



Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Instructional Resources Library

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Tips for Working with Elementary-Aged Blind Students Who Are Functioning on Grade Level

Information for general educators who have a student who is blind in their classroom.

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VI Professionals

Your student will be working with two different types of VI professionals. Here is a very brief description of these two roles:

The Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (TSVI/TVI) will be responsible for teaching specific skills that assist the student in participating in the general education curriculum. In addition, the TSVI may be working on skills affected by vision loss, such as assistive technology, social skills, tactile skills, recreational skills, career awareness, and independent living skills. Collectively, these skills are referred to as the Expanded Core Curriculum and are required elements of the blind student's programming. TSVIs do not serve as tutors if or when the student lacks topic-related academic concepts.

The Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS) will be responsible for teaching orientation (the process of using sensory information to establish and maintain one's position in the environment) and mobility (the process of moving safely, efficiently, and gracefully within one's environment). The COMS will also educate you and your class on safety rules related to a mobility device (e.g., cane), and human guide techniques for walking with another person.

About Braille

Braille is code in which some words are spelled out, some have letter parts combined, and some have contractions:

Example: "cat" is brailled c- a- t (spelled out)

"shout" is brailled with a sign for sh and a sign for out (sh+ out)

"for" is brailled by using a contraction for the entire word

That is why, when you ask the blind student to spell out the word he is stuck on, he may be unable to do this because he is actually stuck on the braille symbols (or contractions).

YOU WILL NOT BE EXPECTED TO READ OR TEACH BRAILLE YOURSELF. Most Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (TSVIs) will “interline” (write in print above a word in braille) for students learning braille so that you can follow along as the student does his work.

In regards to braille, the TSVI will be providing the following:

- direct instruction with the student to teach braille reading, writing, and formats (writing personal letters, outlines, graphs, charts, maps, tables, etc.)
- equipment and materials needed to produce braille
- a print interpretation of everything the student writes in braille so that you may grade it
- assignments you make in braille
- workbooks, library books, and commercially produced materials may be brailled by other agencies and are ordered by the TSVI at your request

Some print formats do not transform into braille well, particularly in first and second grades, because they rely heavily on pictorial representations. The best thing to do is to always provide a copy of the document in question, and the TSVI can change the format so that the student can still learn the concepts.

Braille Procurement

The print materials you use in your class should be made available to the blind student at the same time they are issued to the print students to avoid learning gaps. If you use papers generated from the various subject curricula, let the TSVI know at least two weeks before they can braille them for you on time. Some school districts have a dedicated brailist to prepare materials, and the TSVI may act as a liaison between you and this person. You and the TSVI will discuss how to organize this process so that you find it workable.

Before we leave this topic - a word on "spontaneity." Many teachers say they sometimes feel stymied by having to prepare in advance so that the braille student will have the materials needed, particularly in situations where they see the class needs an immediate review of a concept they are having trouble learning. You should go ahead with what you would normally do, and describe the material in a way to include the blind student.

Braille Books

Braille books are big and bulky. One print book may have as many as four or more braille volumes. Current volumes should be stored in the classroom, but the extra books could be stored elsewhere. Ideally, the rest of the volumes should be stored on a shelf in your room so that the student can quickly retrieve them as needed. If print users are allowed to write in their workbooks, i.e., circle or underline answers, the braille student should do the same in his braille book. Answers can be transferred to a print sheet by the TSVI for you to grade and parents to see. That is why the TSVI may request print copies of all workbooks issued to the blind student. Braille books may be taken home if you assign homework from the book.

Textbooks and Curricular Materials Presented Online (Digital Content)

The TSVI will work with you in advance in order to determine the content and format of online materials. If the (younger) student has not yet learned to use a screen reader (e.g., JAWS), then some

materials may need to be provided in a tactile format paired with auditory descriptions of images. Some digital content is inaccessible, and so the student may need an alternate but parallel assignment to accommodate difficulty in access to digital materials.

Materials Written on Whiteboard

It helps the blind student if you read over the materials which have been written on the board, or verbalize as you write. Another approach is to have a neighboring student quietly read the material to the blind student as he writes in braille anything that is needed for later use (e.g., vocabulary words, daily assignments, math problems). Any reference materials posted on charts around the classroom will need to be provided in braille and kept in a binder at the student's desk.

Student Output

Studies indicate a braille reader takes sometimes as much as twice the time to read and write due to the bulkiness and awkward formats of braille. Something to consider is to allow the braille student to complete a little more than half the work WHEN THIS WILL NOT JEOPARDIZE content mastery. This will not work for all subjects, particularly science and social studies. But it does work well in spelling, math, and some reading activities. Remember, a blind student cannot quickly insert a page of work into a braille to "fill in the blanks," and so for everything he does, he has to prepare an answer sheet and transfer the item number as well as the answer over to the paper. This alone takes more time than simply writing answers directly on the page, as print users can do.

Math

Because braille students cannot "figure" on paper as easily as print students, they are taught to use a device called a Cranmer abacus. This is an abacus that has been modified for use by blind students. The TSVI will provide all instruction with the student on the abacus in conjunction with your math curriculum. TEA allows this device to be used in all standardized testing situations through college, and therefore it is a tremendous advantage for the blind student.

The use of a "talking calculator" is not appropriate until basic math facts are memorized and concepts of multi-digit calculations are demonstrated by the student. Use of calculators on statewide testing (in Texas) is an allowable accommodation as determined by the IEP.

Computer

If your class frequents the computer lab, a computer will be equipped with both the hardware and software necessary for the blind student's use. The TSVI may be expected to teach these modifications to the blind student at the appropriate developmental stages. If students in your class are using a computer regularly, the blind student will be taught ways to access materials through their auditory channel. There are software programs (e.g., JAWS) that read information on the computer and internet, which will require instruction from the TSVI.

Technology

Typically, instruction on touch typing begins once a student reaches the 3rd grade so they can learn how to produce their work in print. The TSVI may also have available other electronic devices that allow the student to write in braille which can also translate the braille into print that can be shared with the teacher. In some situations, the student may need multiple pieces of equipment, which may require

extra desk-top space. A technology assessment will be performed by the TSVI to match equipment with the student's needs. The VI program typically provides specialized equipment and training with the student.

Organization

You and the TSVI will work together to teach organization to the blind student. They have so many books to deal with and papers coming from all directions that they have a difficulty FINDING things! So there are a few rules you may want to stress:

- all papers must have a heading, including name, date, and the assignment
- when print sheets are stapled to the braille copy of a worksheet they must remain together
- books must remain in their designated place when not in use
- old volumes must be placed back on the shelf when they are no longer being used
- completed papers must be turned in to be either translated into print by the VI personnel or directly graded by you if already in print
- graded papers must be stored in one location and taken home on a specified date (follow class routine)
- incomplete work should be stored in one location until ready to turn in
- at no time should papers be shoved into a desk or left lying around on the floor.

Ideally, students in the 3rd grade on up should start using a 3- ring binder with subject dividers or folders labeled in braille and kept in a tub/crate to keep everything together in one place.

Discipline

Blind children are not different from their sighted peers in regard to discipline. They, too, require a structure that is well-defined with consequences for misbehavior. This is crucial if we are to help a blind child function successfully within any environment. So, if homework isn't turned in on time, if the child doesn't raise his hand before responding, if he talks out of turn, if he does a sloppy job on his work, or goes against any of the other rules you feel are important - react as you would for any child. If a particular behavior bugs you or seems "socially inappropriate", it would be a tremendous social value to the blind child for you to help change that behavior, and, in fact, that's one of the main reasons blind children benefit so much from an education in the general education setting. Please do discuss concerns about behavior with the VI professional, though, as there are sometimes issues related to the visual impairment causing the behavior.

Playgrounds

Free play is an important social motivator and physical fitness component for any child, and a blind student should be included in this setting. A Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS) can orient your student to the layout of the playground before the school year begins. She can also determine if the student functions safely on play equipment and give you tips on how to provide sound cues to help localization of equipment (e.g., wind chimes hanging from a playscape). The COMS can also show your class "guide techniques" to safely guide a blind student in many settings, including the playground.

Fire Drills

During a fire drill, assign another student to act as a guide to the designated location. Never grab the student's hand and run.

Cafeteria

Your blind student can be oriented to the cafeteria by the COMS or TSVI at the beginning of the school year. They will also talk to the cafeteria staff on how to let the student know what is available to eat. The student should be expected to move through the lunch line with the other students but may need instruction from the VI professionals on how to balance a tray of food and walk with a cane to find where his classroom is seated. Placing a Styrofoam tray on a hard plastic tray might make carrying more stable.

Teaching Methods

These are some things you might consider as you embark on the day-to-day routines of teaching with a blind student in your classroom.

- Verbalize as you write on the whiteboard or charts - be as explicit as possible as you verbalize, for example: "Go stand by the door" instead of "Go over there," "Let's look at sentence #5," instead of, "Look at the next one;" "I have circled one quarter and one nickel; how much is that?" instead of, "How much have I circled?"
- When you tell the students to get out their books and open to page _____, glance over to the blind student to make sure he is following your instructions, then check to see that he is on the right page (for 1st - 3rd graders).
- As you introduce a lesson and are giving examples of how to complete an activity, ask the blind child a question to check his understanding of the task.
- If you are handing out a worksheet on which the directions have been modified for the blind student, you may want to develop a routine in which you go around to him for more specific instructions after you get the class started (this applies mostly to 1st - 3rd graders).
- Don't be afraid to use the words "look" and "see," as these sound more normal than saying things like, "Here, feel this!, or, "Did you listen to TV last night?"
- If it can be touched, encourage tactual exploration. Guide the student's hands using "[hand-under-hand](#)" technique to explore rather than placing your hands on top of the student's.