

# **Educating Students with Visual Impairments in Texas: Guidelines and Standards**

**June 2010**

To find Guidelines and Standards 2010 on the web, go to [www.tsbvi.edu](http://www.tsbvi.edu) ,

# **Members of the Texas Education of Blind and Visually Impaired Students Advisory Committee**

Original members as of April 2008

*Texas Education Agency – Division of IDEA Coordination*

**Kathy Clayton**, Senior Director

**Richard Poe**, Manager, Federal Policy/State Programs

**Brent Pitt**, Director, Services for Deaf and Texas Deafblind Project

**Dottie Goodman**, Program Specialist

*Deaf-Blind Multihandicapped Association of Texas*

**Paul Welch**, President

**Steve Schoen**, Executive Director

*Texas Association of Parents of Children with Visual Impairments*

**Alaine Hinds**, Past-President

**Shawna M. Tausch**, President

*Texas Association of Blind Students, National Federation of the Blind*

**Joe Orozco**, Past-President

**Jose Martinez**, President

*National Federation of the Blind of Texas*

**Tommy Craig**, President

*American Foundation for the Blind*

**Mary Ann Siller**, National Project Manager, Professional Development

2010 update: National Consultant for Blindness and Low Vision Services

*Alliance of and for Visually Impaired Texans (AVIT)*

**Marty Murrell**, Chair

*Texas Tech University*

**Rona Pogrund**, Associate Professor and Coordinator of Program for Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments

*Stephen F. Austin State University*

**Bill Bryan**, Chair of Human Services, retired 2007

**Frankie Swift**, Coordinator of Programs in Visual Impairments

*Education Service Center ESC XI – Visual Impairment Leadership Function*

**Debbie Roybal**, Coordinator of School and Student Support

**Olga Uriegas**, Visual Impairment Educational Specialist

*Education Service Center Representatives*

**Chrissy Cowan**, Visual Impairment (VI) Education Specialists, ESC XIII

**Debra Leff**, Visual Impairment (VI) Education Specialists, ESC XIII

**Karen Crone**, Visual Impairment/Orientation & Mobility/Deafblind Education Specialist, ESC 4

**Suzanne Scannell**, Visual Impairment Education Specialist, ESC 4

**Judy Babcock**, Coordinator of Special Education, ESC 16

*Local School Program Representatives*

**Linda Wendland**, Administrative Supervisor, Special Education Program for Students With Visual Impairments, Austin ISD

**Pat Boyd**, Manager, Program for Students with Visual Impairments, Houston ISD

**Carol Hoover**, Lead Visual Impairment (VI) Teacher, Round Rock ISD

**Donna Arriola**, Special Education Director, Mission CISD

*Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS)*

*Division for Blind Services (DBS)*

**Barbara J. Madrigal**, Assistant Commissioner, DARS, DBS

**Jennifer Kocyan**, Vocational Rehabilitation/Transition/Children's Program Consultant Supervisor

**Linda Johnson**, Transition Consultant

**Beth Dennis**, Blind Children's Consultant

**Alice Thomas**, Blind Children's Specialist

*Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) – Early Childhood Intervention (ECI)*

**Christine Watkins**, Supervising Lead Consultant

**Velma Gonzales**, Interagency/Child Find Specialist

*Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI)*

**Phil Hatlen**, Superintendent (retired 2007)

**William Daugherty**, Superintendent

**Cyral Miller**, Outreach Director

**Miles Fain**, Principal of Comprehensive Programs

**Lauren Newton**, Principal of Special Programs

## **Acknowledgments**

The Advisory Committee would like to acknowledge the team of Rona Pogrud, Pat Boyd, Linda Wendland, Olga Uriegas and Cyral Miller for their time and hard work in writing and editing this document.

Also, the committee thanks Christine Watkins, Stacy Shafer and Gigi Newton for their writing on early childhood issues.

Thanks to new members of the Texas Education of Blind and Visually Impaired Students Advisory Committee who have participated in annual revisions to this document:

Michele Chauvin, Texas Association of Parents of Children with Visual Impairments  
Juan del Rosario, Tx Association of Blind Students,  
Fred Martinez, Education Service Center, ESC 18  
Virginia Haas, Austin Independent School District  
Clare Scallon, Manor ISD

The 2010 revision is dedicated to the memory of Karen Crone, whose talent and commitment greatly impacted programs for students with visual impairments in Texas and who left us much too early.

# Educating Students with Visual Impairments in Texas: Guidelines and Standards

## Table of Contents

I. Need for this Document .....	7
II. Purpose of this Document .....	8
III. The Population of Students with Visual Impairments .....	8
IV. Determining Eligibility for Students with Visual Impairments .....	9
V. The Full and Individual Evaluation for Students with Visual Impairments .....	12
VI. Defining the Expanded Core Curriculum .....	15
VII. Addressing Curricular Needs of Students with Visual Impairments ..	19
VIII. Evaluation and Instruction in the Expanded Core Curriculum .....	20
IX. Role of the Certified Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (TVI) .....	21
X. Role of the Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS) .....	25
XI. Roles of Paraprofessionals for Students with Visual Impairments and Deafblindness .....	27
XII. Role of the Family in the Individualized Family Service Plan/ Individualized Education Program (IFSP/IEP) Process for Students with Visual Impairments .....	29
XIII. Service Delivery for Infants with Visual Impairments .....	30
XIV. Appropriate Educational Placements for Students with Visual Impairments .....	31
XV. Determining Service Time from the Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (TVI) and/or a Certified Orientation & Mobility Specialist (COMS) .....	32

XVI. Determining Appropriate Caseloads for Vision Professionals .....36

XVII. Conclusion .....38

XVIII. Additional Resources .....39

*Websites: 39*

*Reference Publications: 41*

*Education Service Centers: 42*

XIX. List of Guideline/Standards: .....43

XX. Frequently Asked Questions .....44

# Educating Students with Visual Impairments in Texas: Guidelines and Standards

## I. Need for this Document

Maximizing lifelong success is the goal of education. Students with visual impairments have unique learning needs that must be addressed if they are going to access the regular core curriculum and become independent, productive citizens to the greatest degree possible. Recent data indicate that less than 50% of legally blind individuals in the 22-50-year-old range are employed (National Center for Health Statistics 1998). Thus, educators face a significant challenge in providing educational services that will lead to successful post-school outcomes. In addition to the general education that all students receive, students with visual impairments, starting at birth, also need an **expanded core curriculum** to meet needs directly related to their vision disability (NASDSE, 1999, p. 70). These expanded curriculum areas include instruction in:

- Compensatory skills that permit access to the general curriculum (such as braille, communication skills, study skills, and concept development)
- Independent living skills
- Orientation and mobility skills
- Recreation and leisure skills
- Assistive technology
- Social interaction skills
- Career education
- Sensory efficiency (including visual, tactual and auditory skills), and
- Self-determination

Making appropriate decisions about the development and implementation of programs and services for students with visual impairments requires a clear understanding of the unique learning needs of these students. Administrators must have knowledge about specialized personnel, materials, equipment and educational settings to ensure appropriate individual educational program planning for these students with unique needs. Further, knowing the features of a quality program is key for parents and caregivers so that they can advocate for appropriate services to meet the needs of their child.

Program administrators must understand that appropriately certified personnel are an integral part of the educational team for every student with a visual impairment. These specially trained individuals include certified teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs) and certified orientation and mobility specialists (COMS). Students with deafblindness may require trained interveners, while students who read braille may need braille transcribers to be included on their instructional team.

## **II. Purpose of this Document**

The primary purpose of this document is to provide decision-makers with a set of guidelines and standards by which they can determine the quality of their programs serving students with visual impairments. In analyzing a program's current components, this document offers such decision-makers the opportunity for program adjustment or improvement. These guidelines and standards are highlighted in each section, along with an explanation of the components found in a high quality program for these students and current laws, rules and regulations in the state of Texas that impact the education of students with visual impairments.

## **III. The Population of Students with Visual Impairments**

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

- May be totally blind or have varying degrees of low vision



- Range from birth to 22 years of age
- May be born with a visual impairment or may have acquired a visual impairment at a later time in their life
- May or may not be learners on the academic level of their sighted age peers
- May have hearing impairments (deafblindness)
- May have any number of other disabilities (mild to severe cognitive impairment, physical disabilities, other sensory losses, emotional or behavioral problems, autism and/or learning disabilities)
- May have a visual impairment in any part of the eye structure or due to neurological causes (such as cortical visual impairment)
- May have additional medical needs and considerations

#### **IV. Determining Eligibility for Students with Visual Impairments**

---

##### **Guideline/Standard #1:**

**Eligibility is determined by an individualized family service plan (IFSP) or an admission, review and dismissal (ARD) committee based upon a medical report, functional vision evaluation and learning media assessment.**

---

In order for a student to be eligible for services as a student with a visual impairment under Texas state laws, the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Admissions, Review and Dismissal (ARD) committee must consider:

- 1) a medical report by a licensed ophthalmologist or optometrist
- 2) a functional vision evaluation conducted by a certified teacher of students with visual impairments (TVI) and/or a certified orientation and mobility specialist (COMS)
- 3) a learning media assessment that must be conducted by a teacher of students with visual impairments (TVI)

Federal law 34 CFR §300.304(c)(4) requires that “the child is assessed in all areas related to the suspected disability” and 34 CFR §300.304(c)(6)

“the evaluation is sufficiently comprehensive to identify all of the child’s special education and related services needs”. Therefore, it is recommended that an evaluation of orientation and mobility skills by a certified orientation and mobility specialist (COMS) be requested, along with the evaluation by a teacher of students with visual impairment (TVI), as part of determining the need for eligibility as a student with a visual impairment.

- The *eye medical* report should indicate whether the student has no vision or a serious visual loss after correction, or a progressive medical condition that will result in no vision or serious vision loss after correction TAC §89.1040(c)(12)(A)(i)(I)(II).
- A *functional vision evaluation (FVE)* analyzes how a student actually performs visually in a variety of environments, including familiar and unfamiliar environments, in different lighting conditions, requiring the use of both near and distance vision. TAC §89.1040(c)(12)(A)(ii)(I). Input from both a TVI and a COMS ensures consideration of all aspects of functional use of vision:
  - The functional vision evaluation (FVE) must include recommendations concerning the need for an *orientation and mobility evaluation*, to determine whether there is a need for specific instruction to ensure safe and efficient travel in the home, school and community. TAC §89.1040(c)(12)(A)(ii)(I), 34 CFR, §300.8(c)(13). Input from a COMS during the FVE provides informed decision making regarding the need for an O&M evaluation.
  - The FVE must also recommend whether the student should be referred for a *clinical low vision evaluation*. TAC §89.1040(c)(12)(A)(ii)(I). Clinical evaluations are needed to prescribe certain low vision devices. Eye care specialists (ophthalmologists, optometrists) with specialized training in low vision conduct clinical low vision evaluations. If the IEP committee, based upon the recommendation of the FVE results, agrees to the need for a clinical low vision evaluation, it is the legal responsibility of the local education agency to provide this service. (34 CFR §300.154(b)(2))
- A learning media assessment (LMA) must include recommendations concerning which specific visual, tactual, and/or auditory learning media are appropriate for the student and whether or not there is a

need for ongoing evaluation in this area.  
TAC§89.1040((c)(12)(A)(ii)(II)

- An *orientation and mobility evaluation* must analyze the student's level of safe and efficient movement in familiar and unfamiliar environments in the home, school and community and recommend needed instructional services for current and future mobility needs.

Note: a screening is not the same as an evaluation. To make professional decisions regarding eligibility, an evaluation by a qualified professional should be conducted ([34 CFR §300.302](#)).

If a visual impairment is suspected in a child **under the age of three**, the referral process is coordinated by The Division of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services – Early Childhood Intervention Program (DARS-ECI). As part of the eligibility process, ECI assists families with obtaining documentation of the vision problem from a licensed ophthalmologist or optometrist. ECI provides the local school district with doctors' reports, consent for referral for evaluation, and consent for release of information. If the child is already being served by ECI when a vision loss is discovered, the timelines for evaluation and services should be governed by a local agreement between the school district and the area ECI. The state Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) recommends a three-week timeframe for completion of evaluation from the time of the request.

For students who are deafblind, there are specific additional criteria for eligibility in both visual impairment and auditory impairment.  
TAC§89.1040(c)(2)(A-D). These are listed below:

Deaf-blindness. A student with deaf-blindness is one who has been determined to meet the criteria for deaf-blindness as stated in 34 CFR, §300.8(c)(2). In meeting the criteria stated in 34 CFR, §300.8(c)(2), a student with deaf-blindness is one who, based on the evaluations specified in subsections (c)(3) and (c)(12) of this section:

- (A) meets the eligibility criteria for *auditory impairment* specified in subsection (c)(3) of this section and visual impairment specified in subsection (c)(12) of this section
- (B) meets the eligibility criteria for a student with a *visual impairment* and has a suspected hearing loss that cannot be demonstrated conclusively, but a speech/language

therapist, a certified speech and language therapist, or a licensed speech language pathologist indicates there is no speech at an age when speech would normally be expected

- (C) has documented hearing and visual losses that, if considered individually, may not meet the requirements for auditory impairment or visual impairment, but the *combination of such losses* adversely affects the student's educational performance; or
- (D) has a documented medical diagnosis of a *progressive medical condition* that will result in concomitant hearing and visual losses that, without special education intervention, will adversely affect the student's educational performance

**Visual impairment** is a recognized eligibility category for special education and related services. Part C of IDEA mandates early childhood intervention services for children with disabilities birth through two years of age. (34 CFR § 300.8) IDEA Part B mandates services for students with disabilities ages three through twenty-one. Students must have educational programs that address the **unique needs** of the child **that result from the child's disability**, and ensure access to the general curriculum. (34 CFR §300.39(b)(3)(ii)). A thorough FIE (full and individual evaluation) should be conducted to determine the full scope of a special education program for students with a documented or suspected visual impairment. A functional vision evaluation (FVE) should be conducted prior to all other evaluations in order to provide evaluation that is valid and appropriate for a student with visual impairments. ((34 CFR §300.304(c)(4)).

In determining eligibility and educational need, the ARD committee must consider information from a variety of sources (Section 300.306(c)(i)). Results of the eye medical report **and** the findings of an FVE or other documented reports of visual functioning should be carefully considered by the ARD committee in determining eligibility as a student with visual impairment.

## V. The Full and Individual Evaluation for Students with Visual Impairments

---

## **Guideline/Standard #2:**

**Vision professionals provide expertise specific to visual impairments prior to and during the full and individual evaluation.**

---

A full and individual evaluation (FIE) is required for any child being considered as eligible for special education as a result of a visual impairment. A FIE for initial eligibility or re-evaluation for continued eligibility must include a comprehensive review of student progress in all areas related to the suspected disability, including, if appropriate, health, vision, hearing, social and emotional status, general intelligence, academic performance, communicative status, and motor abilities (34 CFR §300.304(c)(4)). Assessment should be preceded by a Functional Vision Evaluation in order to ensure that results accurately reflect the child's aptitude and not the impact of a visual impairment ([34 CFR §300.304\(c\)\(3\)](#)).

In 1999, the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) recognized that critical skills were impacted by the presence of a visual impairment or blindness. The NASDSE endorsed the term expanded core curriculum (ECC) to describe additional areas that *should be included in a comprehensive evaluation* of students with visual impairments and in developing the annual individualized education program. <http://www.tsbvi.edu/agenda/index.htm>

There are significant changes in demands on visual and sensory functioning as students grow older. For students under three years of age, at least annually, the service coordinator must convene a meeting to evaluate and revise the IFSP as needed (TAC Title 40, Part 2, Chapter 108, Subchapter A, Rule Section 108.25). A comprehensive evaluation of a child under three years of age includes but is not limited to:

- The child's current health and physical status, including vision, hearing, and nutrition.
- The child's functioning in developmental areas (gross motor, fine motor, cognitive, language, self help and social development); and
- The child's functional abilities to participate in the family's daily activities.

For children ages birth to two who are eligible for vision services or who are suspected of having a visual impairment, the TVI must be given 10 days written notice of initial, six-month review and annual IFSP meetings.

[http://www.dars.state.tx.us/ECIS/policy\\_manual/ch3.htm#3.41.8](http://www.dars.state.tx.us/ECIS/policy_manual/ch3.htm#3.41.8)

At least every three years, it is critical to consider a student's evaluation data to determine how that student is functioning in new environments and whether new evaluation is needed.

Involvement of the teacher of students with visual impairments and certified orientation and mobility specialist in the FIE (*34 CFR* §[300.1\(a\)](#) [19 TAC](#)§89.1001(a) [and](#) §300.304(c)(iv) is critical for:

- **performing the FVE and LMA** to establish eligibility and appropriate modifications and accommodations for evaluation and instruction [300.306\(a\)\(1\)](#), [89.1040\(b\)](#), and [89.1040\(c\)\(12\)\(A\)\(ii\)](#)
- **performing the O&M evaluation** to establish or reevaluate the need for orientation and mobility instruction (the COMS) §[89.1040\(b\)](#), [and](#) §[89.1040\(c\)\(12\)\(A\)\(ii\)\(1\)](#);
- ensuring that evaluation includes all appropriate areas of the **expanded core curriculum**; §300.304(c)(4) and §300.305 (a)(2)(ii)
- **establishing assessment techniques**, methods and materials for the Texas Student Assessment Program and local assessments;
- **assisting other team members** in the use of appropriate evaluation tools and methods;
- **providing input regarding evaluation results as they relate to visual impairments**, and;
- **developing appropriate programming recommendations**.

## VI. Defining the Expanded Core Curriculum

---

### Guideline/Standard #3:

**Evaluations of all areas of the expanded core curriculum are used to determine individual student programs.**

---

For children who are blind or visually impaired, evaluations to document the present level of academic and functional performance for the development of the individualized education program (IEP) are required by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). (34 CFR §300.320 (a)(1)) The term expanded core curriculum is used to define concepts and skills typically learned incidentally by sighted students that must be sequentially presented to the student who is blind or has low vision. The expanded core curriculum areas include (A) needs that result from the visual impairment to enable the student “to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum; and (B) other educational needs that result from the child's disability” as required by IDEA. (34 CFR § 300.320 (a)(2)(A)(B)). The presence of a visual impairment requires that these skills be thoroughly evaluated and systematically taught to these students by teachers with specialized expertise. Without specialized instruction, children with vision loss may not be aware of the activities of their peers or acquire other critical information about their surroundings. (NASDSE, 1999, p. 70).

As the IFSP/IEP is being developed, the following unique skills related to the expanded core curriculum should be considered:

- **Compensatory Skills** needed to access the general curriculum, including:
  - Access to literacy through Braille and/or print, handwriting skills and auditory skills. Texas House Bill 2277 (1991) assumes that all functionally blind students are to be taught Braille unless their learning media assessment recommends different literacy media. ([TEC §30.002f](#)) - Many students with low vision use regular print with magnification devices. Some students need both print and Braille. Students with multiple disabilities,

including deafblindness, may use a tactile or object symbol system for literacy.

- Communication needs that will vary depending on degree of functional vision, effects of additional disabilities and the task to be done. Students with deafblindness and others may have alternative communication systems such as tactile sign language, symbol or object communication, or calendar boxes.
- Specialized instruction in concept development that may be significantly impacted when visual observation is limited. It is essential to offer specific and sequential hands-on lessons to build a broad base of experiences. In higher grades, there are many mathematical, geographical and scientific concepts that must be taught with adapted materials and strategies for students unable to learn from pictures and visual diagrams. A child with little or no vision may have fragmented understandings of the world without systematic tactile exploration and clear verbal explanations. Some concepts are totally visual, such as colors, rainbows, clouds, and sky. Some are too large to experience completely, such as a building, mountain ranges, and oceans. Other items are too tiny or too delicate to understand through touch, including small insects, a snowflake, or an item under a microscope. Fragmented concepts can impede social, academic, and vocational development.
- **Sensory Efficiency (includes visual, tactual and auditory skills):** Students who are blind and students with low vision need systematic instruction to learn efficient use of their senses.
  - 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 students with visual impairments, an increased reliance upon *tactual* skills is essential to learning. These skills should be considered as part of the IEP development. It takes more detailed “hands-on” interaction and repetition to tactually understand a concept, such as relative size, that may be readily captured with a glance.



- Systematic instruction in *auditory* skills is critical for successful mobility and learning. Students must learn to effectively use their hearing to respond appropriately to social cues, travel safely in schools and across streets, learn from recorded media and use echolocation for orientation.
- **Orientation and Mobility (O&M):** Safe and efficient travel throughout the environment is a critical component in the education of students with visual impairments. Orientation & Mobility evaluation and instruction should begin in infancy with basic spatial concepts, purposeful and exploratory movement, and progress through more independent age-appropriate motor and travel skills in increasingly complex environments. Vision provides the primary motivation for infants to begin to move their bodies, to raise their heads to see people, to reach toward objects, to move through the environment and to begin to play. Significant delays and differences in meeting motor milestones can impact overall development. The blind child needs to know how classrooms or other environments are arranged in order to independently move with confidence. Systematic orientation to a space may be needed before the placement and function of furniture and objects is understood. More advanced age-appropriate travel skills such as street crossings, bus travel and community experiences are needed, as the student gets older.
- **Assistive technology:** Technology permits students with visual impairments to access the general curriculum, to increase literacy options and to enhance communication. There are a variety of high and low-tech assistive technology tools designed specifically for students with visual impairments that require specialized instruction. These devices include, but are not limited to: electronic Braille note takers, yellow transparencies, tactile symbols, calendar systems, video magnifiers, screen reader software, screen enlarging software, and magnification devices.
- **Social skills:** A visual impairment can socially isolate a student, impede typical social interactions or limit social skill development. A student with a visual impairment may not be able to see facial expressions and subtle body language to participate in conversations and activities. Social skills that sighted children are able to observe and imitate may need to be taught to a child with a visual impairment.

- **Independent living skills:** Personal hygiene, dressing, food preparation, money management, housekeeping, and organization skills are critical skills for successful transition from school to independent living. Young children begin learning basic skills in independent living from visual observation and imitation. Most students with visual impairments, however, will need systematic instruction and adaptations to standard equipment, such as modifications to read oven markings and to cook independently and safely. Depending on the level of vision, cognition and other individual characteristics of a student, adaptations may range from minor highlighting to tactile clues for matching clothing. Students can learn to apply make-up and perform other grooming activities with magnifying lenses, specially marked containers and highlighted dials on electric shavers. These skills are not typically evaluated or taught in a sequential and systematic basis in general education settings. Family members may require assistance and guidance to implement the proper adaptations that will permit practice and mastery of new independence skills within the home.
- **Recreation and leisure skills:** Students with visual impairments need to be exposed to and taught recreation and leisure activities that they can enjoy as children and throughout their lives. They are often not aware of the options or the possible adaptations that would allow them to participate in these activities. Such skills include both individual and organized group activities for students at all ages and levels.
- **Career education:** Students with visual impairments need to be taught about the variety of types of work and career options that are available since they cannot casually observe people in different job roles. They need opportunities to explore their strengths and interests in a systematic, well-planned manner. This training may include the acquisition of specialized skills and equipment to compete in the job market. Students must be prepared for a wide range of vocational choices and the adaptations, including technological devices, which make them attainable. It is important to have opportunities to job shadow for concrete experience of different career choices and to learn about other persons with visual impairments who have successful vocational outcomes.
- **Self-determination:** Self-determination includes personal decision-making, self-advocacy, and assertiveness. These skills lead to

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

## **VII. Addressing Curricular Needs of Students with Visual Impairments**

---

### **Guideline/Standard #4:**

**Appropriate instructional time, accommodations and modifications are provided to meet all identified areas in individual student programs.**

---

Since students with visual impairments have unique learning needs, instructional teams should consider creative strategies to meet those needs. General and special education teachers are primarily responsible for instruction in the academic core content, with the support of VI professionals to accommodate or modify instructional design and materials to address the impact of visual impairment.

**Instructional time:** Instruction in the expanded core curriculum may require additional time beyond the regular school day and year. For students who are under three years old, year round services related to the visual impairment must be available 48 weeks of each year, based upon developmental needs and family priorities.

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

- A longer school day (which might require flexible instructional work times, alternate transportation and locations).

- Additional years in school.
- Applying for high school credit for vision-specific coursework, following state regulations and procedures.
- After-school programs sponsored either by the local education agency (LEA), regional education service center (ESC), community or private agencies.
- Summer programs, either locally or offered by the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI).
- Short-term programs offered by TSBVI Special Programs Department.
- Programs offered by DARS Division for Blind Services and/or
- For children under three, intervention in the child's home or natural environment.

**Instructional accommodations/modifications:** In addition to the specific areas of the expanded core curriculum, students with visual impairments may need accommodations to access the same assignments as their peers. These accommodations may include extended time, specialized instruction, specialized materials, and environmental adaptations to reach the same levels of performance as sighted students. Individualized instruction for certain skills that may be difficult to learn in a large group setting may be needed for concepts such as map skills, advanced math concepts and spatial concepts. Specialized equipment and materials may also be needed such as a braillewriter, raised line paper, a cane, an abacus, a talking graphing calculator or specialized software for computers. For most students, accommodations should be designed so that success in the general curriculum can be attained without lowering expectations. Some students may also need modifications to the general curriculum to develop an appropriate individual program.

## **VIII. Evaluation and Instruction in the Expanded Core Curriculum**

A structured evaluation of each of the ECC areas is critical to measuring success and assuring independence. The TVI and/or the COMS each have a role in evaluating or ensuring appropriate evaluation of the student's

needs in all areas of the expanded core curriculum. The TVI should take the lead in evaluation of compensatory skills, while the COMS should perform the O&M evaluation. In other areas of the expanded core curriculum, collaboration between the two professionals will ensure a comprehensive evaluation. There are a variety of formal and informal evaluations that can appropriately determine the student's functioning level in these vision-specific topics. Instructional needs in the expanded core curriculum areas can be addressed using a variety of service delivery models. The TVI and the COMS are the primary resources for instruction in the expanded core curriculum, although the family, ECI staff including the Early Intervention Specialists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech-language pathologists, classroom teachers, other district personnel, education service center staff, TSBVI or DARS Division for Blind Services can also play important roles in providing the needed instruction. For children under three years of age, the parent(s)/caregiver should be considered the primary instructor(s).

## **IX. Role of the Certified Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (TVI)**

---

### **Guideline/Standard #5:**

**Certified teachers of students with visual impairments perform required evaluations and instruction.**

---

Certified teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs) are legally mandated team members for all students with visual impairments, including those with deafblindness. TAC §§[89.1050\(c\)\(4\)\(A\)](#) & [89.1050\(c\)\(4\)\(C\)](#). The educational needs of these students vary widely. From initial evaluation to instruction to assessment, the TVI plays a critical role in helping students, teachers, paraprofessionals, family members and related service personnel. For information about certification requirements, university coursework and programs for training TVIs, refer to the Administrator Tool Box at [www.tsbvi.edu/pds/index.htm](http://www.tsbvi.edu/pds/index.htm).

Certified Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (TVIs) have many roles, including:

## **Assessment and Evaluation**

- Assisting other professionals in developing appropriate evaluation and assessment strategies.
- Conducting the functional vision evaluation and the learning media assessment.
- Interpreting evaluation and assessment results regarding the impact of a visual impairment.
- Evaluating student progress and providing progress notes as per district policy.
- Evaluating areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum.

## **Direct instruction in the Expanded Core Curriculum**

- 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 expanded core curriculum.
- Supporting parents of infants, toddlers and preschoolers as they help their children reach developmental milestones with adapted strategies specific to needs related to the visual impairment (services may be in the home, at an early intervention program, or in the community).
- Providing support to the student to facilitate development of self-esteem, self-determination and social acceptance.

## **Supporting Educational Teams**

The teacher of students with visual impairments (TVI) must be able to educate, support, and collaborate with family members and other members of the instructional team who work with the student. 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 with a visual impairment. The TVI's supporting roles include:

- Supporting families in developing infant and early childhood goals and objectives related to the visual impairment.

- Supporting transitions from ECI to early childhood, preschool to elementary school, elementary to middle school and middle school to high school.
- Providing opportunities for families to meet other families and to access training.
- Ensuring that necessary skills are attained for transitioning from school to adult life.
- Consulting with parents, teachers, and other professionals in the home, community and school on providing instruction in the expanded core curriculum areas.
- Modifying the environment to accommodate specific visual needs.
- Modeling appropriate techniques for providing instruction.
- Providing, creating and acquiring adapted materials.
- Providing in-service training and consultation to the team in home, school and community settings.
- Recommending adapted strategies for access to the general curriculum and participation in the school community.
- Ensuring that a vision-specific support system is in place for transitioning from school to adult life.
- Building independence and success in home, community and school environments.

### **Administrative/Record Keeping Duties**

- Registering each eligible student with the Texas Education Agency.
- Maintaining records on all evaluations, IFSPs/IEPs, and progress reports.
- Attending IFSP and ARD meetings.
- Ordering and providing adapted textbooks, as appropriate for each student.
- Ordering adapted materials from the American Printing House for the Blind through the Federal Quota program and from other resources.

Federal and State laws mandate specific involvement of certified teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs) in the educational programs of

students with visual impairments, including those with deafblindness and other additional disabilities:

- Teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs) must be available to students with visual impairments, including deafblindness TAC §89.1131(b)(3).
- TVIs should attend each ARD committee meeting unless they meet the exception conditions described in 34 CFR, §300.321(e)(1), regarding attendance, or 34 CFR, §300.321(e)(2), regarding excusal.
- For each child birth-2 years of age with a visual impairment, including those with deafblindness, a TVI must attend initial and annual individualized family service plan (IFSP) meetings and any other IFSP meeting that addresses issues related to or impacted by the visual impairment. (TEA-ECI MOU) <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/taa/specprog021024a1.doc>).
- IDEA requires that an individual who can interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results be a member of the IEP team. (Statute: TITLE I / B / 614 / d / 1 / B / v).
- No Child Left Behind (Public Law 107-110) mandates the provision of highly qualified professionals. Under most circumstances, the TVI is not the student's highly qualified instructor in academic content areas; instruction in the general curriculum is the primary responsibility of the general education teachers.
- The district shall ensure that the ARD committee for each student with a disability includes the required members. (19 TAC §89.1050 (c) ) All special education and related service personnel shall be certified, endorsed, or licensed in the area(s) of assignments. (19 TAC§89.1131 (a). Eligibility Criteria).



## **X. Role of the Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS)**

---

### **Guideline/Standard #6:**

**Certified orientation and mobility specialists perform required evaluations and instruction.**

---

Movement, independent or supported, is critical for learning. Orientation & mobility (O&M) is recognized in IDEA 2004 as a related service, which may be required to assist a child with a visual impairment to benefit from special education. Certified orientation and mobility specialists (COMS) provide services that enable students who are visually impaired to attain systematic orientation to and safe movement in school, home and community environments. COMS are critical members of the team for all students with visual impairments who have identified O&M needs. (34 CFR §300.34 (c)(7) ). In the state of Texas, orientation and mobility instruction must be provided by a certified orientation and mobility specialist (COMS) (19 T.A.C.§89.1131(e) who is certified by the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP). For information about university coursework and certification requirements and programs for training COMS, refer to the Administrator Tool Box at [www.tsbvi.edu/pds/index.htm](http://www.tsbvi.edu/pds/index.htm).

Certified orientation and mobility specialists (COMS) have many roles, including:

### **Assessment and Evaluation**

- Conducting the functional vision evaluation.
- Conducting the orientation and mobility evaluation.
- Evaluating student progress and providing progress notes as per district policy.

### **Direct Instruction in the Expanded Core Curriculum**

- Encouraging purposeful movement, exploration of immediate surroundings and motor development for infants with visual impairments.

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

### **Supporting Educational Teams**

- Supporting families of young children in developing gross and fine motor skills, sensory skills, basic concepts and other developmental milestones.
- Ensuring continuity from early childhood intervention services to school-aged programs.
- Ensuring that appropriate vision-specific supports are in place and the necessary skills attained for transitioning from school to adult life.
- Modifying the environment to accommodate specific mobility needs.
- Modeling appropriate O&M techniques for other team members.
- Providing, creating and acquiring adapted materials such as tactual maps and mobility devices.
- Providing in-service training and consultation to other team members in home, school and community settings.
- Recommending orientation and mobility strategies for access to the general curriculum such as physical education class, and participation in school and community extracurricular activities.

## **Administrative/Record Keeping Duties**

- Maintaining records on all evaluations, IFSP/IEPs, and progress reports.
- Attending IFSP and ARD meetings.
- Ordering and providing adapted materials from the American Printing House for the Blind through the Federal Quota program and from other resources.

## **XI. Roles of Paraprofessionals for Students with Visual Impairments and Deafblindness**

---

### **Guideline/Standard #7:**

**Written job descriptions identify comprehensive roles of paraprofessionals supporting instruction of students with visual impairments, including deafblindness.**

---

The decision to add a paraprofessional to a student's team is made by the IEP committee after careful consideration of what modifications are necessary to achieve proposed IEP goals. These staff members need specific and ongoing training in order to effectively support learning. No Child Left Behind requires minimum educational levels for paraprofessionals; however, specific training on the impact of visual loss is critical for effective instructional support. The roles of paraprofessionals vary with the specific student or classroom being supported. However, they must support the student with a visual impairment and/or deafblindness with specific direction from the TVI or COMS. When simply assigned to a student without proper orientation of all team members, paraprofessionals can act as a barrier between the student and peer involvement or can re-direct instruction away from the teachers. Over-reliance on a paraprofessional over time can lead students to develop passivity and create prompt dependence.

Classroom paraprofessionals may be hired to provide overall support to the larger class with particular duties for a student with a visual impairment and/or deafblindness. Their role may include assistance for activities of

daily living, health and safety, and/or access to the environment. Many programs hire paraprofessionals to provide assistance with material preparation. Preparation may include copying, highlighting, enlarging and scanning materials.

In addition, there are two unique categories of paraprofessionals for students who are blind and those who are deafblind. When there are students reading braille, districts will hire **braille transcribers**, paraprofessionals who are highly trained to provide specialized braille materials using computer software and tactile graphics devices. **Interveners** are specially trained paraprofessionals who ensure appropriate access to instruction for students who are deafblind. (See <http://www.tsbvi.edu/Outreach/deafblind/intervener.htm>) Training should include information on deafblindness in general and also on the specific communication and learning strategies that are appropriate with individual students. Interveners are needed for some students with deafblindness who require assistance to connect with what is happening in the environment beyond what they can personally see or hear, often using highly individualized communication systems. There is a new category of community intervener within the Medicaid Waiver program. For information, see <http://www.dads.state.tx.us/handbooks/dbmd/index.htm>.

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

- Assisting vision professionals and campus staff to modify instructional materials, to include use of braille translation or magnification software.
- Ordering, storing and distributing large print and braille books under teacher supervision.
- Assisting teacher(s) with individual student activities.
- Reinforcing O&M skills for movement of students between instructional locations or activities.
- Increasing access for students with deafblindness to their immediate environment and implementing a meaningful communication system.

Sample job descriptions of interveners and other paraprofessionals are part of the Administrators Tool Box found at <http://www.tsbvi.edu/programs/job-descriptions.htm>.

## **XII. Role of the Family in the Individualized Family Service Plan/ Individualized Education Program (IFSP/IEP) Process for Students with Visual Impairments**

---

### **Guideline/Standard #8:**

**Families are active members of the instructional team.**

---

Quality education is fostered by collaboration between educators and families. The purpose of early intervention is to support parents and caregivers in developing competence and confidence to help their child learn and develop. Family members will need suggestions and support in order to adapt the environment so that their child has access to information that other children gain through vision.

Coordination of all team members, including family members, helps to assure a shared focus on student success. Families bring knowledge of their child but also need information about the unique needs of and services for students with visual impairments in order to be informed participants on the team. Information about specific teaching strategies, materials and activities will need to be shared with family members to ensure consistent approaches and to support and facilitate quality interactions between the family member and the child. Families need knowledge to advocate effectively for their child's needs. Close partnership with the TVI and COMS is critical. A quick checklist for families is available at <http://www.tsbvi.edu/Outreach/seehear/summer04/qpvi.htm>.

Families of students with visual impairments have the same rights and responsibilities as families of all students with any disabilities. IDEA compliance by states includes the full participation of families in the education of their children. Statute: TITLE 1 / D / 664 / b / 2 / D/viii.

### **XIII. Service Delivery for Infants with Visual Impairments**

---

#### **Guideline/Standard #9:**

**Vision professionals are members of the instructional team for all birth - two year old children with visual impairments and available for services 48 weeks a year.**

---

Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services-Early Childhood Intervention (DARS-ECI) is the lead agency in Texas for infants with disabilities, with specialized services for infants with visual and/or auditory impairments provided by local district staff as mandated by IDEA Part C. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) governs roles and responsibilities and sets standards and funding agreements between DARS-ECI and the Texas Education Agency (TEA) ([www.tea.state.tx.us/special.ed/mou/aivimou.html](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/special.ed/mou/aivimou.html)). Services provided by vision professionals must be available 48 weeks a year for children, birth through age two. The teacher of students with visual impairments (and a teacher of students with auditory impairments for a student with deafblindness) must attend each annual IFSP meeting as well as each IFSP meeting that addresses issues related to and impacted by the visual impairment and/or hearing impairment;.

The MOU promotes interagency collaboration and a coordinated system of activities, policies and procedures to support services for infants. The ECI service coordinator arranges evaluation, coordinates the interagency team for effective delivery of services, sets up IFSP meetings and ensures that records are accurate and up to date. The IFSP is family-driven and provides services in their natural environment focusing on the needs of the child within the family. Teachers of students with visual impairments and certified orientation and mobility specialists often provide services in the home setting as well as day care and other community settings for children under three.

It is the local district's responsibility to provide AI/VI services to all infants residing within district boundaries. The location of service delivery is determined as part of the IFSP process based upon the individual needs of the child, after outcomes are identified and strategies are designed. The

family's routines and the child's daily living experiences are relevant factors to consider in determining the location of services. (cite)

If a child attends daycare outside the boundaries of the school district of resident, the district may:

- Make a formal or informal arrangement with the district that the daycare is in to provide the VI/AI services
- Provide services in the evening or on weekends in the child's home
- Provide services in the daycare that is outside their boundaries ([ECI policy manual, Ch. 1](#))

[The Student Attendance Accounting Handbook \(SAAH\)](#) – Section 3.3.3 Student Entitlement to Attend School in District of Residence, and Texas [Education Code TEC §29.003\(b\)\(1\)](#) and [19 TAC §89.1035](#) outline legal requirements for districts to serve infants with visual impairments. Infants and toddlers birth through 2 years of age who have auditory or visual impairments or both and an IFSP indicating a need for services by the district must be enrolled in the local district or RDSPD..

#### **XIV. Appropriate Educational Placements for Students with Visual Impairments**

---

##### **Guideline/Standard #10:**

**An array of services and placement options are available based on individual student needs.**

---

Children under the age of three are served through ECI in the setting deemed most appropriate to each family situation. The most appropriate setting is determined as the placement supporting the family in achieving desired outcomes for their child with as little disruption as possible to daily routines and family life.

For school aged students, IDEA guides placement. “Part B regulations require public agencies to make available a continuum of alternative placements, or a range of placement options to meet the needs of students with disabilities for special education and related services. The options on

this continuum, which include regular classes, special classes, separate schools, and instruction in hospitals and institutions, must be made available to the extent necessary to implement the IEP of each disabled student.” (OSEP Regulations, 34 CFR §§300.115 and 300.116).

The ARD Committee should determine the most appropriate learning environment for each student based upon individual educational needs. By law, the committee must consider the least restrictive environment (LRE) for each student. LRE is typically interpreted to be the placement closest to the child’s home with an appropriate program to meet assessed needs of the individual child. These needs should include both the core and expanded core subjects for a student with a visual impairment. The law requires the ARD Committee to first look at placement in general education with recommended accommodations and/or modifications.

After considering educational needs in both the general curricula and the expanded core the committee must carefully select from the full array of potential settings. Co-teaching, content mastery, itinerant teacher services, resource rooms, short term programs or summer programs at the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI), self-contained classrooms and/or placement at schools such as TSBVI which have a residential component are all equal options to be considered by the ARD Committee. Student needs should drive placement decisions. Any service delivery option may be the most appropriate for an individual student at any given time, and the appropriate placement option may change over time for a particular student. (34 CFR §300.116)

## **XV. Determining Service Time from the Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (TVI) and/or a Certified Orientation & Mobility Specialist (COMS)**

---

### **Guideline/Standard #11:**

**Times for specialized instruction by certified teachers of students with visual impairments and by certified orientation and mobility specialists are determined by appropriate evaluation in all areas of the core and expanded core curriculum for each student.**

---



The IFSP/IEP team must determine the appropriate amount of services that a student will receive from a TVI or COMS based on the student's assessed needs in both the general and expanded core curricula. These needs must be determined based on appropriate evaluation and/or assessment data. For infants, a plan must be based upon a comprehensive picture of the child, identification of functional goals and the need for expertise from the TVI or COMS in strategies for achieving those outcomes.

**Time for services from the TVI and COMS should not be determined based upon availability of personnel.** The district should establish procedures for documenting student need and the vision professional's time. There is an ongoing shortage of vision professionals in this state and country. Therefore, in order to ensure adequate current and future supplies of certified and qualified vision professionals, a district's program should include **active recruitment for new TVIs and COMS** in conjunction with the regional service centers, TSBVI and personnel preparation programs in the state.

The following are examples of service delivery time options: (More detailed examples of times can be found at <http://www.tsbvi.edu/programs/aspea.htm>.)

- Students require intensive instructional time when beginning to learn Braille. A certified TVI should provide Braille instruction on a daily basis, often for 1-2 hours a day. An additional 2-3 hours per day will be needed for preparation of materials and collaboration with the team.
- Social skill instruction must be frequent enough to ensure mastery and generalization. Instruction may need to be provided directly to the student with guided practice and observation across school and home settings at other times. Vision professionals also have important roles in training campus staff and family members to reinforce newly learned social skills.
- To provide adequate time for community instruction, the COMS may schedule lessons in 2-hour blocks. Time needs to be built into a schedule to permit travel to appropriate settings as well as enough

time to explore and learn decision-making skills for safety in unfamiliar situations.

- Students with low vision who are learning to use optical devices may initially require intensive direct instruction 1-3 times a week, followed by reduced time as mastery increases. Some visual conditions require flexible scheduling to support learning in nighttime environments.
- Students with multiple disabilities need routines that create predictable patterns for learning. To support instruction in newly introduced skills in a transdisciplinary model, the TVI may initially schedule more intensive daily consultation for a specified period of time for:
  - observing the student's current skill levels
  - working directly with the student to determine appropriate modifications to materials or instructional methodology
  - modeling teaching to show other team members appropriate techniques
  - monitoring student progress
- There should be scheduled time for active collaboration and consultation with the educational team, including family members, for each student. When the consultative model includes participating in team evaluations, contributing to the writing of IEPs, working periodically with the student, observing across activities, modeling appropriate teaching strategies, creating and preparing communication materials, and attending staffings on a complex student, considerable time may be required from the TVI and/or COMS.
- A successful student with stable low vision may require minimal assistance beyond adapted materials and communication with the general education team and family. Assuming the student's progress in the expanded core curriculum is assessed by the TVI annually, this student may only require consultative services on a monthly or twice monthly basis.
- Service delivery for infants with visual impairments should be individually planned to match the needs of the family. The TVI and COMS may provide direct instruction to the infant and family. In addition, to ensure consistency and prevent fragmented services,

home visits may be combined with other team members such as early interventionists, physical therapists, speech language pathologists or social workers.

The TVI and O&M Specialist will make the recommendation as to whether direct or indirect (consultative) service is needed. This decision must be based on the assessed needs of the student. Direct service is appropriate for a student who has needs that only a particular professional can meet efficiently, legally and appropriately. For example, the O&M specialist is the professional who should introduce instruction in the use of a cane or teach the use of low vision devices for street crossings. The TVI is the professional who teaches new Braille skills or evaluates visual functioning in classroom environments. In addition to direct services, the vision professional must schedule time with the other team members and the family to ensure consistency in programming across the day.

Consultation is a model that can be used effectively to support a variety of educational purposes. Consultation services can be used to ensure that a student has multiple opportunities in a day to use a particular skill and that modifications are implemented throughout all instructional settings. This model is critical for students who cannot generalize to new locations or situations. Communicating about student programming and progress with all parties involved in a student's educational program can be extremely time-intensive. Depending on the student's needs and the instructional setting, the amount of time needed for consultation can vary from daily to once a month. Observation times across the school day and at home must be scheduled to provide documentation of student progress and necessary programming adjustments. Collaboration should occur between the family, TVI, COMS, classroom teacher and other personnel to assure that the student's needs are appropriately addressed.

- For example, the TVI may demonstrate instructional strategies to the classroom teacher that will enable a student to efficiently view a lesson or meet with ECI staff to incorporate strategies important for sensory skill development into other developmental areas.
- For another student, the vision professional may work with school personnel so that tactual cues are provided in the hallways and classrooms to facilitate use of independent mobility skills.

The time needed for an individual student from vision professionals can be expected to change over his or her educational career. Some students will perform independently and competently in school until changes occur in social demands, academic requirements or new environments. For example, a student who has been receiving consultation only in elementary school may need direct instructional support as appropriate to match current needs upon entering middle school. Once skills are acquired, service time may be reduced by the ARD committee.

Many IFSP and IEP goals and objectives can be developed and addressed collaboratively by the primary service provider, which is typically the Early Intervention Specialist or classroom teacher, with support from the vision professional. Overall time recommended may be weekly thirty minute or hour-long visits.

The district should establish procedures for documenting student progress and the vision professional's time.

## **XVI. Determining Appropriate Caseloads for Vision Professionals**

---

### **Guideline/standard #12:**

**Written caseload guidelines are used to evaluate caseloads of vision professionals.**

---

Districts should establish procedures to determine appropriate student caseloads for TVIs and COMS. It is important that caseloads allow for necessary instruction and services to meet the unique educational needs of students with visual impairments. Objective tools should be administered, with supervisory input, at least annually to evaluate adequacy of staffing levels. Although finding highly trained personnel in this field is a challenge for Texas schools, establishing caseloads to effectively assure that student needs are met is appropriate. It is important to establish appropriate case loads.

Division 16, the Itinerant Services Division of The Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) position paper

states that “a teacher’s caseload should be based on the time needed for the student to achieve the IEP goals, including time for direct service, collaboration/consultation, lesson and material preparation, evaluation, and driving. Caseloads based on the assessed needs of students will ensure that students will receive the amount of service necessary to meet their educational goals.”

Students served using the consultation model, particularly those with multiple impairments, may require as much time from the TVI and/or COMS as a student provided direct instruction. Participation in evaluation, observation in multiple settings and across multiple activities, modeling strategies and attending team meetings can require extensive time.

Written caseload guidelines in the professional literature advocate an average ratio of from 8 to 12 students per teacher for quality services. The National Plan for Training Personnel to Serve Students With Blindness and Low Vision (CEC, 2000) noted a preferred ratio of 8:1. The American Foundation for the Blind (1989) and the California Department of Education (1997) both provide similar ranges based on national averages for caseload and class size to be used as guidelines. For itinerant teachers, both describe an average range of from 8 to 12 students for TVIs and COMS, a range of 8 to 12 for a resource room with one teacher and one paraprofessional, and fewer for classes with younger children.

There are a variety of effective and objective tools for determining caseloads. These are available for download from the Administrator’s Tool Box at <http://www.tsbvi.edu/programs/caseload-intro.htm>. Administrators can work with their vision professionals to implement the Michigan severity rating scales, Iowa staffing pattern recommendations, Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority (APSEA) guidelines, Colorado Caseload Management Guidelines (1995) or the Quality Programs for Students with Visual Impairments (QPVI) program to assist in determining appropriate caseloads.

The caseloads need to be regularly monitored to assure equity between teachers and adequate staffing to meet student needs.

## **XVII. Conclusion**

Students with visual impairments, including those with multiple disabilities and/or deafblindness, are a heterogeneous population. The small number of such students makes it difficult for any one school or program to have full knowledge and adequate resources to meet varied and intensive specialized needs of this unique student population. This document was designed to provide a guideline into key components for appropriate individual educational program planning for these students and critical resources available to schools and families. The document references the impact and key areas as outlined in the [National Agenda](#) for the Education of Children and Youths with Visual Impairments, including those with Multiple Disabilities. Further information and support is available from the regional Education Service Centers, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and local vision professionals.

## XVIII. Additional Resources

For additional information on the education of students with visual impairments:

### Websites:

- Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals: <http://www.acvrep.org/>
- American Council for the Blind of Texas: <http://www.acbtexas.org/>
- American Foundation for the Blind: [www.afb.org](http://www.afb.org) and Family Connect website [www.afb.org/familyconnect.org](http://www.afb.org/familyconnect.org)
- American Printing House for the Blind: [www.aph.org](http://www.aph.org)
- Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired: [www.aerbvi.org](http://www.aerbvi.org)
- Council for Exceptional Children <http://www.cec.sped.org>
- DARS Division for Blind Services:  
<http://www.dars.state.tx.us/dbs/index.shtml>
- DARS Early Childhood Intervention:  
<http://www.dars.state.tx.us/ecis/index.shtml>
- DB-LINK: <http://www.dblink.org/>
- Deaf Blind Multi-Handicapped Association of Texas:  
<http://www.dbmat-tx.org/>
- Hadley School for the Blind: <http://www.hadley.edu/default.asp>
- IDEA legislation: <http://idea.ed.gov/>
- National Federation of the Blind: <http://www.nfb.org/>
- National Association of Parents of Children with Visual Impairments: [www.Napvi.org](http://www.Napvi.org)
- Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic: <http://www.rfbd.org>
- Stephen F. Austin State University: [www.SFASU.org](http://www.SFASU.org) .

- Texas Association of Parents of Children with Visual Impairments: [www.tapvi.net](http://www.tapvi.net)
- Texas Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired: <http://www.txaer.org/>
- Texas Education Agency – Special Ed Home Page: <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/special.ed/>
- Texas Education Agency – Special Ed Rules & Regulations: <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/special.ed/rules/comm.html>
- Texas Parents of Blind Children: [www.Txpobc.org](http://www.Txpobc.org)
- Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired: [www.tsbvi.edu](http://www.tsbvi.edu)
- Texas Tech University: [www.ttu.org](http://www.ttu.org)



## Reference Publications:

- Blankenship, K. (2007). *Iowa expanded core curriculum resource guide*. Iowa Department of Education.
- Corn, A.L., Hatlen, P., Huebner, K.M., Siller, M.A., & Ryan, F. (1995). *National agenda for education of children and youths with visual impairments, including those with multiple disabilities*. New York: American Foundation for the Blind
- Department of Education 34 CFR Parts 300 and 301 RIN 1820-AB57 Assistance to States for the Education of Children with Disabilities and Preschool Grants for Children with Disabilities. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services Department of Education
- Division of Visual Impairment of the Council for Exceptional Children  
*Position Papers* available at: <http://www.cecdivi.org/positionpapers.html>
- Hazekamp, J., & Huebner, K. M. (1989). *Program planning and evaluation for blind and visually impaired students: National guidelines for educational excellence*. New York, NY: American Foundation for the Blind.
- Huebner, K., et al., (2004). *National agenda for the education of children and youths with visual impairments, including those with multiple disabilities*. New York, NY: AFB Press.
- Koenig, A. & M. Cay Holbrook (2000). *Foundations of education, 2nd Edition Vol. I: History and theory of teaching children and youth with visual impairments*. New York, NY: AFB Press.
- Koenig, A. & M. Cay Holbrook (2000). *Foundations of education, 2nd Edition Vol. II: Instructional strategies for teaching children and youths with visual impairments*. New York, NY: AFB Press.
- Loftin, M. (2006). *Making Evaluation Meaningful: Determining Additional Eligibilities and Appropriate Educational Strategies for Blind and Visually Impaired Students*. Austin, TX: TSBVI.
- National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE): Blind and Visually Impaired Students: Educational Service Guidelines (1999)*. Dr. Gaylen Pugh, Project Director. Watertown, MA: Hilton Perkins Foundation, Perkins School for the Blind
- National Center for Health Statistics (1998), National Health Interview Survey--Disability Supplement, 1994-95, <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhis.htm>

Pogrund, Rona L. & Diane L. Fazzi, eds. (2002). *Early Focus: Working with Young Children who are Visually Impaired and Their Families*. New York, NY: AFB Press.

*Professional Preparation and Certification of Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments* (Erin, Holbrook, Sanspree & Swallow, 2006) (CEC position paper) [www.cec.org](http://www.cec.org)

*Student-Centered Educational Placement Decisions: The Meaning, Interpretation, and Application of Least Restrictive Environment for Students with Visual Impairments* (Huebner, Garber & Wormsley, 2006) (CEC position paper) [www.cec.org](http://www.cec.org)

*The Role and Function of the Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments* (Spungin & Ferrell, 2007) (CEC position paper) [www.cec.org](http://www.cec.org)

*The Role of Orientation and Mobility Specialist in the Public School* (Griffin-Shirley, Kelley & Lawrence, 2006) (CEC position paper) [www.cec.org](http://www.cec.org)

Texas Education Agency (in press), *Best practices: Educating students with visual impairments*.

Texas Education Code, Commissioner's Rules Concerning Special Education Services 89.AA. Chapter 89. Adaptation for Special Populations (November 11, 2007).

### **Education Service Centers:**

There is a visual impairment certified specialist at every regional Education Service Center in Texas. To find the visual impairment specialist at your ESC, go to the State Leadership Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired site at [www.esc11.net](http://www.esc11.net) or contact Olga Uriegas, SLSBVI State Lead at 817-740-7567.esc11.net

## **XIX. List of Guideline/Standards:**

1. Eligibility is determined by an individualized family service plan (IFSP) or an admission, review and dismissal (ARD) committee based upon a medical report, functional vision evaluation and learning media assessment.
2. Vision professionals provide expertise specific to visual impairments prior to and during the full and individual evaluation.
3. Evaluations of all areas of the expanded core curriculum are used to determine individual student programs.
4. Appropriate instructional time, accommodations and modifications are provided to meet all identified areas in individual student programs.
5. Certified teachers of students with visual impairments perform required evaluations and instruction.
6. Certified orientation and mobility specialists perform required evaluations and instruction.
7. Written job descriptions identify comprehensive roles of paraprofessionals supporting instruction of students with visual impairments, including deafblindness.
8. Families are active members of the instructional team.
9. Vision professionals are members of the instructional team for all birth - two year old children with visual impairments and available for services 48 weeks a year.
10. An array of services and placement options are available based on individual student needs.
11. Times for specialized instruction by certified teachers of students with visual impairments and by certified orientation and mobility specialists are determined by appropriate evaluation in all areas of the core and expanded core curriculum for each student.
12. Written caseload guidelines are used to evaluate caseloads of vision professionals.

## XX. Frequently Asked Questions

1. Is a medical report signifying a visual problem sufficient to qualify as a student with visual impairment?

Under Federal law, the local school district must use a variety of assessment tools and strategies and not any single measure or assessment as the sole criterion for determining whether a child is a child with a disability or determining an appropriate educational program for the child. Eligibility for services as a student with visual impairment is determined based upon a medical report, a functional vision evaluation and a learning media assessment that indicate that there is a visual impairment that even with correction adversely affects a child's educational performance. (See Section V in this document.)

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

[Learning Media Assessment](#) is a required evaluation for determining each student's literacy medium. Under [Texas Administrative Code](#), a certified teacher of students with visual impairments must conduct this evaluation; it will include recommendations for the use of visual, tactual, and auditory learning media. Decisions on whether a student should learn and use braille for literacy includes evaluating the efficiency with which the student gathers information from various sensory channels, the types of general literacy media the student uses, or will use, to accomplish reading and writing tasks and the literacy media the student will use for reading and writing. More information is at <http://www.tsbvi.edu/Outreach/seehear/spring03/literacy.htm>. (See Sections IV and V in this document.)

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

An ARD committee considers evidence to determine the eligibility of a student for services as a student with deafblindness. Texas law establishes eligibility for deafblindness using 4 separate sets of criteria. The third eligibility criteria states that a student can be considered as deafblind if the student: "(C) has documented hearing and visual losses that, if considered individually, may not meet the requirements for auditory impairment or visual impairment, but the *combination of such losses* adversely affects the student's educational performance;" (See Section IV in this document.)

4. Do all students need evaluation by a certified orientation and mobility specialist?

Federal law 34 CFR §300.304(c)(4) requires that “the child is assessed in all areas related to the suspected disability” and 34 CFR §300.304(c)(6) “the evaluation is sufficiently comprehensive to identify all of the child’s special education and related services needs”. Therefore, it is recommended that an evaluation of orientation and mobility skills by a certified orientation and mobility specialist (COMS) be requested, along with the evaluation by a certified teacher of students with visual impairment (TVI), as part of determining the need for eligibility as a student with a visual impairment. The functional vision evaluation performed by a TVI and/or a COMS must include recommendations concerning the need for an orientation and mobility evaluation. (See Section IV in this document.)

5. Do all students with visual impairments need IEPs in all areas of the expanded core curriculum?

The Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) identifies critical skills that are impacted by the presence of a visual impairment. [IDEA](#) requires consideration of present levels of performance in both academic and functional areas. The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) has endorsed the term “Expanded Core Curriculum” to describe areas that should be included in the comprehensive evaluation of students with visual impairments. Annual IEPs should be considered by an ARD committee when evaluation results indicate a need for instruction in areas of the ECC. (See Sections V and VI in this document.)

6. Which professionals must attend an ARD meeting for a student who is visually impaired?

According to Texas Administrative Code Section [89.1050\(c\)\(4\)\(C\)](#), a teacher who is certified in the education of children with visual impairments must attend each ARD for a child with a suspected or documented visual impairment including suspected or documented deafblindness. (See Section IX in this document)

7. Which professionals must attend an ARD meeting for a student who is deafblind?

According to [Texas Administrative Code Section 89.1050\(c\)\(4\)\(C\)](#), for a student with suspected or documented deafblindness, the ARD committee shall include a teacher who is certified in the education of students with visual impairments and a teacher who is certified in the education of students with auditory impairments (See Section IX in this document)

8. Are there specific roles for paraprofessionals working with students with visual impairments or deafblindness?

When an ARD committee determines that a paraprofessional is needed as a member of a student's educational team, there needs to be careful consideration of the specific training needed by that individual for their role in supporting implementation of the IEP. Students with deafblindness may require an intervener, a paraprofessional with training in appropriate access to instruction for students with combined hearing and vision impairments. (See Section XI in this document.)

9. Must a TVI attend the IFSP meetings for infants with visual impairments?

According to the Memorandum of Understanding between DARS-ECI and the Texas Education Agency, the teacher of students with visual impairments (and a teacher of students with auditory impairments for a student with deafblindness) must attend each annual IFSP meeting and each IFSP meeting that addresses issues related to and impacted by the visual impairment and/or hearing impairment;. (See Section XIII in this document.)

10. Does a district have to enroll an infant (birth through 2 years) with a visual impairment?

es. Students with hearing and/or visual impairments are eligible to be served from birth. The Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services-Early Childhood Intervention (DARS-ECI) is the lead agency in Texas for infants with disabilities. However, the specialized services for visual and/or auditory impairments are provided by local district staff, as mandated by IDEA Part C. (See Section XIII in this document)

11. How does a student get referred to attend the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired?

or admission to TSBVI, students must have been determined by their local school districts to be eligible for educational services as students with a visual impairment or deafblindness. Referrals for consideration for admission must be originated by the student's local school district in collaboration with the student's parent. TSBVI cannot accept direct parent referrals. The TSBVI is one placement option in the continuum of placement options for students with visual impairments and/or deafblindness. (See Section XIV in this document)

12. How much time is should be provided by a teacher of students with visual impairments?

etermination of the amount of service time and the type of service delivery is based upon the assessed needs of the student, the educational setting, the types of skills to be taught, and other factors. It is an individualized decision for each student. There are guidelines for amount of service posted at the [www.tsbvi.edu/programs/](http://www.tsbvi.edu/programs/) website. (See Section XV in this document.)