need systematic instruction to learn efficient use of their senses. 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.

For most learners with visual impairments, an increased reliance on tactual skills is essential for learning and should be considered as part of IEP development. A concept that may be readily captured at a glance by a sighted student, such as relative size, may require more detailed hands-on interaction and repetition to be tactually understood by a learner with who is blind or visually impaired.

Further, systematic instruction in auditory skills may be needed for successful mobility and to help students learn to effectively use their hearing to respond effectively to social cues, travel safely in schools and across streets, learn from recorded media, and use echolocation (the use of sound waves and echoes to determine where objects are in space) for orientation.

Career Education

Learners with visual impairments learn about work and career options through parents, friends, community members, and, more formally, through the transition process at school. Opportunities to explore their strengths and interests in a systematic, well-planned manner are provided through the IEP process.

Career exploration and subsequent training may include:

- Acquisition of specialized skills and equipment;
- Understanding of how to request and develop natural supports in the workplace; and
- How to compete in the job market.

Learners who are well prepared for a wide range of vocational choices and the adaptations, including technological devices, that make them attainable are more likely to experience a successful transition from school to work. It is important to provide learners with visual impairments with opportunities to job shadow to gain concrete experiences of various career choices and to learn about other persons with visual impairments who have successful vocational outcomes.

Recreation and Leisure Skills

Providing students with opportunities to experience recreation and leisure activities as children can have positive impacts throughout their lives and encourage participation in sports, playing games with friends, and joining clubs. IEP team members and community members can share options or the possible adaptations that would allow learners with visual impairments to participate in these activities. Such skills include both individual and organized group activities for students at all ages and levels.

Orientation and Mobility

Orientation and mobility is essential, sequential instruction for individuals with visual impairments in using their remaining senses to determine position in space within the environment and techniques for safe movement from one place to another. These skills are taught by a COMS.

Instructional skills include, but are not limited to:

- Concept development (body image, spatial, temporal, positional, directional, and environmental);
- Sensory and motor development;
- Use of residual vision and low-vision devices;
- Human (sighted) guide techniques;
- Cane techniques;
- Route planning;
- Problem-solving skills;
- Techniques for crossing streets; and
- Use of public transportation.

Orientation and mobility instructors work in center-based, school, and itinerant situations. They are frequently called upon to assist public transportation authorities in environmental management planning, such as alleviation of dangers caused by complex road patterns (e.g., traffic circles, multiple street intersections) and selective installation of audible pedestrian signals.

Social Interaction Skills

Nearly all social skills are learned through observing people interacting with each other. While a small part of these interactions can be experienced auditorily, the majority of social exchanges are visual observational experiences. As a result, many social skills that sighted individuals observe and imitate may need to be explicitly taught to a youth with a visual impairment. **Social interaction skills include personal space, facial expressions, gestures, turn taking, and body language.** Lack of access to visual information as a result of a visual impairment can cause a student to feel socially isolated, impede typical social interactions, or limit social skill development. A learner with a visual impairment who cannot see facial expressions and subtle body language may be hesitant to participate in conversations and activities or experience awkward and confusing interactions when they do participate without the benefit of full access to the visual information of the interaction and the environment. **Being taught appropriate social skills can lead to successful social interactions, development of meaningful friendships, and community membership.** A speech-language pathologist can provide direct service for students and consultative services for team members who implement strategies across all environments.

Sensory Efficiency

Sensory efficiency includes instruction in the use of residual vision, hearing, and the other senses, such as learning how to support the use of optical devices, hearing aids, augmentative communication devices, and similar items to support student independence. **By learning to use their senses efficiently, students with visual impairments are able to access and participate in their environments.**

Self-Determination

Self-determination includes:

- Personal decision-making
- Self-advocacy
- Assertiveness based on an understanding of one's abilities and related needs.

These skills lead to competence, as opposed to learned helplessness, and are important components of positive self-esteem. Specialized instruction in developing self-determination skills can help students participate meaningfully in their educational and transition planning and make positive adult lifestyle, job, and other life choices upon graduation.

Independent Living Skills

Generally, young children learn basic skills in independent living through visual observation and imitation. However, most learners with visual impairments need systematic instruction and adaptations to use standard equipment, such as modifications to read oven markings in order to cook independently and safely.

Depending on the student's level of vision, intellectual ability, and other unique characteristics, adaptations may range from:

- Minor highlighting and tactile clues for matching clothing, to
- Cooking food
- Grooming and hygiene
- Cleaning one's living environments, and
- Preparation for living on one's own.

These skills are not typically evaluated or taught in a sequential and systematic basis in general education settings. Family members may require assistance and guidance to implement the proper adaptations that will permit practice and mastery of new independent skills within the home.

Successful transition from school to independent living and employment requires the development of such critical skills as:

- Home living
- Self-determination
- Vocational
- Community access
- Money management
- Interpersonal/social

Ongoing assessment of each of the ECC areas is critical for measuring success and ensuring independence. Instructional needs in the ECC areas can be addressed using a variety of service delivery including instruction occurring more often in the classroom, outside of the classroom throughout the school environment, or in the community for vocational programming. Collaboration between professionals will ensure comprehensive services.



Although the TVI and the COMS are the primary resources for instruction in the ECC, other staff members may also play important roles in providing the needed instruction, including:

- Family members
- Occupational therapists
- Physical therapists
- Speech-language pathologists
- Classroom teachers
- Certified rehabilitation vision therapists

Resources for the Expanded Core Curriculum

- [Expanded Core Curriculum Lesson Plan Template](#)
- [Iowa Expanded Core Curriculum Resource Guide](#)
- [Understanding the Expanded Core Curriculum](#)
- [West Virginia Expanded Core Curriculum Resource Guide](#)

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE BLIND OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED

Learners who are blind or visually impaired use a variety of AT and may use a combination of devices to successfully complete educational tasks and participate in the general education curriculum and in social and leisure activities. AT devices and services needed by learners who are blind or visually impaired typically fall into the following domains:

- Seating and Positioning
- Communication
- Reading
- Writing
- Math
- Activities of Daily Living
- Mobility
- Computer (or Device) Access
- Learning and Studying
- Listening
- Visual Aids
- Environmental Control
- Recreation & Leisure

According to the Ohio Operating Standards for the Education of Children With Disabilities (2014), an **AT device** is:

Any item, piece of equipment or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of a child with a disability. The term does not include a medical device that is surgically implanted, or the replacement of such device. (p.15)

AT service is defined as

Any service that directly assists a child with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device. The term includes:

- The evaluation of the needs of a child with a disability, including a functional evaluation of the child in the child's customary environment;
- Purchasing, leasing, or otherwise providing for the acquisition of assistive technology devices by children with disabilities;
- Selecting, designing, fitting, customizing, adapting, applying, maintaining, repairing, or replacing assistive technology devices;
- Coordinating and using other therapies, interventions, or services with assistive technology devices, such as those associated with existing education and rehabilitation plans and programs.
- Training or technical assistance for a child with a disability or, if appropriate, that child's family;
- Training or technical assistance for professionals (including individuals providing education or rehabilitation services), employers, or other individuals who provide services to, employ, or are otherwise substantially involved in the major life functions of that child. (pg. 15-16)

AT Consideration

According to Ohio Administrative Code 3301-51-02: Free Appropriate Public Education,

- (1) Each school district must ensure that assistive technology devices or assistive technology services, or both, are made available to a child with a disability if required as a part of the child's IEP.
- (2) On a case-by-case basis, the use of school-purchased assistive technology devices in a child's home or in other settings is required if the child's IEP team determines that the child needs access to those devices in order to receive FAPE. (Section F, Assistive Technology, <http://codes.ohio.gov/oac/3301-51-02>)

IDEA requires that IEP teams annually consider AT for every student who has an IEP.

In the context of IEP development, review, or revision, consideration of AT is intended to be a collaborative process in which team members determine whether AT devices or services are needed for the student to be able to access the general education curriculum or achieve IEP goals. It necessitates that the IEP team includes or has access to someone who has knowledge about AT or who can guide the team in considering AT in the context of what he or she knows about the student.

Team members who are considering AT should examine available data about and observations of the student and ask whether the student may need AT:

- To receive instruction within the least restrictive environment
- To meaningfully participate in the general curriculum
- To participate in academic or functional activities
- To access textbooks and other educational/print materials
- To access auditory information
- For written communication and/or computer access
- For expressive communication
- To participate in state and local assessments.

During the discussion, the team may determine that the student needs an AT assessment to succeed. [The SETT Framework by Dr. Joy Zabala](#) can guide this process, beginning with identifying **student** strengths and weaknesses, as well as the student's **environments** and required **tasks**. The team, in turn, identifies **tools** that contain the needed features, initiates equipment trials, and gathers data during the trials to facilitate final tool and strategy selection. Finally, an implementation plan is developed, including a plan for follow-up and follow-along as this process is ongoing.

AT Evaluation

The team should conduct an AT feature-matching process to identify appropriate AT devices and services for the student. During this process, the student's needs, environments, and tasks are determined prior to identifying specific features of AT equipment or tools. [The Student Inventory for Technology Support \(SIFTS\)](#), developed by the Assistive Technology and Accessible Educational Materials (AT&AEM) Center at OCALI, is a tool to assist teams in matching a student's needs with AT features. Once the AT features have been identified, equipment trials should be conducted to determine the effectiveness of each AT device considered.

Additional tools that may be used to inform the SETT (Student, Environments, Tasks, Tools) process include the following:

- [Learning Media Assessment](#)
- Functional Vision Assessment; and/or
 - [Perkins Learning Resources](#)
 - [Family Connect Resources](#)
- Low-Vision Evaluation
 - [Specific Assessments for Students With Low Vision](#)

The data gathered from these assessments, including visual, reading, and writing functioning, should be considered in the AT evaluation process. Additional information regarding assessment may be found in the [CISAM AIM Module 2: AIM & AT](#). Refer to the AT assessment section for additional information.

For further information about the AT assessment process, refer to the AT&AEM Center at OCALI, which provides:

- [Basic AT information](#);
- [AT Assessment](#);
- [AT Tools](#);
- [AT Implementation](#);
- [AT Professional Development](#); and
- [Assistive Technology Internet Modules \(ATIM\)](#), free online learning modules that include:
 - [WATI AT Assessment Process \(Vision-WATI-Part I, Vision-WATI-Part II, Vision-WATI-Part III\)](#)

Additional AT Resources

- [Michigan Assistive Technology Guidelines for Teachers of the Blind and Visually Impaired](#)
- [Teaching Assistive Technology to Students With Visual Impairments](#)
- [Teaching Students With Visual Impairments: Assistive Technology](#)
- [Principles of Assistive Technology for Students With Visual Impairments](#)
- [Assistive Technology for Students Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired: A Guide to Assessment](#)
- [Assessing Students' Needs for Assistive Technology \(ASNAT\): A Resource Manual for School District Teams](#)
- [An Overview of Using the WATI AT Assessment Process](#)
- [AT Resource Guide](#)
- [Navigating Accessible Educational Materials](#)
- [Ohio's Accessibility Manual](#)
- [Testing Accommodations Manual – Alternate Assessment; Allowable Accommodations and Adaptations](#)

ACCESSIBLE EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS (AEM) AND STUDENTS WHO ARE BLIND OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED

How Does the AT&AEM Center Support Ohio School Districts?

The [Assistive Technology and Accessible Educational Materials \(AT&AEM\) Center at OCALI](#) is a statewide project funded by the Ohio Department of Education, Office for Exceptional Children (ODE-OEC), serving students with print disabilities, including students who are blind or visually impaired. The AT&AEM Center assists school personnel by creating, collecting, and disseminating AEM.

What Are AEM?

Accessible educational materials are materials designed/converted to make them usable across the widest range of student variability, regardless of format. IDEA supports activities that are designed to use current and emerging technologies to improve access to textbooks, in accessible formats such as braille, large print, audio, digital text, and text with audio, that make it possible for children with disabilities to access and use free educational materials and textbooks across learning environments (“Accessibility-Instructional Materials,” 2017).

What Is Federal Quota?

The AT&AEM Center conducts the annual Federal Quota Registration of Blind Students on behalf of ODE-OEC. [The Federal Act to Promote the Education of the Blind](#) enacted by Congress in 1879 provides AEM to eligible students who meet the definition of legal blindness. This annual registration of eligible students determines a per-capita amount of money designated for the purchase of AEM available from the [American Printing House for the Blind \(APH\)](#). The Federal Quota program generates funds administered by the AT&AEM Center to provide educational materials produced by APH for registered students. The Federal Quota funds are supplemental to school district funding. For guideline information, visit the AT&AEM Center’s [Federal Quota section](#).

How Do School Districts Request AEM From the AT&AEM Center?

Once the team, including the TVI and/or COMS, has determined that specific material and/or equipment is needed for a learner, teachers, supervisors, or administrators can request materials from the AT&AEM Center on behalf of students with print disabilities, including students with visual impairments. To ensure delivery of AEM to students in a timely manner, the AT&AEM Center asks requestors to submit a [Materials Request](#) form in March preceding the school year in which the AEM will be used. It takes time to produce specialized formats, and delivery of AEM is contingent on timely submission of requests. For an explanation of the AEM request process, refer to the [Obtaining AEM section on the AT&AEM website](#).

The AT&AEM Center maintains a collection of more than 53,000 audio, braille, digital text, and large-print textbooks; instructional aids and tools; and specialized equipment for students with print disabilities, including students with visual impairments. The AT&AEM Center provides information on how to access these AEM via the following:

- [AT&AEM Services for Students With Visual Impairments](#)
- [Accessible Educational Materials](#)

[National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standards](#)

[AT&AEM Center website](#)

– For professional development/learning opportunities, visit the Professional Development drop-down menu on the AT&AEM Center website.

How Can School-Based Decision-Making Teams Ensure Provision of AEM?

AEM provide access to educational materials that might previously have been inaccessible for students who are blind or visually impaired. The National Center on Accessible Educational Materials (NCAEM) has developed a decision-making process to aid teams in ensuring that students who need materials in specialized formats have them available for full participation and achievement.

Where Can Families and School Staff Find More Information?

Families and school personnel interested in additional information and support for students who are blind or visually impaired can access the [CISAM AIM Training Series \(CATS\)](#) and [CISAM AIM Modules \(CAM\)](#), which cover a variety of topics on the provision of quality AEM in a timely manner throughout the state of Ohio. The NCAEM also provides multiple resources.

SUPPORTING STUDENTS WHO ARE BLIND OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED IN THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Full membership in the classroom and the community enriches the educational experience for everyone. Encouraging learners to share experiences and understand each other's unique qualities from an early age builds understanding and acceptance. Teachers can set high expectations, recognizing that a visual impairment does not necessarily hinder the learning that happens in the classroom but may change the way in which course content is accessed and delivered. Understanding and addressing the individualized learning needs of young learners allows for their increased participation in the learning process and opportunities for involvement in additional areas such as extracurricular activities.

In IDEA, the least restrictive environment (LRE) means that a learner who has a disability must have the opportunity to be educated with peers without disabilities to the greatest extent appropriate. When considering LRE for learners with a visual impairment, it is important to recognize that each learner is unique with regard to his or her needs for accommodations and types of programming. Therefore, inclusion in LRE may require a range of supplementary aids and services, including accommodations, materials, and personnel. It is comparable to a "backpack" of supports that learners can carry with them as they transition between settings throughout their day and as they grow, when their educational needs may change (see OCALI's LRE video). Such changes make age-appropriate assessment and planning crucial for setting the stage for success.

While considering the supports and services needed to enable instruction in both the expanded core and the general curriculum, the team must also be mindful of how students will access information to increase participation and learning that can take place in a range of environments among their peers. The key to ensuring that a student has access in the learning environment is team collaboration that includes assessment and feedback from a TVI. Ongoing communication can ensure that the student with a visual impairment is included in instruction using appropriate accommodations and modifications. For example, if the learner will need a standard textbook or a specialized format (audio, braille, digital, and/or large print), the TVI can assist with ordering the materials as needed. The TVI can also assist with using Federal Quota funds to order AEM produced by the American Printing House for the Blind (APH) for students who are legally blind and registered in the annual Federal Quota Registration of Blind Students.

Generally, the less opportunity students with a disability have to interact and learn with nondisabled peers, the more their learning environment is considered to be restrictive. Careful consideration of where learners spend their time, how services are offered, and the opportunities students have for direct connections with their peers enriches the planning process and, ultimately, the educational experience.

Learners' needs drive decisions about the environments where services will be provided. Any service delivery option may be appropriate for an individual student at any given time, and the appropriate option may change over time for a particular learner. A variety of service delivery options may need to be considered by the IEP team to meet a given learner's needs, including general education classrooms, collaborative settings, itinerant teacher services, resource rooms, and self-contained classrooms. If the needs of the learner cannot be met with supplementary aides and services within the district, the district is responsible for locating the necessary supplementary aids and services outside the district.

For preschool and school-age learners, IDEA and its federal and state implementing regulations guide the delivery of services. Specifically, Part B of the IDEA regulations require public agencies to make available a continuum of service delivery options, or a range of service delivery options, to meet the needs of students with disabilities for special education and related services. The options of this continuum, which may include general education classes, special education classes, separate schools and instruction in hospitals and residential schools, must be made available to the extent necessary to implement the IEP of each student with a disability (34 CFR §300.115 and §300.116).

Children under the age of 3 are served through Part C, Early Intervention, in the setting deemed most appropriate to each family situation. The most appropriate setting is determined as supporting the family in achieving desired outcomes for the child with as little disruption as possible to daily routines and family life.

General Curriculum Resources:

- [Education of Students Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired](#)
- [Professional Development Through the Perkins eLearning Portal](#)
- [Instructional Adaptations for Students Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired](#)
- [Etiquette](#)

English Language Arts Resources:

- [Reading Strategies for Students With Visual Impairments](#)
- [Literacy Fact Sheets for the Learner who Is Blind/Visually Impaired](#)
- [Paths to Literacy](#)
- [Children's Stories for the Visually Impaired](#)
- [Braille Bug](#)

Mathematics Resources:

- [Math Home Page](#)
- [Mathematics Made Easy for Children With Visual Impairment](#)

Science Resources:

- [Accessible Science](#)
- [National Center for Blind Youth in Science](#)
- [Adapting Science for Students With Visual Impairments: A Handbook for the Classroom Teacher and Teacher of the Visually Impaired](#)

Social Studies Resources:

- [Social Studies Resources](#)
- [Geography in a Different Way](#)



ADDRESSING THE POSTSECONDARY TRANSITION NEEDS OF STUDENTS WHO ARE BLIND OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED

Students who are blind or have a visual impairment and receive services through an IEP in the state of Ohio are required to have a formal transition plan by the time they are 14. The transition plan is meant to guide all other IEP goals and services. It answers the following questions:

- What does the student want to do after graduation from high school?
- Does the student have the potential to reach his/her plans/goals?
- How can we help the student achieve his/her goals?
- What kind of instruction, services, related services, technology, accommodations, modifications, and supports will be needed to help the student reach his/her goals?
- Who will be responsible for implementing the plan?
- What is the timeline?
- Are there community agencies that need to be involved to support the student before or after graduation to ensure a seamless transition from school to community, postsecondary education, or employment?

Postsecondary Transition Planning for Students With Disabilities

In order to support this transition, Congress added requirements for secondary transition services as a component of IDEA.

Postsecondary activities, based on the individual learner's needs, may include:

- Postsecondary education;
- Vocational education;
- Integrated employment (including supported employment);
- Continuing and adult education;
- Adult services;
- Independent living; or
- Community participation.

Appropriate, measurable postsecondary goals within the plan are intended to facilitate the learner's move from special education services to community life. The IEP team identifies the courses of study, educational experiences, and transition services that the student will need to move towards his/her identified post-school visions, goals, or outcomes. These may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Required courses;
- Elective courses;
- Modified courses;
- Specially designed courses;
- Educational experiences in the school; and/or
- Educational experiences in the community.

As the learner grows and changes, so does his/her interests in school and postsecondary outcomes. Therefore, flexibility is a major component of all aspects of transition planning, so that the transition plan may be easily revised over time.

A comprehensive transition plan for a learner who is blind or visually impaired must include age-appropriate assessments and instruction selected from the ECC to address the specialized needs of the student. Employment and postsecondary education success depends on the individual's independent living goals. Learners with visual impairments may need an additional year or more of instruction to meet their core academic requirements and the ECC and, therefore, be better prepared to transition into postsecondary life. For that purpose, IDEA contains a provision to support learners with disabilities who want to continue their public school education after they have completed their core academics by allowing them to stay in school through their 22nd birthday. This can be an opportune time to complete ECC goals.

The Ohio Department of Education recently developed a [Career Connections framework](#), which integrates career elements at different grade levels. The framework supports students with disabilities and their parents during the transition process beginning at a much earlier age than the mandated age of 14. As a result, students can identify their preferences, interests, and knowledge of careers much earlier than in the past.

Age-Appropriate Transition Assessments (AATA)

Few vocational assessments are relevant for all learners who are blind or visually impaired. It will be necessary to find or create assessments that address preferences, interests, needs, and strengths of each student for whom a transition plan is developed. Sometimes interviews can give much needed information when the right questions are asked. Some standardized assessments for speed or quality of work are not reliable for learners who are blind, since they most likely have been standardized for sighted peers. See the [National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center \(NSTTAC\)](#) for more information.

Participation of State and Local Agencies

State and local agency involvement may be appropriate to support the secondary transition services of a learner with a disability. According to IDEA, school districts must invite a representative from any agency that is likely to be responsible for providing or paying for transition services to attend the student's IEP team meeting. Individual transition plans are most comprehensive when developed by a multi-agency team that is knowledgeable of and promotes the use of evidence-based predictors, as developed by OCALI and shared through the Ohio Employment First initiative ("[Evidence Based Predictors](#)," n.d.).

In Ohio, the agency that supports employment for individuals with disabilities is the [Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities \(OOD\)](#), previously known as the Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission. The bureau under OOD that specifically supports individuals who are blind or visually impaired, including individuals with multiple disabilities, is the [Bureau of Services for the Visually Impaired \(BSVI\)](#). Every learner in Ohio who is eligible to receive special education services due to a visual impairment should be referred for services through BSVI beginning at age 14, whether or not vision is a primary or a secondary condition.

Social Security is another agency that many learners are linked to as a safety net while they are pursuing postsecondary education or employment. If a learner is eligible to receive services from OOD, he/she can request a benefits analysis from Social Security.

Many individuals who are blind, especially those with multiple disabilities, qualify for services from the [Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities \(DODD\)](#). Learners may be referred for consideration to their [County Boards of Developmental Disabilities \(CBDD\)](#) based on needs.

Students choosing to attend college should meet with the Office of Disability Services at the chosen postsecondary institution before making application decisions. This office can support their educational needs.

Finally, as learners move from school to adulthood, it is important to have a clear understanding of the differences between educational rights under IDEA and disability rights as an adult under Section 504 of the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA). Under IDEA, local and state education agencies are required to find, identify, and serve students with disabilities. However, once a learner with a disability leaves the education system through graduation, exceeds the school-age limit, or chooses to withdraw from free appropriate public education (FAPE) under IDEA, the individual (or his/her guardian) assumes the responsibility for seeking out adult services through an eligibility process. This is the difference between educational entitlement and adult eligibility. For more information on the differences between IEPs and 504 Plans, consult [The Difference Between IEPs and 504 Plans](#) ("The Difference Between", n.d.).

Ohio's Indicator 13 Checklist

Ohio's Indicator 13 Checklist is a version of NSTTAC's Indicator 13 Checklist, which was designed to help school districts review the secondary transition plan components of their IEPs. [The Ohio Indicator 13 Checklist](#) is available on the ODE website.

- [National Technical Assistance Center on Transition](#)
- Ohio Age-Appropriate Transition Assessment
- [Ohio Employment First](#)
- [OhioMeansJobs](#)

Summary of Performance

The Summary of Performance (SOP) is required under the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004. The language as stated in IDEA 2004 regarding the SOP is as follows: For a child whose eligibility under special education terminates due to graduation with a regular diploma, or due to exceeding the age of eligibility, the local education agency "shall provide the child with a summary of the child's academic achievement and functional performance, which shall include recommendations on how to assist the child in meeting the child's postsecondary goals" §Sec. 300.305(e)(3).

Individualized and driven by the learner's postsecondary goal(s), the SOP is a summary of the learner's academic achievement and functional performance. As such, its purpose is to provide guidance on what accommodations and supports the student may need as he or she leaves high school and moves on with postsecondary goals.

THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY IN THE IEP PROCESS

A quality education is facilitated by collaboration and equal partnership between all stakeholders, including the family, to help ensure the shared focus is on student success. In an equal partnership, educators find value in the opinions, insights, and expertise of parents, the child's first teachers. Likewise, parents value the knowledge that educators bring to the table. Indeed, supporting parental involvement and expectations has been determined to be one of the leading predictors of post-school success for students ("[Evidence Based Predictors](#)," n.d.).

To be able to function as equal partners, parents need knowledge and support to make effective, informed decisions and to actively participate in the IEP process. The general goal of services to parents is to enable them to become advocates and promote appropriate services for their child. Parents are empowered to make informed decisions when they receive comprehensive, unbiased information from a variety of sources.

For the best outcomes, parents need access to resources and information, including:

- Roles of educational personnel
- Teacher of students with visual impairment
- Certified orientation and mobility specialists
- Paraprofessionals
- Intervention specialists
- General education teachers
- Additional related-service providers, which may include speech-language pathologists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, and adapted physical education teachers
- Eligibility criteria
- Options related to accessible educational materials and assistive technology
- Appropriate educational supports
- Reevaluations
- Expanded core curriculum

In an equal partnership, families receive training options and resources from the school, if needed. Families in Ohio may also seek the support and guidance of a parent mentor through the local parent training and information center, the Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities (OCECD).

According to ODE's [Best Practices for Parent Involvement in Schools](#), research confirms that the involvement of parents and families in their child's education is critical to students' academic success. Parents can provide information on their child's strengths, weaknesses, interests, learning styles, and preferences and, thereby, provide insights that are invaluable in the IEP decision-making process (Ohio Department of Education [ODE], 2017 Sample Best Practices section, para. 1).

The following practices are based on the State Board of Education’s Parent and Family Involvement Policy, the National PTA’s National Standards for Family-School Partnerships, and [Joyce L. Epstein’s Framework of Six Types of \(Parent\) Involvement](#). These practices can help guide educational teams successfully involve parents and families as they:

1. Create a welcoming school climate
2. Provide families with information related to child development and creating supportive learning environments
3. Establish effective school-to-home and home-to-school communication
4. Strengthen families’ knowledge and skills to support and extend their children’s learning at home and in the community
5. Engage families in school planning, leadership, and meaningful volunteer opportunities
6. Connect learners and families to community resources that strengthen and support students’ learning and well-being

ROLES OF THE PROFESSIONALS

Role of the Teacher of Students With Visual Impairments

Teachers of students with visual impairments (TVI) are team members for all learners with visual impairments, including those with multiple disabilities and deafblindness. The educational needs of the learners vary widely. From initial evaluation to instruction to assessment, the TVI plays a critical role in helping students, teachers, paraprofessionals, family members, and related services personnel.

TVIs have many roles, including:

Assessment and Evaluation

- Assisting in developing appropriate evaluation and assessment strategies;
- Conducting the functional vision and learning media assessments;
- Conducting or participating in assistive technology evaluations;
- Referring learners, as appropriate, for orientation and mobility evaluations;
- Referring learners for low-vision exams conducted by low-vision practitioners;
- Interpreting evaluation and assessment results regarding the impact of a visual impairment;
- Interpreting eye reports;
- Participating in developing IEPs; and
- Evaluating student progress and providing progress notes.

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, based on student need;
- Supporting families of young learners as they help their children reach developmental milestones with adapted strategies specific to needs related to the visual impairment; and
- Providing support to learners to facilitate development of self-esteem, self-determination and social acceptance.

Supporting Educational Teams

The TVI educates, supports, and collaborates with family members and other members of the instructional team who work with the learner with a visual impairment. The TVI must be able to convey professional opinions in a diplomatic, collaborative manner in order to ensure that appropriate programming is recommended for the student. The TVI’s supporting roles may include:

- Supporting families in developing early childhood goals and objectives related to a visual impairment;
- Supporting transitions from early intervention services to preschool, preschool to elementary school, elementary school to middle school, and middle school to high school;
- Assisting in the provision of a coordinated set of activities 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 home, community, and school on providing instruction in the ECC areas;
- Assisting in modifying the environment to accommodate specific visual needs;
- Modeling appropriate instructional techniques;
- Providing, creating, and assisting in acquiring adapted materials;
- Maintaining current eye reports on each student, when available, and interpreting ophthalmological information to the educational team;
- Providing inservice training and consultation to the educational team in school and to professionals in applicable community settings (e.g., community-based instruction and community-based employment);
- Recommending adapted strategies for access to the general education curriculum and participation in the school community;
- Recommending that a vision-specific support system is in place for transitioning from school to adult life; and
- Building student independence and success in home, community, and school environments.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (P.L. 107-110) U.S. C. § 8302 (2015) (ESSA) mandates the provision of highly qualified professionals for all students. In cases where the TVI is not the student’s highly qualified instructor in academic content areas, the TVI may collaborate with the academic teacher of record. For information about certification requirements in Ohio, visit the [Educator Licenses section](#) of the ODE website. For more information on university programs in Ohio and surrounding states, see [Preparing Vision Professionals: College/University Programs](#).

ROLE OF THE CERTIFIED ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY SPECIALIST (COMS)

Orientation and Mobility (O&M) involves the ability to know where you are and where you want to go in a safe and efficient manner. This can be done independently or with support. O&M is recognized in IDEA as a related service, which may be required to assist a learner with a visual impairment in benefiting from special education. Certified COMSs provide services that enable learners who are visually impaired to attain systematic orientation to and safe movement in school, home, and community environments. COMSs are critical members of the team for students with visual impairments who have identified O&M needs.

COMSs have graduated from a certified program in O&M. Graduate students completing an O&M program must pass an O&M certification exam through the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP). Further, in the state of Ohio, a COMS who works with preschool and school-age students is required to hold a [Pupil Services: Orientation and Mobility license](#) through the Ohio Department of Education.

The COMS has many roles. These may include:

Assessment and Evaluation

- Assisting in conducting the functional vision assessment when appropriate;
- Conducting the O&M assessment; and
- Evaluating student progress and providing progress notes as per school district/agency policy.

Direct Instruction in the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC)

- Encouraging purposeful movement, exploration of immediate surroundings, and motor development for young students 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 learner to facilitate development of self-esteem, self-determination, and social acceptance;
- Orienting the student to unfamiliar environments;
- Instructing the learner 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; and
- 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;
- Planning continuity from early childhood intervention services to school-age programs;
- Assisting in modifying the environment to accommodate specific mobility needs;
- Modeling appropriate O&M techniques for other team members;
- Assisting in providing, creating, and acquiring adapted materials, such as tactile maps and mobility devices;
- Providing inservice training and consultation to other team members in home, school, and community settings; and
- Recommending O&M strategies for access to the general curriculum, such as physical education class and participation in school and community extracurricular activities.

Administrative/Recordkeeping Duties

- Maintaining records on all evaluations, IEPs, and progress notes; and
- Attending IEP meetings.

ROLE OF THE PARAPROFESSIONAL WORKING WITH STUDENTS WHO ARE BLIND OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED

The role of paraprofessional has changed in recent years. Specifically, their role has shifted from mainly clerical duties toward more instructional tasks. As a result, paraprofessionals have become important members of instructional teams, providing services to learners with special needs. Their changing role reflects changes in educational practices, evolution of teachers' roles, and shifts in legislation and policy. These changes required the development of standards and competencies for paraprofessionals and the teachers who direct their work.

There is a great need for paraprofessionals to provide the services and supports learners need for education in inclusive classrooms, individualized instruction, early childhood settings, and experiences in community environments for community living.

According to Picket (2000), paraprofessionals are school employees who:

1. Work under the supervision of teachers or other licensed/certificated professionals who are responsible for:

- Identifying learner needs,
- Developing and implementing programs to meet learners needs,
- Assessing learner performance, and
- Evaluating the effectiveness of education programs and related services; and

2. Assist with the delivery of instructional and other direct services as assigned and developed by certified/licensed professional practitioners.

By employing paraprofessionals, educational and related services staff for persons with disabilities are able to expand and improve the quality of the assistance they provide. The benefits paraprofessionals offer schools and individuals with disabilities include the following:

- Expanded learning opportunities for students with disabilities
- More individualized instruction
- Increased planning time for educators, supervisors, and others
- Better monitoring and evaluation of students
- Greater consistency in services
- Improved parent-school relationships
- Greater involvement of students with disabilities in education and other settings in the community at large

Some of the benefits paraprofessionals may provide specifically when supporting the learning environment of a learner with a visual impairment include:

- Storing and distribution of audio, braille, digital, and large-print books under teacher supervision
- Reinforcement of O&M skills for movement of students between instructional locations and activities
- Assistance for activities of daily living
- Health and safety
- Access to the environment

The roles of paraprofessionals can vary, depending on the specific learner or classroom being supported; however, all paraprofessionals should work as part of an instructional team to support all learners, including learners with a visual impairment. **In particular, paraprofessionals must work closely with their supervising teacher(s) with input from the TVI and/or COMS to ensure that strategies are in place to support effective instruction and increase student independence and opportunities for social involvement among peers.** (Over-reliance on a paraprofessional can, at times, result in a decrease in a learner's level of independence and an increase in unintentional dependence on adults over time, often referred to as *learned helplessness*.)

School districts that employ paraprofessionals are required to have a written policy that specifies the criteria for staff selection and their plan for continuing education and annual training opportunities to enable paraprofessionals to continue to develop the knowledge and skills that support the student learning. Although federal and state regulations require minimal educational levels for paraprofessionals, specific training on the impact of visual loss is important and can be beneficial for the provision of effective instructional support.

STUDENTS WHO ARE BLIND OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED AND HAVE ADDITIONAL DISABILITIES

Students who are blind or visually impaired and have additional disabilities make up a complex, heterogeneous population. Therefore, the expertise of many professionals is necessary to meet the diverse needs of these learners. The TVI providing services to learners with additional disabilities is a vital member of those students' transdisciplinary team.

According to Silberman and Sacks (2007), teachers of students with visual impairments should acquire collaborative skills in order to function as an integral part of a transdisciplinary team in meeting the complex needs of students with visual impairments who also have severe/multiple disabilities. They will need to know and understand the roles and functions of the various disciplines including, but not limited to, medicine; education; social work; psychology; occupational, physical and speech therapies; and vocational rehabilitation. They must be knowledgeable in the terminologies utilized by each. Operating as part of such a team and offering direct and/or consultative services affords the TVI the opportunity to be both a teacher and learner as he/she demonstrates his/her expertise and, in turn benefits from the knowledge and skills of the other team members from various fields, all on behalf of students with visual and other severe/multiple disabilities. The TVI and other team members need to acquire knowledge of the unique needs of this population, which are directly attributable to their visual impairment. In addition, the TVI needs to be a strong advocate for the student who also has multiple impairments and his/her family.

A learner who is blind or visually impaired and has additional disabilities may require, depending on the learner's disabilities and identified needs, additional services/resources in the following areas:

- Physical therapy
- Speech therapy
- Occupational therapy
- Assistive technology
- Accessible educational materials

Note: Learners who have a combined vision and hearing loss are considered deafblind, not visually impaired.

STUDENTS WHO ARE BLIND OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED AND GIFTED

According to the U.S Code, “gifted and talented” students are defined as those “... who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities” (Title IX (20 U.S.C. 7801 [22])).

So-called twice-exceptional students are gifted students of above-average abilities who have special educational needs due to an identified disability such as sensory issues, including visual impairments or hearing impairments, Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), learning disabilities, or autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Students who are both gifted and visually impaired often remain ineligible for programs and services because the visual impairment masks or suppresses the gifts and talents.

According to the Office of Civil Rights (OCR), if schools place a “condition” for participation in accelerated classes or programs on qualified students with disabilities by requiring that they to forfeit their special education or related aids and services, they are denying FAPE under Part B of IDEA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Special education must be provided to enable students who are gifted and visually impaired to achieve their potential through implementation of a well-planned, systematic program based on individual needs, abilities, and disabilities.

Learners who are both gifted and visually impaired need programs and placement options that respond to their needs in four areas:

- (a) identification;
- (b) curricular modifications;
- (c) psychological needs and counseling; and
- (d) specially trained teachers and support services.

Unfortunately, giftedness among these learners generally goes unidentified. Identifying giftedness in learners who are visually impaired is a complicated process for the following reasons: (a) appropriate measures to screen these learners for intellectual giftedness have not yet been identified; (b) norms are not well established for adapted editions of tests (braille or audio), and enlarged print may not reproduce graphics accurately; (c) lower scores may reflect the inability of tests to capture and recognize intelligence based on non-visual behaviors. As a result, some states use multiple measures to identify learners with visual impairments and giftedness.

Other factors that might interfere with the identification of the true potential of learners with visual impairments include lowered expectations for these students, lack of self-confidence, non-challenging environments, and/or lack of learning opportunities imposed by the visual impairment.

The most pressing problem faced by learners with visual impairments is access to the curriculum. Most educational curricula are based on the assumption that learners have typical vision. Therefore, without translation into alternative formats, concepts, abstractions, and synthesis of the curriculum may be lost or severely delayed in learners with visual impairments. This extends to verbal descriptions and incidental learning that takes place daily in the classroom. While TVIs cannot accompany learners with visual impairment or blindness throughout the day, they should be involved with their programs, providing learning materials in [adapted formats](#), as well as assisting other teachers in providing non-visual examples and [references](#).

Support services for learners who are gifted and visually impaired should include instant access to materials that are available to their sighted peers. Given the quantity and pace of reading and analysis typically required in classes for students who are gifted, it is imperative that materials in appropriate alternative formats be made accessible to learners with visual impairments in “advance of sighted peers” vs. “a timely manner.”

Learners who are identified as gifted and visually impaired – twice exceptional – have unique needs that must be addressed. Education requires the nurturing of learners’ special gifts and talents, while simultaneously meeting the unique needs created by visual impairments. **For learners who are gifted and visually impaired, special education services must go beyond traditional deficit-based or compensatory approaches toward enriching experiences that develop and build upon gifts and talents.** Learners with visual impairments should be assessed for and included in programs for students who are gifted. Once identification has occurred, decisions regarding educational options and settings, curriculum, and counseling services should address the student’s giftedness, visual impairment, and individual needs.

Characteristics of gifted learners with visual impairments include any of the following:

- Fast rate of learning;
- Superior memory;
- Superior verbal communication skills and vocabulary;
- Advanced problem-solving skills;
- Creative production or thought that may progress more slowly than that of sighted students in some academic areas;
- Ease in learning braille;
- Great persistence and commitment to tasks;
- Motivation to know;
- A slower rate of cognitive development compared to sighted peers;
- Excellent ability to concentrate.

When looking at these characteristics, it is important to keep in mind that a given learner does not exhibit all these characteristics. In addition, a learner’s abilities should be compared to those of both their sighted peers and their peers with visual impairments.

The following resources and federal guidance are for learners who are twice exceptional:

- [Ohio Twice Exceptional Guide](#)
- [Twice Exceptional Children \(2e\), Wrightslaw](#)
- [OSEP Letter to Delisle](#)
- [OSEP Memo to State Directors, Letter to Delisle Follow-Up](#)
- [OESP Letter to Anonymous](#)
- [OCR Dear Colleague Letter](#)

DETERMINING SERVICE TIME FOR THE TVI AND/OR COMS

To assist in determining the amount of time an itinerant TVI or COMS should provide services to individual learners, the [Vision Services Severity Rating Scales \(VSSRS\)](#), designed by Michigan Department of Education Low Incidence Outreach, are recommended for guidance.

The [VISSIT: Visual Impairment Scale of Service Intensity of Texas](#) is another tool designed to help TVIs in determining the type and amount of services (direct consultation or collaborative consultation) to recommend for students, based on student need in the ECC. This does not address the overall workload of the TVIs, but primarily focuses on student needs.

DETERMINING WORKLOAD FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS OF STUDENTS WHO ARE BLIND OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED

The Office for Exceptional Children provides a workload calculator for Ohio school districts that must be used as part of the workload process to determine the service provider's caseload. Ohio educational agencies are required to determine preschool and school-age service providers' workload using a workload-based approach prior to the start of the school year and again when students are dismissed or students are added. Completing a time study is one way to obtain data for the workload determination. Workload activities can include, but may not be limited to, paperwork, meetings, diagnostics, screenings, progress monitoring, planning time, professional development, and travel for itinerant teachers.

Once the district determines the workload, it must be decided if it can be completed as it is assigned. If not, the district must make changes. Under the Workload Rule, schools and districts make workload determinations that consider all aspects of the service providers' workload. This will impact the number of learners that can be assigned to a particular service provider. **For learner needs to be effectively met, caseloads need to be regularly monitored to ensure equity between teachers and adequate staffing.**

The workload calculator may be found on Ohio Department of Education's [Service Provider Ratio and Workload Calculation](#) webpage. This process supports [Rule 3301-51-09](#) of the Ohio Operating Standards for the Education of Children With Disabilities. The end goal for the workload approach is to ensure time to deliver services and complete other aspects of the job. For additional information about the workload rule, please view this [video](#).

LICENSURE FOR VISION PROFESSIONALS

Students with visual impairments are provided educational services by an Ohio-licensed TVI. Learners who are visually impaired and require orientation and mobility training or other orientation skills receive additional services by an Ohio-licensed COMS. Fully-licensed TVIs and COMSs have completed numerous hours of coursework and internship with other licensed individuals in the field of visual impairment education, and successfully passed nationally recognized tests in their areas of expertise.

Training Program Requirements

All individuals who are applying to be licensed as a TVI or COMS in the state of Ohio must be recommended for an initial licensure by an accredited teacher training program. A list of approved educator programs may be found on the [Students page of Ohio HigherEd](#).

Required Tests

Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (TVI) – The state of Ohio requires passing the [Ohio Educator Assessment test](#) provided by Evaluation Systems Group of Pearson for licensure. Candidates seeking to obtain an initial license as an intervention specialist in visual impairments must take the [Assessment of Professional Knowledge: Multi-Age \(PK-12\)/004 examination](#) and receive a minimum score of 220.

All educators seeking either initial licensure or an additional licensure as an intervention specialist in the area of visually impaired (PK-12) (Licensure Code 65-196109) must take the Ohio Educator Assessment Test entitled "Special Education Specialist: Visually Impaired" (code number 045) and receive a minimum score of 220. This examination requires that examinees bring a braillewriter to the testing center. The test contains multiple-choice questions, constructed response questions, and a braille transcription test.

In addition, all newly licensed or additional licensure-seeking candidates must take the Ohio Educator Assessment Test entitled "Foundations of Reading Assessment" (code number 090) and receive a minimum score of 220. The test contains multiple-choice questions and constructed response. [Preparation materials and information about payment, testing centers, and policies for examination may be found online.](#)

Orientation and Mobility Specialist – The Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Educational Professionals (ACVREP) provides the examination for licensure as a COMS. A multiple-choice examination is administered to all candidates. Preparation materials, information about testing centers, and policies for the examination may be found on the [COMS section of the ACVREP website](#).

Licensure Applications

Anyone applying for a teaching licensure must obtain a BCI criminal background report. If applying from out of state, both a Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) background report is required. These reports may be initialized at local police, sheriff, or fingerprinting stations. Some universities require that results be sent to the educator preparation office prior to student teaching or internship. The results of the reports are also shared with the Ohio Department of Education. [Applications for Ohio Licensure as either a TVI or a COMS are completed online.](#)

CONCLUSION

The Ohio Guidelines for Working With Students Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired was designed to provide guidance and resources to decision-makers and families. Learners who are blind or visually impaired have a wide range of abilities as well as varied and intensive needs. Due to the diverse needs represented by this population of learners, educators and families must be knowledgeable of services required and resources available to plan and implement appropriate individual educational programs for students. Further information is available from the [Ohio Department of Education, Office for Exceptional Children, The Outreach Center for Deafness and Blindness at OCALI, the AT&AEM Center at OCALI, the Ohio State School for the Blind, and OSSB Statewide Services Department.](#)

Appendix A

RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES FOR TVIs AND COMSs

The Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) features a Job Exchange, a listing of advertisements posted by school divisions, agencies, and other organizations in need of professionally trained staff. A fee is charged for this service.

The Council for Exceptional Children's Division on Visual Impairment and Deafblindness also features an Employment Opportunities portal. This site features listings of positions for TVIs, teachers of students with deafblindness, COMS, and personnel preparation. There is no fee for this service.

The American Foundation for the Blind (AFB; www.afb.org) is a central source of information and services for individuals who are blind or visually impaired across the United States. The website includes a listing of colleges and universities offering teacher preparation programs for TVIs and COMSs in the United States and Canada.

For information about TVI and O&M specialist programs offered in Ohio and surrounding states, please visit the document "[Preparing Vision Professionals: College/University Programs](#)".

Appendix B

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For additional information on the education and supporting the learning of students with visual impairments, please consult the following resources:

[Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals \(ACVREP\)](#)

ACVREP develops and maintains current evidence-based, field-driven professional scopes of practice and competencies for vision rehabilitation and education professionals who serve to promote the value and quality of services provided by certified professionals.

[American Foundation for the Blind \(AFB\)](#)

AFB focuses on providing knowledge and support to families, guide the creation of accessible products in the business world, and offer publications to educate professionals in the field.

[American Council of the Blind \(ACB\)](#)

The American Council of the Blind strives to increase the independence, security, equality of opportunity, and quality of life, for all blind and visually-impaired people.

[American Printing House for the Blind, Inc. \(APH\)](#)

APH is the world's largest nonprofit organization creating educational, workplace, and independent living products and services for people who are visually impaired.

[Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired \(AERBVI\)](#)

AERBVI supports professionals who provide education and rehabilitation services to people with visual impairments through affiliated chapters and divisions by means of effective strategic planning conducted at all levels within the organization.

[A Cheat Sheet to Help You Self-Advocate for Accommodations as a College Student Who Is Blind or Visually Impaired](#)

Basic information to assist students in advocating for resources available at their college or university
<http://www.acb.org/>

[Braille Formats \(online version\) – Principles of Print to Braille Transcription 2016](#)

Formatting guidelines for Unified English Braille (UEB) available in downloadable and printable PDF and BRF files.
<http://idea.ed.gov/>

[Council for Exceptional Children – Division on Visual Impairments and Deafblindness](#)

The focus of the division is to advance the education of individuals with visual impairments and to promote related educational, scientific, and charitable purposes.

[Educational Management Information System \(EMIS\) of Ohio Department of Education \(ODE\)](#)

EMIS is a statewide data collection system for Ohio's primary and secondary education, including demographic information, attendance, course information, financial data, and test results.

[FamilyConnect](#)

This site gives parents of children with visual impairments a place to support each other, share stories and concerns, and link to local resources. The site was created by the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) and the National Association of Parents of Children With Visual Impairments (NAPVI).

[Federal Quota section on the AT&AEM website](#)

At the direction of the Ohio Department of Education, Office for Exceptional Children, the AT & AEM Center conducts the annual Federal Quota Registration of Blind Students for Ohio. Each year in December, the AT & AEM Center mails a packet of materials to superintendents and/or principals, requesting them to register each student who is legally blind and attending school in their district as of the first Monday in January.

[The Hadley School for the Blind](#)

The Hadley Institute for the Blind and Visually Impaired promotes independent living through lifelong, distance education programs for individuals who are blind or visually impaired, their families, and blindness service providers.

[Individuals With Disabilities Education Act of 2004 \(IDEA\)](#)

IDEA is a law ensuring services to children with disabilities throughout the nation. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to more than 6.5 million eligible infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities. Infants and toddlers with disabilities (birth-2) and their families receive early intervention services under IDEA Part C. Children and youth (ages 3-21) receive special education and related services under IDEA Part B.

[Letter to Michelle Kotler From Director Melody Musgrove Regarding IDEA and Definitions](#)

This letter addresses concerns regarding the criteria used by some states to identify children with “visual impairments or blindness,” as that term is defined under Part B of IDEA.

[Michigan’s Vision Services Severity Rating Scale \(VSSRS\)](#)

The severity rating scales support consistency in determining service delivery times for students who are blind or visually impaired. The scales may be used to establish how often a particular service should be delivered to a student.

[National Braille Association \(NBA\)](#)

NBA is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing continuing education to those who prepare braille and to providing braille materials to persons who are visually impaired.

[National Center on Accessible Educational Materials \(NCAEM\)](#)

NCAEM provides resources and technical assistance for educators, parents, students, publishers, conversion houses, accessible media producers, and others interested in learning more about accessible educational materials (AEM) and implementing AEM and the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS).

[National Federation of the Blind \(NFB\)](#)

NFB is a consumer organization of blind people working together to improve opportunities for the blind and understanding of blindness by the general public.

[Ohio Department of Education \(ODE\)](#)

The ODE oversees the state’s public education system, which includes public school districts, joint vocational school districts, and charter schools. The department also monitors educational service centers, other regional education providers, early learning and child care programs, and private schools.

[Ohio Department of Education, Office for Exceptional Children \(ODE-OEC\)](#)

ODE-OEC provides leadership, assistance, and oversight to school districts and other entities that provide differentiated instruction to students with disabilities and gifted students.

[Ohio State Board of Education](#)

The Ohio State Board of Education is comprised of 19 members whose focus is on developing educational policy to further the vision for all Ohio students to graduate from the preK-12 education system with the knowledge, skills, and behaviors necessary to continue their education successfully and/or be workforce ready and participate in the global economy as productive citizens.

[National Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments \(NAPVI\)](#)

NAPVI is part of the Lighthouse Guild, which is the leading not-for-profit vision + healthcare organization, with a long-standing heritage of addressing the needs of people who are blind or visually impaired, including those with multiple disabilities or chronic medical conditions. NAPVI is a parent advocacy, support, and educational association.

[Ohio State School for the Blind \(OSSB\)](#)

OSSB, a publicly funded educational facility, is dedicated to the intellectual, social, physical, and emotional growth of all students with visual impairments. Its mission is to work cooperatively with students, families, and the community to provide an effective, enjoyable educational experience through specialized, curriculum, equipment, materials, and individualized, disability-specific instruction to develop students’ unique potential.

[OSSB Statewide Services](#)

OSSB’s Statewide Services Department provides technical assistance, professional development, materials, and resources to families and local school districts serving children who are visually impaired.

[OSEP Letter to Delisle](#)

This letter addresses clarification of IDEA and its implementing regulations as they apply to children who have high cognition and who may have specific learning disabilities (SLD). The letter references the OSEP Letter to Anonymous.

[OSEP Memo to State Directors, Letter to Delisle Follow-Up](#)

This memorandum includes a copy of the Letter to Delisle and reiterates what previous letters (OSEP Letter to Anonymous and OSEP Letter to Delisle) have stated: that students who have high cognition, have disabilities, and require special education and related services are protected under IDEA.

[OSEP Letter to Anonymous](#)

This letter addresses clarification of IDEA and its implementing regulations as they apply to children who have disabilities and high cognition.

[Office of Civil Rights \(OCR\) Dear Colleague Letter](#)

The OCR was informed of an issue involving the allowance of students with disabilities seeking enrollment in challenging academic programs. This practice is inconsistent with federal law and the OCR in the U.S. Department of Education will act promptly to remedy violations when they occur.

[OSEP’s Dear Colleague Letter on Braille](#)

In 1997, Congress added a requirement to ensure that students who are blind and have visual impairments are provided braille instruction that is necessary for them to receive a free appropriate public education. Despite the requirement, parents and advocates of children who are blind or visually impaired have voiced serious concern that the number of students receiving instruction in braille has decreased significantly. This letter identifies resources that are designed to help strengthen the capacity of state and local personnel to meet the needs of students who are blind or visually impaired.

[OSERS Letter on Eligibility Determinations for Children Suspected of Having a Visual Impairment, Including Blindness, Under the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act](#)

The purpose of this memorandum is to ensure broad dissemination of the key points made in a November 12, 2014, letter, providing additional guidance on this important issue and sharing information about outside resources that may be helpful in examining the state’s procedures related to the identification and evaluation of children suspected of having a visual impairment, including blindness.

[Perkins School for the Blind](#)

Perkins is a progressive, multi-faceted organization committed to improving the lives of people with blindness and deafblindness around the world. The Perkins mission is to prepare children and young adults who are blind with the education, confidence, and skills they need to realize their potential.

[Perkins School for the Blind Wonderbaby](#)

WonderBaby.org is a project sponsored by Perkins School for the Blind dedicated to helping the parents of young children with visual impairments as well as children with multiple disabilities. Includes a database of articles written by parents who want to share with others what they have learned about playing with and teaching a blind child, as well as links to meaningful resources and ways to connect with other families.

[Seedlings Braille Books for Children](#)

This is a non-profit organization dedicated to increasing the opportunity for literacy by providing high quality low-cost braille books for children.

[Tip Sheet #2 – The Expanded Core Curriculum \(New Hampshire Professional Development Center for Vision Education\)](#)

The expanded core curriculum (ECC) refers to the body of knowledge and skills needed by students with vision loss to be successful in school and in post-graduate pursuits as a result of unique, disability-specific needs.

[Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired \(TSBVI\)](#)

TSBVI serves as a special public school for students, ages 6 through 21, who are blind, deafblind, or visually impaired, including those with additional disabilities. It is also a statewide resource for the parents of these children and the professionals who serve them, from birth through transition from school.

Teaching Students With Visual Impairments

The mission of Teaching Students With Visual Impairments is to provide all persons involved in the student's education with the resources they need to help each student become successful members of their communities and to equip those in the vision field to meet the wide range of needs of the students they serve.

"Universities with Programs for Supporting Students with Visual Impairments" document. <TBD LINK INSERT HERE>.

The VISSIT: Visual Impairment Scale of Service Intensity of Texas

VISSIT is designed to guide teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs) in determining the type and amount of itinerant services to recommend for students on their caseload. The student's IEP committee typically relies upon the TVI for this recommendation. The scale supports the TVI in quantifying information for the IEP committee.

[List of key vision terms and their definitions provided by the American Foundation for the Blind \(AFB\)](#)

Appendix C

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