



Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Outreach Programs

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Introduction to the T-TESS Companion for VI Professionals: Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists (COMS®)

This document is intended to be used as a companion to the T-TESS (or other district appraisal system) and provides information specific to professionals working with students with visual impairments. It is assumed that administrators will have the same expectations for excellence for professionals in visual impairments as other educators regardless of the instructional setting, existing disabilities and/or age of the student.

Orientation and mobility (O&M) is a related service that is provided to students from birth through 21 who are blind or visually impaired, including those with multiple disabilities. O&M specialists may travel to many campuses and community settings to deliver services.

Students have been identified through evaluation as needing O&M instruction by a certified orientation and mobility specialist (COMS). The ultimate goal of O&M programming is to assure that students with visual impairments are safe and efficient when moving in their **home, school and community** as required in IDEA. Instruction may include, but is not limited to:

- sensory and concept development (the basic building blocks of orientation)
- purposeful movement
- self-directed (independent) travel
- use of assistive technology (canes, optical and GPS devices)
- public transportation
- street crossings

Orientation and mobility goals should address functional skills that are not typically based on enrolled grade content standards. Instruction occurs in natural environments such as grocery stores, malls, restaurants, residential and commercial/business settings in addition to the home and school environments.

O&M lessons often include periods of discovery, meaning students may experience natural consequences through trial and error (e.g., contact obstacles with or without their canes, step off of curbs unexpectedly or become disoriented along a route). This technique encourages students to rely on their orientation and mobility skills in order to become safe and independent travelers.

A pre-conference is highly recommended to help guide the observation. Pre-conference topics could include a review of the following topics specifically related to the student being observed:

- Cognitive functioning and communication level
- Degree of vision and/or hearing loss and presence of additional disabilities if applicable
- Behavioral strategies
- O&M goals/objectives
- Collaboration with other individuals

Legal references related to students with visual impairments to support this document include the following:

- Educating Students with Visual Impairments in Texas: Guidelines and Standards: <http://www.tsbvi.edu/resources-weblinks/1147-2015-guidelines-and-standards>
- TSBVI O&M page: <http://www.tsbvi.edu/o-m-page>
- Code of Ethics for Orientation and Mobility Specialists: <https://www.acvrep.org/ascerteon/control/certifications/coms-code>
- O&M in home, school & community settings: <http://idea.ed.gov/explore/home> search: 300.34c7