

2024 Guidelines and Standards for Educating Students with Visual Impairments in Texas

To find this document on the web:

On the [Texas Education Agency \(TEA\) website](#)

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

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Note: About the Use of the Terms Deafblind and TDB

In 2016, the American Association of the DeafBlind changed the presentation of their name from Deaf-Blind to DeafBlind. Helen Keller National Center and the National Family Association for DeafBlind have also adopted this format. There are organizations following the Federal IDEA format, which continues to use the hyphen, such as the National Center on Deaf-Blindness.

Other groups have noted a preference for using a combined term with no capitals, e.g., deafblind. The national consumer group, DeafBlind Citizens in Action (DBCA), has chosen to use deafblind as a combined non-capitalized word (except in their title) to recognize a distinct, unified disability. Internationally, the most common current label is deafblind, including within Deafblind International, The World Federation of the Deafblind and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This nomenclature is clearly an ongoing conversation within the community.

In this document, the term will be presented as **deafblind**, except for citing legal documents or matching titles of organizations and previously published documents using a different format.

In 2020, the Texas State Board for Educator Certification approved a set of standards for a new teacher certification - a teacher of students who are deafblind (TDB). This will be a supplemental certification attached to existing TSVI and/or TDHH certification. Currently, procedures for certifying this new professional, including required coursework and examination, are under development, with a fall 2025 potential rollout. Rules governing participation of the TDB in determining eligibility and the development and implementation of the IFSP/IEP will also need to be determined. There are many professionals currently serving students who are deafblind who have taken advanced coursework and received certificates or master's degrees in this field. TDBs are mentioned in this document as partners in the evaluation and instruction of students who are deafblind.

I. Need for This Document

The American education system has a broad goal of preparing all students for lifelong success. Some stated objectives of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) are to ensure an educational program is available to all students with disabilities that prepares them “for further education, employment, and independent living” (IDEA: Regulations, Part 300) and to “lead productive and independent adult lives, to the maximum extent possible” (IDEA: Title 1). This document addresses how to accomplish these goals for the population of students who are blind or have low vision, including those who are deafblind.

Students with visual impairments have unique learning needs that must be addressed if they are going to graduate ready for further education, employment, and/or independent living. Employment has often been used as a gauge for educational success. Based on 2022 American Community Survey (ACS) data, 51.3% of 21-64 year old people who are blind or have low vision were employed, compared to 77.5% of those without a disability in the same age range ([Disability Statistics, Cornell University](#)). Educators clearly face a significant challenge in providing educational programs that lead to successful post-school outcomes for this population. Why is that?

In addition to the general education curriculum instruction that all students receive, students who are blind or have low vision, starting at birth, also need an **Expanded Core Curriculum** (ECC) to meet needs directly related to their visual impairment. This requirement is embedded in Texas law in TEC§30.002, Subsections (c-1) and (c-2)). These nine ECC areas include:

- Compensatory and functional academic skills that permit access to the general curriculum (such as braille, concept development, tactile graphics, Nemeth Code, and specialized communication skills)
- Orientation and mobility skills
- Social interaction skills
- Career education and planning
- Assistive technology (AT), including optical devices
- Independent living skills
- Recreation and leisure skills
- Self-determination
- Sensory efficiency (including visual, tactual, and auditory skills)

Making appropriate decisions about the development and implementation of programs and services for this population requires a clear understanding of these unique learning needs. Administrators must have knowledge about specialized personnel, materials, equipment, and educational settings to ensure appropriate IFSP and IEP planning for these students. Knowing the features of a quality program is also key for students and family members so that they can advocate for appropriate services to meet their needs and/or the needs of their child.

Program administrators must understand the essential role that appropriately certified personnel provide within the educational team for every student who is blind or has low vision. These specially trained individuals include certified teachers of students with visual impairments (TSVIs) and certified orientation and mobility specialists (COMS). In addition, students who are deafblind need teachers who have specialized deafblind knowledge and training (TDBs), teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing (TDHH), and may require trained interveners and/or interpreters. 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 school administrators, educational staff, family members, and other decision makers with a set of guidelines and standards to evaluate the quality of their programs for students with visual impairments. These guidelines and standards are highlighted in each section. There are also resource links and descriptions of components found in high-quality programs along with references to current federal and state laws, rules, and regulations that impact the education of students who are blind or have low vision in Texas.

Resources cited in this document include federal and state laws and procedures, professional organization standards, and additional sources reflected in Sections XVII, XIX-XX, and XXV-XXVI. Primary legal sources are S. 1177 — 114th Congress: Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 2004 revision, current Texas Education Code (TEC), and the Texas Administrative Code (TAC). Primary professional references are from the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER).

III. The Population of Students with Visual Impairments

The population of students who are blind or have low vision is diverse. In January of 2024, a total of 10,930 students were registered with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) as eligible for specialized instruction due to a visual impairment. This count includes 873 students eligible for services as students who are deafblind. Students who are eligible for services as a student with a visual impairment may also have additional disabilities.

These students:

- May be totally blind or have varying degrees of low vision
- Range from birth to 22 years of age
- May have been born with a visual impairment or may have acquired a visual impairment at a later time in their life
- May or may not be learning on the same academic level as their peers
- May also be deaf or hard of hearing (deafblind)
- May have a visual condition related to ocular disorders or due to neurological causes (such as cerebral or cortical visual impairment) or both
- May also be eligible to receive services under other IDEA categories of special education (such as intellectual disability, physical disability, deaf or hard of hearing, emotional or behavioral problems, autism, or specific learning disabilities) ¹
- May have additional medical needs and considerations
- May be receiving instruction in a variety of instructional settings, including the home, school, and community

IV. Determining Eligibility for Students with Visual Impairments

Guideline/Standard #1

Eligibility is determined by an individualized family service plan (IFSP) or by an admission, review, and dismissal/individualized education plan (ARD/IEP) committee. It is based upon an eye medical report, functional vision evaluation, a learning media assessment, and an orientation and mobility evaluation. A COMS must be part of the team that determines the scope of any needed full and individual reevaluations.

Visual impairment and **deafblind** are recognized disability eligibility categories for special education and related services in federal law. A [guidance document](#) (TEA, 2021) provides information for an assessment team as they determine eligibility of a student as having a visual impairment.

The term *visual impairment including blindness* means an impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects the child's educational performance. This definition includes those who are blind or have low vision (TAC §89.1040(c)(12), 34 CFR §300.8(c)(13)). All rules related to visual impairment also apply to students who

¹ TEA's Legal Framework includes a specific example of a student with intellectual disability AND a visual impairment: "Multiple disabilities means impairments occurring at the same time (such as intellectual disabilities-blindness or intellectual disabilities-orthopedic impairment..."

are deafblind, with additional criteria listed later in this section.

Children may receive services for visual impairment from birth through school graduation. IDEA Part C describes and mandates early childhood intervention services for children with disabilities from birth through two years of age (34 CFR §300.25). IDEA Part B governs services for students with disabilities ages three through twenty-one.

In determining eligibility and educational need, the educational committee must consider information from a variety of sources; no single source determines eligibility (34 CFR §300.306(c)(i)). In order for a student to be eligible for special education services as a student with visual impairment under Texas state law TEC §30.002 and 19 TAC §89.1040, the IFSP or ARD/IEP committee must be provided a range of information gathered from a variety of sources, which must include the following:

- A medical eye report by a licensed ophthalmologist or optometrist.
- A functional vision evaluation (FVE) conducted by a TSVI and/or a COMS.
- A learning media assessment (LMA) that must be conducted by a TSVI
- An orientation and mobility (O&M) evaluation by a COMS - required for initial eligibility, and a COMS must be a member of the multidisciplinary team reviewing the scope of any needed reevaluation in subsequent years.

In some cases, it may be difficult to obtain a current eye medical report. The local education agency (LEA) is responsible for evaluation, including acquiring an eye report and transportation to and from the appointment if the parent cannot provide transportation (34 CFR §300.154(f)). It is preferable for the FVE, LMA, and O&M evaluations to be conducted after the eye medical exam, because medical corrections, such as prescribed glasses, may influence a student's performance on other components of the assessment process. However, there is not a legal requirement for a specific sequence of the visual impairment eligibility evaluations.

Federal law states that "each public agency must conduct a full and individual evaluation, in accordance with 34 CFR §§300.304-300.306, before the initial provision of special education and related services to a child with a disability 34 CFR §300.301(a)" (OSEP, 2017, p. 3), and no component of that evaluation may be used as a single determining factor for eligibility (OSEP, 2017). Therefore, other assessments may be conducted prior to the completion of the medical exam to avoid an unnecessarily lengthy process. After the eye medical report is acquired, the visual impairment evaluations may need to be reexamined based upon the medical information.

Results of the eye medical report, along with the findings of an FVE, LMA, O&M evaluation, and other documented reports of visual functioning, should all be carefully considered by the IFSP or ARD/IEP committee in determining eligibility as a student with visual impairment. **The FVE and LMA reports should typically be conducted and results shared prior to additional evaluation by other members of the**

educational team, including school psychologists, educational diagnosticians, counselors, and related service professionals, to ensure that tools used and results found accurately reflect the child's aptitude and not the impact of a visual impairment (34 CFR §300.304(c)(3)).

A student who is eligible for specially designed instruction and special education services as having a visual impairment may also be eligible in other IDEA special education categories, such as intellectual disability, specific learning disabilities, deafblind, and autism. When evaluating students who are blind or have low vision for additional disabilities, it is critical that the IEP team include a TVI because of the complexity involved in separating the impact of visual impairment from the possible impact of a separate area of disability. For students who are suspected of being deafblind, a teacher of students who are deaf and hard of hearing (TDHH) must also be involved on the educational team.

Eligibility Evaluations, Legal Requirements

19 TAC §89.1040 outlines the required elements for each eligibility evaluation. A screening is not the same as an evaluation (34 CFR §300.302). To make professional decisions regarding eligibility, an evaluation must be conducted by a qualified professional.

- 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. (19 TAC§89.1040(c)(12)(A)). The school district is responsible for ensuring that medical reports are available for the consideration of eligibility for special education services (19 TAC §89.1050(a)).
- The FVE is an analysis of how a student uses vision to perform tasks in real-life environments. The evaluation must include the performance of tasks in a variety of environments requiring the use of both near and distance vision and recommendations concerning the need for a clinical low vision evaluation (19 TAC §89.1040(c)(12)(A)(ii)(I)).
 - Input from both a TVI and a COMS ensures consideration of all aspects of the functional use of vision.
 - The FVE should reflect and link to the student's assistive technology assessment results.
- Clinical low vision evaluations are needed to prescribe optical devices that enhance visual efficiency for students with low vision (Low Vision Position Paper, AER). Eye care specialists, typically ophthalmologists or 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)).

- An 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)).
 - The LMA is an important evaluation tool for determining a literacy medium. IDEA states, "In the case of a child who is blind or visually impaired, provide for instruction in braille and the use of braille unless the IEP Team determines, after an evaluation of the child's reading and writing skills, needs, and appropriate reading and writing media (including an evaluation of the child's future needs for instruction in braille or the use of braille), that instruction in braille or the use of braille is not appropriate for the child." (34 CFR §300.324(a)(2)(iii)).
 - The LMA should reflect and link to the student's assistive technology evaluation results.
 - Based on the considerations of the law, for some students, literacy decisions may require ongoing diagnostic instruction in a variety of media and careful data collection. There should be adequate exposure to and practice with tactile, visual, and auditory formats in order to meaningfully evaluate the student's strengths and needs. Information from a clinical low vision evaluation is an important component for students with low vision in determining whether there are optical and/or electronic devices that will assist the student in efficiently accessing print.

Note: Often the FVE and LMA are combined into a single report.

- An orientation and mobility evaluation must be conducted by a person who is appropriately certified as an orientation and mobility specialist and must be conducted in a variety of lighting conditions and in a variety of settings, including in the student's home, school, and community and in settings unfamiliar to the student. The evaluation will analyze the student's level of safe and efficient movement and recommend needed instructional services for current and future mobility needs (TEC §30.002, Subsection (c-1) and (c- 2)).

Note: After the required O&M evaluation for initial eligibility for visual impairment, a COMS must be part of the multidisciplinary team that determines the scope of any needed full and individual reevaluations.

Eligibility for Children Under the Age of Three

If a visual impairment is suspected in a child under the age of three, the Health and

Human Services Commission (HHSC) – Division of Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) Program coordinates the referral process. As part of the eligibility process, ECI assists families with obtaining documentation of the vision status from a licensed ophthalmologist or optometrist. ECI provides the local school district with doctors' reports, parent consent for referral for evaluation, and parent consent for release of information.

The ECI provider must refer the child to the local education agency (LEA) and to the local office of the [HHSC Blind Children's Program](#), with parental consent and within 5 days of receiving an eye medical report (26 TAC §350.815). A [technical assistance document](#) is available from TEA to help explain this process. Per Federal law, early intervention services needed by the child must be started in a timely manner, defined in Texas as [starting within 28 days of the family signing the IFSP](#). Because these children must be enrolled at the LEA to receive VI services from the district, LEAs should set up a process for enrolling infants that encourages and supports families in this process.

The local district is responsible for providing the FVE, LMA, and O&M evaluations from qualified VI professionals. The initial evaluation, the initial assessments of the child and family, and the initial IFSP meeting must be completed within 45 days from the date the lead agency or ECI provider receives the referral of the child, with some exceptions (34 CFR §303.310).

- 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 program. See Section XXIV for legal citations.

[New language](#) has been proposed by the TEA regarding eligibility for ECI services for children with a visual impairment or who are deaf or hard of hearing. The new wording would establish that a child under three years of age meets the criteria for VI or DHH if the student's IFSP indicates the child meets IDEA Part B eligibility, has a visual impairment or a developmental delay because of the sensory impairment, or has a medical condition with high probability of developmental delay because of the vision loss or impairment. These eligibility criteria are intended to clarify that eligibility follows the rules for Part C of IDEA.

Eligibility for Students Who Are Deafblind

For students who are **deafblind**, there are specific additional criteria for eligibility in both visual impairment and deaf or hard of hearing in TAC §89.1040(c)(2)(A-D). In 2020, the State Board of Educator Certification approved standards for a new teacher certification as [Teacher of Students who are DeafBlind \(TDB\)](#), who can provide valuable expertise in eligibility, evaluation, and instructional design for students suspected of being deafblind. The eligibility criteria are listed below:

Deafblindness - A student with deafblindness is one who has been determined to meet the criteria for deafblindness as stated in 34 CFR §300.8(c)(2). In meeting

the criteria stated in 34 CFR §300.8(c)(2) a student with deafblindness is one who, based on the evaluations specified in subsections (c)(2) and (c)(3) of this section:

- a) Meets the eligibility criteria for deaf or hard of hearing 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 deaf or hard of hearing 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. (TAC §89.1040(c)(2)(A-D).

Students will need to have an O&M evaluation for initial eligibility and a COMS on the team - for students who are deaf or hard of hearing, an O&M evaluation should address how the student accesses auditory information in addition to the other evaluation elements noted above.

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

Guideline/Standard #2

Visual impairment professionals provide expertise specific to visual impairment prior to and during the full and individual evaluation.

Specially designed instruction (special education) involves adapting content, methodology or delivery of instruction as needed to address the unique needs of an eligible child that result from the child's disability and ensure access to the general curriculum (34 CFR §300.39(b)(3)(ii)). VI professionals are essential partners in the evaluation process. Involvement of the TVI and COMS in the full and individual evaluation is supported by 34 CFR §300.304(c)(3)), which states that comprehensive evaluations are administered "by trained and knowledgeable personnel" to accurately reflect the child's aptitude or achievement rather than impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills; the TEC aligns with IDEA. If a student is deafblind, participation of a TDB provides the training and knowledge needed to help the team understand their

unique educational needs. Eligibility considerations specific to visual impairment are outlined in Section IV of this document.

Full Individual and Initial Evaluations for Students from Ages Birth through Two Years.

Evaluations of students under three years of age must be comprehensive, multidisciplinary evaluations designed to identify supports and services necessary to enhance the family's capacity to meet the developmental needs of their infant or toddler (34 CFR §303.321). There are significant changes in demands on visual and sensory systems in the early developmental years. 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;
- Functioning in developmental areas (gross motor, fine motor, cognitive, language, self-help, and social development); and
- Functional abilities to participate in the family's daily activities.

For students under three years of age, ECI is responsible for making sure a child has all the necessary vision and/or hearing evaluations and medical examinations. The ECI service coordinator must convene a meeting at least every six months to evaluate and revise the IFSP as needed (26 TAC §350.1004(f)).

The local district is responsible for providing services for children from birth through two years old who are blind or have low vision (including those who are deafblind) and for those who are deaf or hard of hearing. Language in 26 TAC §350.1009 specifies that the IFSP team must include a TVI and that the TVI must be given 10 days written notice of initial, periodic review, and annual IFSP meetings. A COMS must conduct an orientation and mobility evaluation as part of determining initial eligibility and be a member of the team considering subsequent comprehensive needs for evaluation. At least every six months or annually for children under the age of three, it is critical to consider a student's evaluation data to determine how that child is functioning in new environments and whether new evaluation is needed. There is a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MOU) between HHSC and the TEA outlining ECI and local education agency joint responsibilities for children under three years of age with visual impairments.

Initial Evaluations for Students Three Years Old and Older

District personnel or family members may refer a student for initial evaluation for specialized instruction if there is a suspected visual impairment that may be impacting educational performance. The purpose of the full and individual initial evaluation (FIIIE) is:

- 1) To determine whether the child is a child with a disability as defined in IDEA, and

- 2) If that disability impacts learning, to determine the child's educational needs, and
- 3) To decide upon specially designed instruction and appropriate educational programming to incorporate into the child's IEP (34 CFR §300.305(a) and 20 U.S.C. 1414(c)(1)-(4)).

The first time a student is formally evaluated as a student with a visual impairment, whether or not the student is already in special education for another disability category, the team must make two determinations:

1. Does the child meet eligibility as a child with a visual impairment?
2. By reason of that visual impairment, will the child need special education and related services?

The essential evaluations for initial eligibility for visual impairment include an eye medical report, FVE, LMA, and an O&M evaluation. These evaluations should typically be completed and reports shared **prior to evaluation by other members of the team**, including specialized instructional support personnel such as school psychologists, educational diagnosticians, counselors, and related service professionals. This sharing ensures that testing procedures are appropriate reflections of the student's achievement and do not reflect their sensory status (34 CFR §300.304(c)(3)).

Evaluation for initial 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)).

TEC §30.002 requires that students who are determined eligible for the district's special education program on the basis of a visual impairment receive evaluation and instruction in the ECC. It outlines the nine areas of the ECC that are known to potentially impact learning for students who are blind or have low vision. 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. See Section VI for a complete explanation of these instructional areas that must be included in a comprehensive evaluation of students who are blind or have low vision and in developing the annual IEP.

Reevaluations for Continued Eligibility and to Design IEPs

Vision professionals (TVIs and COMS) must be included in the multidisciplinary team making determinations about needed reevaluations for students with visual impairments. Reevaluations conducted by the TVI, COMS, and TDB should typically be completed and reports shared **prior to evaluation by other members of the team**, including specialized instructional support personnel such as school psychologists, educational diagnosticians, counselors, interveners, and related service professionals.

This sharing is to ensure that the tools and procedures used for evaluation accurately reflect the student's achievement and not their visual status (34 CFR §300.304(c)(3)). Legally, a FIE 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)). TEC §30.002 requires that students who are eligible for the district's special education program on the basis of a visual impairment receive evaluation and instruction in the ECC.

Role of VI Professionals in Evaluations

The input of trained and knowledgeable professionals is required by IDEA (34 CFR§300.304). Specialized VI professionals² are critical for:

- **Performing the FVE and LMA** to establish eligibility and appropriate modifications and accommodations for evaluation and instruction (34 CFR §300.306(a)(1) and 19 TAC §89.1040(b) and §89.1040(c)(12)(A)(ii)(I) and (II))
- **Performing the O&M evaluation** to establish eligibility and/or reevaluate the need for orientation and mobility instruction (19 TAC §89.1040(b) and §89.1040(c)(12)(A)(ii)(I))
- Ensuring that evaluation includes all appropriate areas of the **expanded core curriculum** (34 CFR §300.304(c)(4) and §300.305(a)(2)(ii), and TEC §30.002(c)(4))
- **Establishing appropriate 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 (34 CFR §300.304(c)(3)) and
- **Developing appropriate IFSP and IEP** programming recommendations.

VI. Defining the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC)

Guideline/Standard #3

² For students who are deafblind, the team must include a teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing (TDHH). Additional training and expertise in the impact of deafblindness may be needed in order to provide an appropriate evaluation for these students.

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

Evaluations to document the present level of academic and functional performance for the development of the IEP are required by IDEA and TEC (34 CFR §300.320(a)(1), TEC §30.002). The TEC further specifies that each child eligible for special education as a result of visual impairment receives evaluation and instruction in the ECC (TEC §30.002(b)(4)(A)(B)).

The ECC areas include educational needs that result from the visual impairment to enable the student "to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum"; and "other educational needs that result from the child's disability" as required by IDEA (34 CFR §300.324). The presence of a visual impairment requires that these ECC skills be thoroughly evaluated and systematically taught to these students by teachers with specialized expertise (NASDSE, 1999, p. 70).

Once eligibility as a student with visual impairment is established, instructional needs in the following skill areas should be considered, based on evaluation results, as the IFSP/IEP is being developed:

Compensatory Access and Functional Academic Skills needed to access the general curriculum, including:

- Access to literacy and mathematics through braille (including literary codes and Nemeth Code) and/or print, handwriting skills, and auditory skills. TEC requires all students with visual impairments to be taught braille unless the ARD committee determines and documents, through the results of the LMA, another learning medium to be more appropriate (TEC §30.002(f)). Texas students are taught the Unified English Braille (UEB) code for literary and mathematics purposes. Most are also taught Nemeth Code for math and science materials. Many students with low vision use regular print with magnification devices. Some students need both print and braille. Students with additional disabilities, including those who are deafblind, may use a tactile or object symbol system for literacy. Tactile learning must include instruction in the use of tactile graphics, increasingly used in instructional materials and assessment tools.
- Communication needs vary depending on the degree of functional vision, the effects of additional disabilities, and the task to be done. Students who are deafblind and others may have alternative communication systems, such as tactile sign language, symbol or object communication, or calendar boxes. These systems require systematic instruction and consistent use to ensure student mastery.
- Concept development may be significantly impacted due to limited visual observation. Fragmented concepts impede social, academic, and vocational development. It is essential to offer specific and sequential hands-on lessons, systematic tactile exploration, and clear verbal explanations to build a broad base

of experiences. Instruction is essential because some concepts are totally visual, such as colors, rainbows, clouds, and sky. Some are too large to experience completely, such as tall buildings, mountain ranges, and oceans. Other items are too tiny or too delicate to understand through touch, including small insects, snowflakes, and microscopic items.

- Many abstract mathematical, geographical, and scientific concepts must be taught with alternative strategies and materials, including Nemeth Code and tactile graphics. Nemeth Code is a specialized braille code used to transcribe mathematical symbols as well as scientific and other technical materials. Teachers must ensure that students have tactile materials to convey the same information that sighted peers can access from pictures, graphs, diagrams, maps, and other visual representations. Often, when descriptions cannot adequately convey information, students require quality tactile graphics in their educational programming. The use of graphics in assessment materials to test comprehension of concepts has greatly increased over time. Students must have time to train and practice with tactile graphics in order to achieve competency.

Orientation and Mobility (O&M) - Safe and efficient travel throughout the environment is a critical component in the education of students who are blind or have low vision. Students with multiple impairments will benefit from O&M instruction that facilitates purposeful movement and increases independence to the greatest degree possible. In order for students to succeed in school and be prepared for post-secondary and vocational pursuits, they will need to develop independent travel skills in the community and in using public transportation systems.

O&M evaluation and instruction should begin during infancy with basic body and 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, raise their heads to see people, reach toward objects, move through the environment, and begin to play. Significant delays and differences in meeting motor milestones can impact overall development. The child who is blind needs to know how classrooms or other environments are arranged in order to independently move with confidence. Systematic orientation to a space may be needed before the placement and function of furniture and objects are understood. As the student gets older, more advanced age-appropriate travel skills such as street crossings, bus travel, and community experiences are needed.

Social Interaction Skills - A visual impairment can socially isolate a student, impede typical social interactions, or limit social skill development. A student who is blind or has low vision may not be able to see facial expressions and subtle body language, which are important cues to participate successfully in conversations and activities. Social skills that sighted children observe and imitate may need to be taught to a child with a visual impairment.

Career Education - Students with visual impairments need to be taught about the

variety of work and career options that are available because they cannot casually observe people in different job roles. They need opportunities to explore their strengths and interests in a systematic, well-planned manner. Full access to appropriate school or career preparation programs may require adaptations. Training may include the acquisition of specialized skills and equipment to compete in the job market. Students must be prepared for a wide range of vocational choices and the adaptations, including technological devices, which make them attainable. It is important to have opportunities to job shadow for concrete experience of different career choices and to learn about other persons with visual impairments who have successful vocational outcomes.

Assistive Technology (AT), including optical devices - Technology permits students with visual impairments to access the general education curriculum, to increase literacy options, and enhance communication or improve their functional capabilities. AT has also dramatically improved mobility options. There are a variety of AT tools designed specifically for students with visual impairments that may require specialized instruction. AT can include electronic equipment such as switches, tablets, and portable notetakers; computer access such as magnification software, screen readers, refreshable braille displays, and keyboarding; and light tech devices such as an abacus, a braille, Active Learning materials (e.g., Little Room®), calendar systems, and optical devices. Clinical low vision evaluations may be recommended to determine technology devices that support visual efficiency.

Independent Living Skills - Personal hygiene, dressing, food preparation, time and money management, housekeeping, and organization skills are critical for a successful transition from school to independent living. Young children begin learning basic independent living skills from visual observation and imitation. Most students who are blind or have low vision, however, will need systematic instruction, specific adaptations, and frequent practice. Depending on the level of vision, cognition, and other individual characteristics of a student, adaptations needed may include special markings on oven controls, magnifying lenses for grooming, or tactile cues for matching clothing. These skills are not typically evaluated or taught in a sequential and systematic way in general education settings. Family members may require assistance to implement adaptations that will permit independent practice and mastery of new skills within the home.

Recreation and Leisure skills - Students with visual impairments need to be exposed to, given sufficient hands-on experiences, and systematically taught recreation and leisure activities that they can enjoy as children and throughout their lives. They are often not aware of the options or possible adaptations that would allow them to participate in these activities. Such skills should include both individual and organized group activities for students at all ages and levels.

Self-Determination - Self-determination includes personal decision-making, self-advocacy, problem solving, and assertiveness. These skills lead to personal competence and are important components of positive self-esteem. Students who become effective advocates for themselves through instruction in developing self-determination skills can meaningfully participate in their educational and transition planning and make positive adult lifestyle, job, and other life choices. Students need

self-determination skills to be active and effective members of their educational team, to participate in the development of their IEP, and to participate in developing post-secondary goals that are meaningful and reflect personal interests and abilities.

Sensory Efficiency (including visual, tactual, and auditory skills) - Students who are blind, have low vision, or are deafblind need systematic instruction to learn efficient use of all their senses.

- Instruction in *visual efficiency* must be individually designed and based on accurate evaluation. Instruction may include using visual gaze to make choices, tracking cars when crossing the street, responding to visual cues in the environment, and/or using optical devices such as magnifiers and telescopes.
- For some students, an increased reliance upon *tactual skills* is essential to learning. These skills should be considered as part of the IFSP/IEP development. Students may require more detailed “hands-on” interaction and repetition to understand a concept tactually, such as relative size, that may be readily captured with a glance.
- Systematic evaluation of and 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, use recorded media, or use echolocation for orientation.
- Sensory learning also addresses the development of the proprioceptive, kinesthetic, and vestibular systems, all of which can be impacted by vision loss. Some students may rely upon olfactory and gustatory skills and need instruction in those areas.

VII. Addressing Curricular (ECC) Needs of Students with Visual Impairment

Guideline/Standard #4

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

[TEC §30.002\(c\)\(4\)](#) states that for a child with visual impairment receiving special education services, the LEA must provide an evaluation of the impact of the impairment and instruction in the ECC.

Classroom teachers are primarily responsible for instruction in core academic content, with the support of specialized professionals (TVI/COMS/TDHH/TDB) who assist with accommodating or modifying instructional design, providing curricular materials, and adapting materials to address the impact of sensory impairments. The team, with active participation from the sensory professionals, should develop a plan for determining the student's present levels of academic achievement and functional performance in both the general curriculum and the ECC in order to develop the student's specially designed instruction. The TVI and COMS may have specific input into needed adaptations, modifications, and appropriate materials due to their knowledge of the impact of that student's visual impairment. If a student is deafblind, a TDB will have expertise in programming appropriate for students who are deafblind. VI professionals partner with all other members of the educational team to ensure students have access to their learning environments, as well as to specific instructional materials.

Collaboration among the TVI, COMS, families, and other team members is an effective approach for addressing many areas of the ECC. Many of these skill areas are needed and typically practiced in non-classroom settings, including at home and in community venues. IEP plans should ensure that systematic instruction occurs and student progress is monitored for instruction/learning that may be required outside of normal school day hours. The district must note in the IEP how it will document student progress when non-LEA staff addresses an identified IEP goal.

Providing Services for Students Under the Age of Three

For children who are under three years of age, LEAs and charter schools should be prepared to provide visual impairment and/or deaf or hard of hearing services, including initial evaluations in accordance with Child Find, as documented in the IFSP to children who meet visual impairment or deaf and hard of hearing eligibility. Service delivery in the IFSP is based on developmental needs and family priorities (IDEA Part C, Section 1436). ECI programs are administered by the Texas HHSC in partnership with LEAs for students who meet eligibility for VI, deafblind, or deaf and hard of hearing services. The most current Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between HHSC and the TEA outlining ECI and local education agency joint responsibilities for children under three years of age with visual impairment is available at [TEA/HHSC Memorandum of Understanding](#). See Section XII for more information.

Instructional Accommodations and Modifications

In addition to the specific areas of the ECC, students who are blind or have low vision may need accommodations to access the same well-rounded education program and school assignments as their peers. These accommodations may include items such as extended time, specialized instruction, specialized materials and devices, 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, spatial concepts, and other concepts the student cannot learn incidentally through vision. AT, specialized equipment, and materials may also be needed such as a braille, raised line paper, a cane, an abacus, a talking graphing calculator, a braille notetaker, a video-magnifier, or JAWS software. 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 IEP. It is critical that families and students understand that some modifications will impact the permissible degree plan and secondary education options.

Evaluation in the ECC

IDEA requires consideration of present levels of performance in both academic and functional areas. Evaluation in each of the ECC areas is critical to gauging the need for instruction in skills that promote lifetime independence and success. There are both formal and informal evaluations that can determine a student's functioning level in these vision-specific topics.

A COMS must be a member of the committee that determines what evaluations are needed. Both the TVI and the COMS have roles in evaluating or ensuring appropriate evaluation of the student's needs in all areas of the ECC. The COMS must perform the O&M evaluation. In other areas of the ECC, the two professionals may collaborate with each other as well as other members of the team, including the family, to ensure a valid comprehensive evaluation.

Each district should create and document a systematic process to **annually** prioritize students' strengths and needs in all areas of the ECC, and to monitor ongoing progress. Priority ECC areas included in an IEP may vary from year to year for a particular student based on identified needs as they are ultimately determined by the ARD/IEP committee. Evaluation in the ECC can be supported with the use of checklists. The [EVALS KIT](#) from the TSBVI includes a range of evaluation tools.

If evaluation has indicated a need for instructional goals in ECC areas, progress should be documented in the student progress report. Progress can also be noted on the visual impairment ARD Supplement in the student's district folder or another designated format and procedure for storing this information.

Instruction in the ECC

Instruction in the ECC areas may be addressed using a variety of service delivery models. A growing number of curricula resources are available to support instruction in each area of the ECC, both in print and online.

The TVI and the COMS are primary resources for instruction in the ECC. In collaboration with the TVI and COMS, as noted in TEC §30.002((c)(5)A-E, many others may also play important roles in providing needed instruction, including:

- Family members (For children under three years of age, parents and caregivers are considered the primary instructors.)
- Early intervention specialists
- Occupational therapists
- Physical therapists
- Speech-language pathologists
- Classroom teachers
- Other district personnel
- ESC staff
- TSBVI programs

TEC §30.002(10) A-E requires districts to develop procedures for assuring prompt and effective access directly to resources through

- Cooperating agencies in the area
- TSBVI
- The Central Media Depository, for specialized instructional materials and aids made specifically for use by students with visual impairments; ...
- Related sources which include:
 - HHSC - Blind Children's Program staff, and
 - Texas Workforce Commission, Transition Rehabilitation Program staff

Addressing the Need for Instructional Time for the ECC

Students who are blind or have low vision have unique individual learning needs beyond the core curricular instruction offered to all students. Therefore, instructional teams often

must develop creative strategies to ensure adequate instructional time is available to address priority ECC annual goals.

ECC instruction may require additional time beyond the regular school day and year. It can be difficult to find time within the typical school program to address all needed elements of the general academic curriculum and ECC areas. Texas law specifically notes that there will need to be flexibility on the part of school districts to meet the special needs of children with visual impairments (TEC §30.002(c)(5)). The TEC notes that students' unique educational curriculum needs may 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: Students with disabilities may be eligible for educational services from birth through 21 years of age.
- Application for high school credit for vision-specific coursework, following state regulations and procedures: See Section XXII for more information on innovative courses.
- After-school programs sponsored by the LEA, ESC, or community or private agencies.
- Summer programs, either locally, regionally, or offered by TSBVI.
- Short-term programs offered by TSBVI.
- Programs offered by HHSC Blind Children's Program.
- Programs offered by the Texas Workforce Commission's Transition Rehabilitation Program.
- Intervention in the child's home or other natural environment for children under three years of age (TEC §30.002).

TEC §30.002(e)(10) requires a description of arrangements for services beyond regular school hours. The 2023-24 Student Attendance Accounting Handbook, available on the TEA website, includes an example of O&M services offered in the evening (underline added):

If your school district provides instructional services for special education after school or on Saturday, the contact hours may be counted only if the services cannot be provided or are unavailable at any other time (for example, speech therapy provided on Saturday as a result of the unavailability of speech therapists during the regular school week, orientation and mobility services or vision instruction provided outside the regular school day because they must be provided at night or in periods of darkness). SAAH Section 3.6.5 Instruction

Provided Outside of the Regular School Day.

VIII. Role of the Certified Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments

Guideline/Standard #5

Certified teachers of students with visual impairments perform required evaluations and provide specially designed instruction.

TVIs are required IEP team members for all students with visual impairments, including those who are deafblind (34 CFR §300.321 and 19 TAC §89.1050(c)(4)(A) and (C)).

Roles are defined by the CEC, and these competencies are incorporated into accredited university training programs. The educational needs of these students vary widely, so the role of the TVI must be flexible to meet changing conditions. Ongoing professional development is essential. From initial evaluation to specially designed instruction to ongoing assessment, the TVI plays a critical role in collaboration with teachers, paraeducators, family members, and related service personnel. For information about certification requirements, university coursework, and programs for training TVIs, refer to the [Professional Preparation](#) page on the TSBVI website, including the [VI and O&M Preparation in Texas newsletter](#).

TVIs have many roles, including:

Assessment and Evaluation

- Conducting the functional vision evaluation and the learning media assessment.
- Assisting other professionals in developing appropriate evaluation and assessment strategies.
- Interpreting eye medical reports, evaluation, and assessment results regarding the impact of a visual impairment.
- Evaluating student progress and collecting data to demonstrate student progress, per district policy.
- Evaluating areas of the ECC.
- Recommending and collaborating in appropriate specialized evaluations.

Direct Instruction in the Expanded Core Curriculum

- Providing direct instruction in visual efficiency, tactile symbols, braille (including literary and math codes), assistive technology, auditory skills, social skills, use of near and distance optical devices, skills for transition, 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 specially designed instruction to the student to facilitate development of self-esteem, self-determination, and social acceptance.

Supporting Educational Teams through Collaboration

The TVI must be able to educate, support, and partner with administrators, family members, and all other members of the instructional team who work with each 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 who is blind or has low vision. The TVI's supporting roles include:

- Supporting families in developing infant and early childhood goals and objectives related to their child's visual impairment.
- Supporting transitions from ECI to preschool, preschool to elementary school, elementary to middle school, middle school to high school, and through graduation.
- Providing opportunities for families to meet other families and access training.
- Coordinating services for students with the COMS.
- Consulting with parents, teachers, and other specialized instructional support personnel in the home, community, and school on providing instruction in the ECC areas.
- Observing instruction across the day in order to support consistent educational programming across environments.
- Supervising/coaching paraeducators to ensure provision of quality adapted materials, promote independence, and support mastery of IEP goals.
- 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 collaborative consultation to the extended educational team.
- Recommending adapted strategies for access to the general curriculum and participation in the school community.

- Ensuring that instruction in necessary skills for transitioning from school to adult life is provided.
- Providing guidance to help the team develop a vision-specific support system for transitioning from school to adult life.
- Building independence and success in home, community, and school environments.
- Researching technology options and connecting with vendors for optical devices and assistive technology solutions for students.

Administrative/Record Keeping Duties

- Registering each eligible student with the TEA via the Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments and Deafblind Child Count.
- Maintaining records on all evaluations, IFSPs/IEPs, and progress reports.
- Attending IFSP and ARD/IEP meetings.
- Monitoring and recording student progress toward IEP goals/objectives.
- Ordering and providing adapted instructional materials 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.
- Consulting with guidance counselors about accommodated state and College Board tests.

Federal and state laws mandate specific involvement of TVIs in the educational programs of students with visual impairments, including those who are deafblind and have other additional disabilities:

- TVIs must be available to students with visual impairments, including those who are deafblind (34 CFR §300.321, TAC §89.1131(b)(3)).
- IDEA requires that an individual who can interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results be a member of the IEP team (34 CFR§300.321).
- A TVI must attend initial and annual IFSP meetings and any other IFSP meeting, for children from birth to 2 years of age with visual impairment, including those who are deafblind, that addresses issues related to or impacted by the visual impairment [HHSC and TEA MOU](#).
- A TVI must attend each ARD/IEP committee meeting for students with visual

impairment, including those who are deafblind, unless they meet the exception conditions regarding attendance or excusal described in 34 CFR §300.321(e)(1-2).

- In general, the TVI is not the principal 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/IEP committee for each student with a disability includes the required members (19 TAC §89.1050(c)).
- All special education and related service personnel must be certified, endorsed, or licensed in the area(s) of assignments (ESSA, 34 CFR §300.321, and TAC §89.1131(a)).

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

Guideline/Standard #6

Certified orientation and mobility specialists perform required evaluations and provide instruction in orientation and mobility.

Movement, independent or supported, is critical for learning. A COMS is required to conduct an O&M evaluation for *initial eligibility* of a student under the IDEA category of visual impairment (TEC §30.002(c-1)) and to be a member of the multidisciplinary team in evaluating needed reevaluations. O&M is recognized in IDEA as a related service, which may be required to assist a child with a visual impairment to benefit from **special education**. Under TEC §30.002, O&M may be considered as an instructional service if the qualifying reason for eligibility as a student with a visual impairment relates to O&M instruction. These students would qualify as having a visual impairment under IDEA and their specially designed instructional services would be provided by the COMS.

COMS are critical members of the team for all students who are blind or have low vision with identified O&M needs. COMS provide services that enable students with visual impairment to attain systematic orientation to and safe movement within home, school, and community environments, and in addition, support the development of social, sensory, daily living, and recreation/leisure skills (34 CFR §300.34(c)(7)(i)). The O&M needs of students who are blind or have low vision vary widely, and ongoing professional development for COMS is essential.

In the state of Texas, an O&M specialist must be certified by the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP) to provide O&M instruction in the schools (19 TAC §89.1131(e)). For information about university coursework, certification requirements, and programs for training COMSs, refer to the [VI and O&M Preparation in Texas newsletter](#). It has answers to many questions prospective students may have about the TVI and O&M certification programs in Texas.

COMS have many roles, including:

Assessment and Evaluation

- Conducting the functional vision evaluation in collaboration with the TVI.
- Conducting the orientation and mobility evaluation.
- Evaluating student progress and collecting data to demonstrate student progress per district policy.
- Evaluating ECC areas, often in collaboration with the TVI.

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 in a variety of settings (e.g., using traffic sounds at an intersection to cross the street).
- Facilitating purposeful movement and independence to the greatest degree possible for students with multiple impairments, including through active learning systems for students with significant disabilities.
- Providing specially designed instruction to foster development of self-esteem, self-determination, social skills, independent living skills, and recreation and leisure skills.
- Instructing on the efficient use of low vision for movement.
- Orienting students to unfamiliar environments and different lighting conditions (e.g., night travel).
- Teaching efficient use of optical devices.
- Teaching use of mobility tools, including the long cane and adaptive mobility devices, for safely negotiating the environment.
- Encouraging and reinforcing use of braille skills in the community for accessing information (e.g., signage).
- Reinforcing and developing listening skills.
- Teaching the use of assistive technology that supports movement and travel, including GPS systems and other navigation tools as well as online applications.

- Arranging travel experiences for instruction 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, including family members.
- Providing, creating, and acquiring adapted materials such as tactile maps and mobility devices.
- Providing in-service training and collaborative consultation to other team members in home, school, and community settings.
- Recommending O&M 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, IFSPs/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.
- Ordering and providing non-APH adaptive equipment, such as canes.

X. Roles of Paraeducators for Students with Visual Impairments and Students who are Deafblind

Guideline/Standard #7

Written job descriptions identify comprehensive roles of paraeducators

supporting instruction of students with visual impairments, including those who are deafblind.

The decision to add a paraeducator (also called a paraprofessional, classroom aide, or teaching assistant) to a student's team is made by the ARD/IEP committee after careful consideration of what modifications are necessary to achieve proposed IEP goals. The roles of paraeducators will vary with the specific student or classroom being supported. In addition, there are unique categories of support staff for students who are blind or deafblind, as described below. As required in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), paraeducators whose positions are funded by Title 1 funds must meet applicable state certification and licensure requirements. In addition, when working with students who are blind or have low vision, these staff members need specific and ongoing training on the impact of vision (and when applicable, hearing) loss and the individual's other learning characteristics. Guidance and specific direction from the TVI, COMS, or TDB are necessary in order to support effective strategies to address sensory impairment.

Paraeducators must be provided training on their role and the roles of all team members. The impact of a visual impairment on development varies widely; paraeducators need information and ongoing coaching on instructional strategies appropriate for their individual students with sensory impairments. When simply assigned to a student without proper preparation, paraeducators may act as a barrier between the student and peer involvement, improperly direct instruction away from the teachers, or reduce independent skill acquisition. Over-reliance on a paraeducator over time can lead students to develop passivity and dependence on prompts from others.

General information about this role is available in the [Paraeducator Handbook](#) available from TSBVI Publications.

Classroom paraeducators may be hired to provide overall support to the larger class with particular duties for a student who is blind, deafblind, or has low vision. Their role may include assistance for activities of daily living, health and safety, and/or access to the environment. Many programs hire paraeducators to prepare adapted materials.

Preparation may include general copying, scanning for digital access, highlighting and enlarging, or adapting materials into tactile or other formats based on the student's learning media assessment.

As stated in State Board for Educator Certification Rules, [19 TAC §230.61](#), paraeducators work under the supervision of a certified teacher or teaching team. They supplement and practice skills introduced by the teaching team, support implementation of IEP goals and student behavioral plans, and may contribute data for student progress monitoring to the team.

Braille Transcribers

When there are students reading braille, districts will need to hire braille transcribers. Transcribers need intensive training in order to produce specialized braille materials for

literacy, music, math, and computer code; using computer software; and operating tactile graphics devices. The TVI will specify learning media for each student and oversee material preparation. Online in-service training is offered through the ESCs and TSBVI. [ESC Region 11](#) offers four webinars annually that focus on specific production topics. [Braille and Tactile Graphic Boot Camp](#) is offered at TSBVI twice a year. Other resources for braille transcribers, including a professional learning community and on-demand training, are also available from TSBVI and regional ESCs.

Certification courses in the literary braille code are available from the National Federation of the Blind for a person to acquire [Library of Congress Literary Braille Certification](#) through the National Library Service. There are two ways to do this: a) remotely through email with an assigned instructor or b) take a weekly class through TSBVI, which is now being offered on a remote basis as well as in person. Contact obriens@tsbvi.edu for more information. One resource on the role of a paraeducator for students with visual impairments is [A Paraeducator's Handbook](#) available from TSBVI Publications.

Interveners

Interveners are specially trained paraeducators who provide direct support to ensure appropriate access to instruction for some students who are deafblind. Interveners are needed for students who require assistance to access what is happening in the environment beyond what the student can personally see or hear, often using highly individualized communication systems ([National Center on Deafblindness](#)). Interveners may be assigned for all or part of the instructional day. Training should include information about deafblind issues in general and the specific communication and learning strategies that are appropriate for each individual student.

Training for interveners is available from several sources. A local TDB and TSBVI's TX DB Project staff have specific expertise to support training for an individual who is completing intervener coursework. Some local VI professionals or regional ESC consultants have completed relevant training to support new interveners as well. There are web-based resources such as the OHOA modules available from NCDB which can support this learning although these modules do not currently lead to certification. Information on intervener training can be found on the TX DB Project website. A National Intervener Credential is available through the National Resource Center for Paraeducators. There are now three online university programs that offer coursework towards credentialing: Utah State, Central Michigan University, and San Francisco State University.

There is also a category of intervener within the [Deaf-Blind MultiHandicapped Program](#). These support staff work with people who are deafblind, of all ages, outside the school settings.

Paraeducators, including those for students who are blind or have low vision and interveners for students who are deafblind, have differing job functions according to student needs and the role, but generally, duties in the educational setting will include:

- Assisting VI professionals and campus staff to adapt/modify instructional materials; adaptations are specific to each student and might include use of braille translation software, magnification and magnification devices, or AT software.
- Ordering, storing, and distributing large print and braille books and other adaptive materials, under teacher supervision.
- Assisting teacher(s) with individual student activities to implement the IEP.
- Reinforcing O&M skills for movement of students between instructional locations or activities.
- Increasing access for students who are deafblind to their immediate environment.
- Implementing the student's communication system per the IEP.

Sample job descriptions of paraeducators, braille transcribers, interveners, and other paraeducators are part of [The Administrator's Toolbox](#) (currently being updated).

XI. 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 educational team.

Quality education is cultivated through active partnerships between educators and families. Parent training and counseling are included in TEC §30.002(c)(7) as one component of the comprehensive state plan for students with visual impairments in order to support effective collaboration between the school and home. "When family voices are an integral part of planning and guiding services and support, better outcomes can be achieved" ([The Value of Family Engagement](#), NCDB, 2022).

Family members of children who are blind or have low vision, including those with additional disabilities and those who are deafblind, may need coaching and information to fully engage as key partners with the educational team to:

- Incorporate activities into daily routines that promote their child's development.
- Ensure that their child has access to information that other children gain through vision and hearing.
- Adapt the home and community environment for access, inclusion, and safety.
- Connect with other families of children with similar experiences.

- Help their child master skills necessary to access and interpret their environment.
- Access information, resources, and services specific to their child and family.
- Understand their child's unique educational requirements.
- Understand the combined impact of additional disabilities, such as a hearing loss or other impairment.

Family observations, needs, and priorities should be incorporated into comprehensive evaluations and program development. From the earliest diagnosis, families are the core of service delivery. For children from birth through 2 years, [Early Childhood Intervention](#) is a statewide program within the Texas Health and Human Services that supports families as they help their child grow. At 3 years of age, the Texas Education Agency, through local school districts, is responsible for educational programming.

Engagement of all team members with family members at every age helps to ensure a shared focus on student success. [Navigate Life Texas](#), supported by Texas Health and Human Services, includes information and resources related to educational issues as well as other areas of family life with a child who has a disability.

Professionals can enhance family engagement through “universally accessible, culturally affirmative, and unbiased services and supports” ([NCDB](#), 2022). Close partnership with the TVI, COMS, TDB, and other team members is critical. Families may find a [checklist](#) to review their child's IEP helpful. Families of students who are deafblind may also benefit from the [IEP Quality Indicators for Students who are Deafblind - Updated 2023](#) for reviewing their child's program.

Families of students with visual impairments have the same rights and responsibilities as families of all students with and without disabilities. Provisions for special education in the IDEA covers ALL students with disabilities. The ESSA mandates extensive family engagement for families of students in Title 1 schools, and IDEA defines the rights of parents of children with disabilities. These requirements include the right to explanations of the IDEA procedural safeguards, confidentiality of and access to their child's records, participation in their child's educational meetings, independent evaluations, prior written notice, etc. as outlined in multiple sections of the statute, including 34 CFR §300.306(a)(1), §300.322(c), §§300.327-328 and §300.501(b-c). [Texas Project First](#) is a TEA-sponsored resource for information on parent rights in special education in Texas.

Specific rules for families of students with sensory impairments include:

- Parents must be asked to give [consent](#) so that their child can be registered on the Annual VI Registration and/or the Deafblind Census. These registrations generate Texas' portion of the Federal Quota for free specialized materials from the American Printing House for the Blind, as well as providing information for State Supplemental VI Funds and the Federal DB Census.

TEC §30.004 requires each school district to annually provide parents with information

about the availability of services at state institutions and their rights regarding eligibility and admission. A [form](#) with this specific notice about services available through TSBVI is required under TEC §30.002(e)(3).

XII. Service Delivery for Infants with Visual Impairments

Guideline/Standard #9

VI professionals are members of the instructional team for all birth through 2-year-old children with visual impairments and are available for services year-round.

HHSC-ECI is the lead agency in Texas for services for infants and toddlers with disabilities. However, given parent consent, local districts are responsible for providing specialized services specifically for infants and toddlers who are blind or have low vision, who are deaf or hard of hearing, or who are deafblind, at no cost to families, as noted in FERPA per TEC §29.003(b)(1). When a child is referred to an ECI program, the TVI, COMS, and TDHH are considered members of the interdisciplinary team. A child under 36 months qualifies for local district services provided under the auspices of ECI if identified as [deaf or hard of hearing or blind or visually impaired](#), as the presence of a sensory impairment puts children at risk for developmental delays.

[A Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MOU) governs roles and responsibilities and sets standards and funding agreements between HHSC-ECI and TEA for children with visual impairment and who are deaf or hard of hearing. A TEA Special Ed Technical Assistance Guide, [Child Find and Evaluation](#), outlines many components of the ECI - LEA relationship.

The TVI and a TDHH, for a student who is also deaf or hard of hearing (deafblind), must attend each annual IFSP meeting as well as each IFSP meeting that addresses issues related to and impacted by the vision and/or hearing status (19 TAC §89.1050). A COMS is required to perform an O&M evaluation for initial eligibility as well as be a member of the IFSP team considering the need for any reevaluation.

ECI programs are responsible for providing ophthalmological, optometric, audiological, and otological evaluations when required to determine eligibility for ECI services and for hearing and vision services from an LEA, although they are the payor of last resort (CFR Title 34 §303.510 and §303.520). Eye medical reports and the evaluations for eligibility are usually updated at least annually as there is tremendous growth and change during the first years of life that can impact development.

The MOU promotes interagency collaboration and a coordinated system of activities, policies, and procedures to support services for infants and toddlers. The ECI service coordinator arranges evaluations, 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 the child's natural environment, focusing on the needs of the child within the family. TVIs and COMS often provide services in the home setting as well as daycare and other community settings for children under three.

IFSPs are usually written for a calendar year and services must continue to be provided each month as they have been established by the IFSP committee. This means that district and ECI personnel must be available to provide services or assess children during the summer months if such services are included in the IFSP.

VI professionals who serve students within the ECI program should provide progress reports monthly in the format and with the information required by the ECI program and their ISD.

Early intervention services should be based on the needs and concerns of each family and child. The purpose of early intervention is to support parents and caregivers in developing competence and confidence to help their young child learn and develop. ECI staff must meet with the family to review the child's progress at least every six months to determine whether the services and strategies on the IFSP are helping address IFSP goals. The VI specialists, and a TDHH for a student who is deafblind, should participate in this review (19 TAC §89.1050). Reviews can occur at other times if any team members think there may be a need to change the IFSP.

It is the local district's responsibility to provide visual impairment or deaf or hard of hearing instructional services to all infants and toddlers with sensory loss 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 and family, 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. Each school district develops agreements that govern coordination of services with ECI programs in their area. If a child attends daycare outside the boundaries of the school district of residence, the district may:

- make a formal or informal arrangement with the district that the daycare is in for that district to provide the visual impairment and deaf and hard of hearing services.
- provide services in the evening or on weekends in the child's home.
- provide services in the daycare that is outside district boundaries.

The [Student Attendance Accounting Handbook](#) (SAAH) and 19 TAC §89.1035b outline legal requirements for districts to serve infants with visual impairments and to be enrolled in their local district or regional day school program for the deaf (for students who are deaf or hard of hearing and/or deafblind). See excerpts from IDEA, 19 TAC §89.1035, and Section 3.3.9 and 4 of the [SAAH](#) in Section XXIV.

General information on ECI programs and links to find a local program can be found

[online](#). See Section XXV of this document for relevant legal excerpts. A Google Drive titled [ECI, DHH, and BVI Service Information](#) provides shared information about services for VI and DHH students from birth through two years of age.

xiii. 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 agreed upon in an IFSP that matches each family situation. The most appropriate setting is the placement supporting the family in achieving chosen outcomes for their family and child, with as little disruption as possible to daily routines and family life. Though many ECI services are provided at home, they can also be provided in other locations where the child goes regularly, such as a daycare center or other community setting.

For school-aged students, IDEA provides this guidance on 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. (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, or LRE, for each student. The least restrictive environment 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. Assessment should include both general academic and ECC needs for a student with a visual impairment. IDEA and TEC require the ARD Committee to first look at placement in general education with recommended accommodations and/or modifications.

By law, 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).

Services for students who are blind or have low vision and are served in private or homeschool settings are guided by the same rules as those for any similarly placed student. Reference the [SAAH](#) and/or [Guidance on Parentally Placed Private school children with disabilities](#).

After considering educational needs in both the general curriculum and the expanded core curriculum, the committee must carefully select from the full array of potential settings. TEC §30.002(c)(5) requires “flexibility on the part of school districts to meet the special needs of children with visual impairments.” Educational settings to be considered can include, but are not limited to:

- Co-teaching
- In-class support
- Itinerant teacher services
- Resource room as an instructional arrangement specific for students with visual impairments
- Short-term programs at TSBVI
- Summer programs at TSBVI
- Self-contained classrooms
- Placement for an academic year at TSBVI, which has a residential component

There are specific procedures to be followed if an ARD/IEP committee determines that enrollment at the TSBVI is the most appropriate educational setting. The [steps to admission](#) are posted on the TSBVI website.

XIV. 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 supported by appropriate evaluation in all areas of the expanded core curriculum for each student.

The IFSP/IEP team must determine the appropriate amount of service time that a student will receive from a TVI and/or COMS. This determination should be based on the student’s assessed needs in both the general education curriculum and ECC, the educational setting, the types of skills to be taught, and other factors. IEP service should include time for direct instruction, collaborative consultation with the team members, evaluation, and specialized material procurement and preparation. For infants, a plan must be based on the concerns and needs of the family and supported by a comprehensive evaluation of the child’s developmental progress. This plan will include the identification of functional goals and outline the need for expertise from the TVI or

COMS for coaching the family to meet the child and family outcomes.

The [*Visual Impairment Scale of Service Intensity of Texas \(VISSIT\)*](#) is a validated tool to guide decisions on the type and amount of TVI service. It helps the TVI use evaluation results in all areas of the ECC to quantify how much instructional service (direct and collaborative consultation) to recommend per student. The [*Orientation & Mobility Visual Impairment Scale of Service Intensity of Texas \(O&M VISSIT\)*](#) for COMS has also been validated. Training materials are provided on the [TSBVI website](#).

Service time from the TVI and COMS should not be determined based upon availability of personnel. The district should establish procedures for documenting student needs based on comprehensive evaluation, ECC assessments, and instructional data, and use that information to make service delivery decisions.

It can be challenging to provide sufficient instructional time with a limited supply of VI professionals. There is an ongoing shortage of these professionals in this state and country. Therefore, in order to ensure adequate current and future supplies of certified and qualified VI professionals, a district's program should include ongoing recruitment for new TVIs and COMS in conjunction with the ESCs, TSBVI, and personnel preparation programs in the state.

Virtual Learning Considerations

Recently there has been more exploration of providing services to students via a virtual platform such as a distance meeting platform, learning management system (LMS), or another virtual system. Some things to consider include how to ensure:

- student access to meaningful, high quality instruction.
- appropriate provision of accommodations during virtual learning.
- determining student needs across learning environments for effective collaborative consultation with in-person staff.
- appropriate provision of accommodations and access to assessments and plans for STAAR or other high-stakes test administration.
- measuring efficacy of accommodations across learning environments.
- student access to appropriate instructional materials such as braille and tactile graphics.
- Texas certification status of the service provider.

Service Delivery Option Examples

Students require intensive instructional time when beginning to learn braille, including both literary code and Nemeth Code. A certified TVI should provide braille instruction on a daily basis, often for 1-2 hours a day (Holbrook, et al., 2000). Additional time will be needed for material preparation and collaboration with the team. Students learning braille need to have adequate braille materials available in the classroom for application

of learning and skill practice.

Social skills instruction must be provided frequently enough to ensure mastery and generalization. Instruction may need to be provided directly to the student with frequent guided practice and observation across school and home settings at other times. VI professionals also have important roles in training campus staff and family members to adapt instructional approaches and/or to reinforce newly learned social skills with daily practice.

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. Once students are familiar with their immediate school environments, instruction moves into the community in order to master O&M skills in the home, school, and community.

Students with low vision who are learning to use optical devices may initially require intensive direct instruction at least one time per week, followed by reduced instructional time as mastery increases. This model may be referred to as “front loading” instructional delivery.

Lessons may need to be offered outside the normal school day. Some students have decreased visual functioning in low light situations and require flexible scheduling by the TVI and/or the COMS to support learning in dark or nighttime environments.

Students with complex needs learn when taught via 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 consultations for a specified period of time and then decrease as appropriate based on student progress, 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.

Collaborative consultation services for complex learners can be as time intensive as direct instruction. There should be scheduled time for active collaboration and consultation with the educational team, including family members, for each student. Considerable time will be required from the TVI and/or COMS for:

- Participating in team evaluations.
- Contributing to the writing of IEPs.

- Working periodically with the student.
- Observing across activities.
- Modeling appropriate teaching strategies.
- Adapting tactile graphs and other learning media.
- Creating and preparing communication and Active Learning materials.
- Attending staffings on a student with complex needs.
- Collaboration with an intervener, paraeducator, brailist, or other related service staff.

An independent student with stable vision who is making progress in academic and age-appropriate ECC areas may require minimal assistance beyond collaboration around adapted materials and communication with the general education team and family. Assuming the student's progress in the ECC is evaluated by the TVI and COMS annually, this student may require one hour of collaborative 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. Family-centered intervention must be sufficiently frequent, typically weekly, to develop a rapport between the family, child, and professional and to build family confidence and competence in supporting their child's growth and learning. Coaching from the TVI and COMS helps family members successfully address unique developmental needs related to visual impairment. 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, and/or social workers.

Direct Instruction and Collaborative Consultation Models

The TVI and O&M specialist will make a recommendation for either collaborative consultation services or direct service with related collaborative consultation. This decision must be based on the assessed needs of the student and the needs of and resources available to the educational team, including family members.

Direct service with related collaborative consultation time is appropriate for a student who has needs that only a particular professional can meet efficiently, legally, and appropriately. For example, the COMS is the professional who introduces instruction in the use of a cane or teaches the use of distance optical 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 VI professionals must schedule time to meet with other team members and the family to ensure consistency in programming across the day. Therefore, students with direct service from a VI professional will also need related collaborative consultation time to

support generalization of IEP objectives.

Collaborative consultation is an instructional model that can be used effectively to support educational progress (Darst and Pogrud, 2018). For students with an IEP, often there are goals and objectives best addressed by the primary service provider with collaborative support from the VI professionals and other team members.

Consultation services help ensure that a student has multiple opportunities in a day to use a particular skill and that required accommodations are implemented throughout all instructional settings. Collaborative services should be linked to IEP goals. This model is critical for students who cannot generalize to new locations or situations and an important part of making sure that students with special needs have enough successful practice to master their annual learning goals.

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 teachers, and other personnel to ensure that the student's needs are appropriately addressed across settings. The TVI may demonstrate instructional strategies to the classroom teacher that will enable a student to efficiently view a lesson or show the family how their child can access the home television. A COMS may conduct co-visits with early childhood intervention staff to incorporate strategies important for sensory efficiency into other developmental lessons while coaching the family.

Collaboration ensures that necessary adaptations are provided throughout the student's day. The COMS may work with school personnel so that tactual cues are provided in the hallways and classrooms to facilitate independent use of mobility skills. Similar cues might be established in the home, at daycare, or at an afterschool job placement.

Collaboration for a student who is deafblind may require organized meetings with a wide range of team members, including an intervener, a teacher of students who are deafblind, a TDHH, audiologist, licensed specialist in school psychology, and other related service members.

The time an individual student might need from VI professionals can be expected to vary over an educational career. Some students will perform independently and competently in school until there are changes in social demands, academic requirements, or new environments. For example, a student who has been receiving consultation only in elementary school may move to direct instructional support for new skills upon entering middle school. Once skills are acquired, the ARD committee may reduce service time.

Service time from a TVI or COMS can be evaluated in part by how successfully the

chosen service delivery model is supporting student progress. Adjustments to service time are written into an IFSP or IEP as the student's educational performance indicates. The district should establish procedures for documenting student progress and the VI professional's time.

XV. 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 each student with visual impairment. Objective tools (referenced below) should be administered, with supervisory input, at least annually to evaluate adequacy of staffing levels. A caseload analysis is a data-based process to assess the amount of time needed for VI professionals to adequately and appropriately educate their existing student caseloads. Paired with analysis of non-instructional time (workload analysis), predictions on future growth, and predicted staffing changes, this combined analysis allows districts to use objective data to provide for student instructional needs.

Although finding highly trained personnel in this field may be a challenge for Texas schools, establishing caseloads to effectively ensure that student needs are met is necessary to support a quality program. Appropriate caseloads result in better student outcomes, increase student safety in school and community settings, ensure adequate instruction including intensive interventions as needed, and help retain quality staff. [The Administrator's Toolbox](#), currently being updated, has more information on this topic. A set of flyers to help recruit professionals and paraeducators and provide information on VI workloads is available at the [Professional Preparation page](#) on the TSBVI website.

The Itinerant Services Division of The Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) position paper on "Caseloads Based on Students' Assessed Needs" [2013] states:

In determining an appropriate caseload for an itinerant teacher of students with visual impairments, the following factors must be considered: direct service hours needed to implement IEP goals, time for preparation of materials, time spent in collaboration and consultation with other team members, time spent in assessment, and driving time to reach schools.

Students served using a collaborative/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, including weekly or more frequent intervention.

The [*Visual Impairment Scale of Service Intensity of Texas*](#) tools, developed in Texas, are available to support the caseload decision process of TVIs and COMS. The *VISSIT* tools guide TVIs and COMS to use evaluation results in all areas of the expanded core curriculum to determine how much instructional service (direct and collaborative consultation) to recommend per individual student.

According to the [*2024 Summary of Professionals in Visual Impairment in Texas*](#), the 10-year average caseload for TVIs has been 17 students per full-time TVI. The 10-year average caseload for COMS has been just under 17 students per full-time equivalent. Despite growth in the number of VI professionals in Texas, student population growth has meant increasing caseloads, potentially limiting the availability of qualified staff to provide needed services to students.

Written caseload guidelines in the professional literature have historically advocated 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 (2014) 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 paraeducator, and fewer students for classes with younger children. However, a recent research study by [*Zebehzy et.al.*](#) (*JVIB*, 2023) noted that average caseloads across the US in 2021 are above that suggested range.

Districts must consider both the student caseload (instructional student service) and related activities required of VI professionals as described in Sections VIII and XIX. These other tasks include such time-intensive activities for managing a student caseload as conducting evaluations, travel between school/instructional sites, connecting with related agency staff, attending ARD and IFSP meetings, researching and ordering specialized equipment, and conducting the Annual VI Registration and Deafblind Child Count. Together, these and other tasks along with direct instruction and collaborative consultation time, add up to a workload. Workloads of TVIs and COMS need to be monitored to ensure adequate staffing to meet student needs and equitable distribution among the district, as new students arrive and others move during the school year. A new *Visual Impairment Scale of Staffing Pattern Analysis (VISSPA)* has been recently developed that will help address workload analysis.

XVI. Conclusion

Students with visual impairments, including those with multiple disabilities and/or those who are deafblind, 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 IFSP and IEP planning for these students and critical resources that are available to schools and families. The document references the impact of visual impairment and key

areas for the delivery of quality educational programs for students with visual impairments. References to statutes and rules are intended to clearly indicate the legal foundation for these practices.

Further information and support are available from each regional ESC in Texas, TSBVI, and local VI professionals.

XVII. Frequently Used Links

Texas Education Code (TEC)

TEC 30.002: <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/ED/htm/ED.30.htm#30.002>

TEC §30.004: <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/ED/htm/ED.30.htm#30.004>

Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services and TEA: <https://tea.texas.gov/academics/special-student-populations/tea-hhsc-eci-mou.pdf>

Texas Student Attendance Accounting Handbook:

<http://tea.texas.gov/index2.aspx?id=25769817607>

IDEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Act (references to 34 CFR §300.xxx, etc.)

- Part B of the IDEA, relating to services for students from 3 through the school year of their 21st birthday, law and resources:
<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/statuteregulations/>
- Part C of the IDEA, relating to services for infants and toddlers up to age three:
<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/early-learning-early-childhood/>

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA): <https://www.ed.gov/essa?src=rn>

Texas Administrative Code (TAC)

[https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac\\$ext.ViewTAC](https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac$ext.ViewTAC) Search the site to find specific sections.

XVIII. OSEP 2017 Letter on Eligibility - with updated URL citations



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES**

May 22, 2017

**Contact Person
Name: Lisa Pagano
Telephone: (202) 245-7413**

OSEP 17-05

MEMORANDUM

TO: State Directors of Special Education, Preschool/619 State Coordinators

FROM: Ruth E. Ryder
Acting Director
Office of Special Education Programs

SUBJECT: Eligibility Determinations for Children Suspected of Having a Visual Impairment Including Blindness under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

On November 12, 2014, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) issued a response to an inquiry for policy clarification addressing whether a State educational agency (SEA) and/or local educational agency (LEA) is permitted to establish procedures that further define the disability category, “visual impairment including blindness,” under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).¹ Since that time, OSEP has received a request for written guidance to assist SEAs in supporting their LEAs in reaching appropriate eligibility determinations for children with this disability. The purpose of this memorandum is to ensure broad dissemination of the key points made in our November 12, 2014 letter, provide the additional guidance requested on this important issue, and share information about outside resources that may be helpful as you examine your State’s procedures related to the identification and evaluation of children suspected of having a visual impairment including blindness.

¹ See OSEP *Letter to Kotler* available at: <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/files/acc-13-020197r-md-kotlereligibilitycriteria.pdf>

Applicable IDEA Definitions

Under Part B of the IDEA, a child with a disability means a child evaluated in accordance with 34 CFR §§300.304-300.311 as having a disability, and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services. 34 CFR §300.8(a)(1). Further, under 34 CFR §300.8(c)(13), “visual impairment including blindness” means an impairment in vision that, *even with correction*, adversely affects a child’s educational performance. (Emphasis added) The term includes both partial sight and blindness.

State and Local Eligibility Criteria

While States are permitted to establish standards for eligibility for special education and related services, and are not required to use the precise definition of a disability term in the IDEA, these State-established standards **must not narrow the definitions in the IDEA**. We recognize that States often adopt common definitions of certain modifiers to guide evaluators in making individualized eligibility determinations. For example, as OSEP noted in our November 12, 2014 letter, “intellectual disability” refers to “*significantly* subaverage general intellectual functioning,” (34 CFR §300.8(c)(6)), and similarly, the definition of “orthopedic impairment” refers to “a *severe* orthopedic impairment that adversely affects a child’s educational performance” (34 CFR §300.8(c)(8)). In these cases, because the IDEA does not specifically address the meaning of these modifiers, the IDEA gives States discretion to determine the precise level of impairment that qualifies as “*significantly*,” and “*severe*,” respectively, in order for evaluators and eligibility teams to implement these definitions.

In contrast, in the definition of “visual impairment including blindness,” the regulations do not contain a modifier; therefore, *any* impairment in vision, regardless of significance or severity, must be included in a State’s definition, provided that such impairment, even with correction, adversely affects a child’s educational performance. States may not use criteria or other definitions for “visual impairment including blindness” that result in the exclusion of children who otherwise meet the definition in 34 CFR §300.8(c)(13). For example, State eligibility guidelines and definitions for “visual impairment including blindness” may not exclude a child with convergence insufficiency or other visual impairment from meeting the IDEA’s definition of “visual impairment including blindness” if that condition, even with correction, adversely affects that child’s educational performance (e.g., the child’s ability to read and write).

It has come to our attention that some States direct their LEAs to implement a two-step process when addressing whether a child suspected of having a visual impairment may be eligible for special education and related services under the IDEA. During the first step, the eligibility team is required to reach a decision as to whether the child has one

or more of the conditions that the State has identified and believes could affect a child's vision functioning. Examples of such conditions might include: the child has a reduced visual field to 50 degrees or less in the better eye; the child has been diagnosed with cortical visual impairment; or the child has a diagnosis of a degenerative condition that is likely to result in a significant loss of vision in the future. During the second step, the eligibility team determines the extent that it should proceed further and examine whether the condition adversely affects the child's educational performance. However, if the eligibility team were to conclude the child's vision difficulties do not fall within one of the State's listed criteria or conditions, the eligibility team would not consider whether the child's visual functioning adversely affects his or her educational performance. Such a practice is inconsistent with the IDEA. While it is permissible for a State to provide *examples* of the types of conditions that would meet the State's criteria for "visual impairment including blindness," the SEA or LEA may not preclude eligibility teams from considering whether *other* vision conditions, even with correction, adversely affect the child's educational performance such that the child requires special education and related services under the IDEA.

For more information about various types of visual impairments and the ways in which those impairments can affect a child's ability to learn, visit <http://www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/visualimpairment/>.

Evaluation to Determine Whether the Child's Visual Impairment Adversely Affects Educational Performance

Prior to the eligibility determination, each public agency must conduct a full and individual evaluation, in accordance with 34 CFR §§300.304-300.306, before the initial provision of special education and related services to a child with a disability. 34 CFR §300.301(a). The purpose of the evaluation is to determine whether the child qualifies as a child with a disability and the nature and extent of the educational needs of the child. Under 34 CFR §300.304(b)(1), in conducting the evaluation, the public agency must use a variety of assessment tools and strategies to gather relevant functional, developmental, and academic information about the child that may assist in determining whether the child is a child with a disability and the educational needs of the child. That information could include information from a physician, if determined appropriate, to assess the effect of the child's visual impairment on the child's eligibility and educational needs. However, under 34 CFR §300.304(b)(2), no single measure or assessment may be used as the sole criterion for determining whether the child is a child with a disability and for determining an appropriate educational program for the child.

Under 34 CFR §300.306(c)(1)(i), in interpreting evaluation data for the purpose of determining whether the child is a child with a disability under Part B of the IDEA and the educational needs of the child, the group of qualified professionals and the parent must draw upon information from a variety of sources, including aptitude and achievement tests, parent input, and teacher recommendations, as well as information about the child's physical condition, social or cultural background, and adaptive behavior. Under 34 CFR §300.306(c)(1)(ii), the public agency must ensure that information obtained from all of these sources is documented and carefully considered.

There is nothing in the IDEA or the Part B regulations that would prevent a public agency from obtaining a medical diagnosis prior to determining whether the child has a particular disability, and the educational needs of the child.³ Also, there is nothing in the IDEA or the Part B regulations that would prohibit a State from requiring that a medical diagnosis be obtained for purposes of determining whether a child has a particular disability, provided the medical diagnosis is obtained at public expense and at no cost to the parents, and is not used as the sole criterion for determining an appropriate educational program for the child. Further, if a State requires a medical diagnosis consistent with the above criteria, such a requirement exceeds the requirements of Part B of the IDEA. Under 34 CFR §300.199(a)(2), the State would be required to identify in writing to the LEAs located in the State, and to the Secretary, that such rule, regulation, or policy is a State-imposed requirement that is not required by Part B of the IDEA and Federal regulations.

When determining a child's vision status, the LEA's evaluation should be thorough and rigorous. Such evaluations should include a data-based media assessment, be based on a range of learning modalities (including auditory, tactile, and visual), and include a functional visual assessment. In previously issued guidance, OSEP has noted that an assessment of a child's vision status generally would include the nature and extent of the child's visual impairment and its effect on the child's ability to learn to read, write, do mathematical calculations, and use computers and other assistive technology, as well as the child's ability to be involved in and make progress in the general curriculum offered to nondisabled students. Such an evaluation generally would be closely linked to the assessment of the child's present and future reading and writing objectives, needs, and appropriate reading and writing media. The information obtained through the evaluation generally should be used by the eligibility team in determining whether it would be appropriate to provide a blind or visually impaired child with special education or related services as required by the IDEA. In addition, because the evaluation must assess a child's future needs, a child's current vision status should not necessarily determine whether it would be inappropriate for that child to receive special education and related services while in school. Please see OSEP's Dear Colleague Letter on Braille, June 19, 2013, available at: <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/idea-files/osep-dear-colleague-letter-on-braille/>

You may wish to consult the following outside resources that address assessments for children who have, or are suspected of having a "visual impairment including blindness."⁴

- American Foundation for the Blind/now American Printing House for the Blind (APH) ConnectCenter. Assessments for students who are blind or visually

³ In the case of a suspected "visual impairment including blindness," a diagnosis may be made by a medical professional such as the child's pediatrician, ophthalmologist, or optometrist.

⁴ These organizations are examples of organizations that may be helpful on these matters. We cannot vouch for the quality or completeness of their assistance. They are provided merely as examples, and there may be other organizations that you may wish to consult.

impaired. Retrieved from

<http://www.familyconnect.org/info/education/assessments/13>

- American Printing House for the Blind, Inc. Accessible Tests Resource Center. Retrieved from <https://sites.aph.org/accessible-tests/>
- Perkins eLearning Center. Assessment of students who are blind or visually impaired. (No longer available on this site.)

Based on the guidance set forth in this memorandum and OSEP's *Letter to Kotler*, a State may need to review its criteria and revise those criteria, as appropriate, and make sure that its LEAs are informed of the changes. As an example of how a State could revise its criteria, a State could comply with the IDEA requirements by adding a general criterion stating that the definition of "visual impairment including blindness" includes, in addition to other specific State-established criteria, any other impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance.

OSEP will be following up with States through our various monitoring activities. If you have questions or would like to access technical assistance, please contact your OSEP State Lead. We appreciate your continued efforts to ensure that children suspected of having visual impairments including blindness are provided with an appropriate evaluation and if found eligible under IDEA, the services necessary to meet their special education needs.

cc: Parent Training and Information Centers

OSEP-Funded Technical Assistance Centers

XIX. Useful Websites

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

Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP): <http://www.acvrep.org>

American Council of the Blind of Texas (ACBT): <http://www.acbtexas.org>

American Foundation for the Blind (AFB): <http://www.afb.org>

American Printing House for the Blind (APH): <http://www.aph.org>

APH ConnectCenter: <https://aphconnectcenter.org/>

Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER): <http://www.aerbvi.org>

Bookshare: <https://www.bookshare.org>

Center for Parent Information & Resources, Considering Blindness and Visual Impairment, a legacy resource from NICHCY, December 2010, <http://www.parentcenterhub.org/considering-visual>

Council for Exceptional Children (CEC): <http://www.cec.sped.org>

CEC-DVIDB <https://dvidb.exceptionalchildren.org/>

Deaf-Blind Multihandicapped Association of Texas (DBMAT): <http://www.dbmat-tx.org>

ESC Region 10 Expanded Core Curriculum checklists: <https://www.region10.org/programs/visually-impaired-services/important-forms/expanded-core-curriculum/>

Hadley School for the Blind: <http://www.hadley.edu>

HHSC Early Childhood Intervention: <https://hhs.texas.gov/services/disability/early-childhood-intervention-services>

HHSC Blind Children's Program: <https://hhs.texas.gov/services/disability/blind-visually-impaired/blind-childrens-vocational-discovery-development-program>

IDEA legislation: <http://idea.ed.gov>

Learning Ally: <http://www.learningally.org/>

National Federation of the Blind (NFB): <http://www.nfb.org>

National Center on Deaf-Blindness (NCDB): <https://www.nationaldb.org/>

National Organization of Parents of Blind Children (part of NFB): <http://www.nopbc.org>

Stephen F. Austin State University:
<https://www.sfasu.edu/edstudies/academics/certification-prep>

Texas Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (TAPVI):
<https://www.facebook.com/TAPVIFamilies/>

Texas Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (TAER): <http://www.txaer.org/>

Texas Education Agency (TEA) – Accessible Instructional Materials:
http://tea.texas.gov/Academics/Instructional_Materials/Accessible_Instructional_Materials

Texas Education Agency (TEA) – Special Education
http://tea.texas.gov/Curriculum_and_Instructional_Programs/Special_Education

Texas Education Agency (TEA) – Special Ed Rules and Regulations:
<http://tea.texas.gov/index2.aspx?id=2147497444>

Texas Parents of Blind Children (Division of the NFB): <https://www.nfbtx.org/division-parents#:~:text=What%20is%20Texas%20Parents%20of,support%2C%20encouragement%2C%20and%20information>.

Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI): <http://www.tsbvi.edu/>

Texas Tech University: <https://www.depts.ttu.edu/education/outreach-and-research/sowell/>

Texas Workforce Commission: <http://www.twc.state.tx.us>

XX. Reference Publications

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California Department of Education. [*Guidelines for Programs Serving Students with Visual Impairments, 2014 Revised Edition*](#). 2014.

Council for Exceptional Children, Division on Visual Impairment and DeafBlindness. [*Position Papers*](#).

Darst, S., Pogrud, R.L. (2018). Collaboration in orientation and mobility. In R.L. Pogrud & N. Griffin-Shirley (Eds.), *Partners in O&M: Supporting Orientation and Mobility for Students Who Are Visually Impaired*. New York, NY: APH Press.

Federal Register. 34 CFR 300. [*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 Final Regulations". August 14, 2016.

Federal Register, 65 FR 36586 Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education, [*Educating Blind and Visually Impaired Students; Policy Guidance*](#). June 8, 2000.

Holbrook, M. Cay, Cheryl Kamei-Hannan, and Tessa McCarthy, eds. [*Foundations of Education, 3rd Edition, 2 vols.*](#) New York: AFB Press. 2017.

Huebner, Kathleen M., Brunhilde Merk-Adam, and Karen Wolffe. [*National Agenda for the Education of Children and Youths with Visual Impairments, Including Those with Multiple Disabilities, Revised*](#). New York: AFB Press. 2004.

Loftin, Marnee. [*Making Evaluation Meaningful: Determining Additional Eligibilities and Appropriate Educational Strategies for Students with Blindness and Visual Impairment, 2nd edition*](#). Austin, TX: TSBVI. 2022

National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE). *Blind and Visually Impaired Students: Educational Service Guidelines*. Watertown, MA: Hilton Perkins Foundation, Perkins School for the Blind. 1999. (Available through [Amazon](#))

National Center on Deaf-Blindness. [*The Value of Family Engagement: Identifying Unique Needs and Priorities of Families with Children Who Are Deaf-Blind*](#). NCDB. 2022.

Pogrud, Rona L. & Diane L. Fazzi, eds. [*Early Focus: Working with Young Children Who Are Visually Impaired and Their Families*](#). New York: AFB Press. 2002.

Tellefson, Mary. [*Orientation and Mobility Career, College and Community Readiness Standards*](#). Paths to Literacy. 2024.

Texas Education Agency. "[Texas Administrative Code, Commissioner's Rules Concerning Special Education Services 89.AA. Chapter 89. Adaptation for Special Populations](#)".

Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. "[Student Data Program, Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairment and Deafblind Child Count \(2023\)](#)".

Zebehazy, K., Herzberg, T, and Botsford, K. (2023). *Exploring Caseload Data of Vision Professionals and Their Implications*. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness* 117(1),

XXI. Education Service Centers (ESC)

There is a certified visual impairment specialist at most regional ESCs in Texas. To find the visual impairment specialist at your ESC, use general information numbers for each ESC provided below.

Region 1 – Edinburg

1900 West Schunior
Edinburg, TX 78541-2234
(956) 984-6000
Fax: (956) 984-7632

Region 2 – Corpus Christi

2209 North Water Street
Corpus Christi, TX 78401-2599
(361) 561-8400
FAX: (361) 883-3442

Region 3 – Victoria

1905 Leary Lane
Victoria, TX 77901-2899
(361) 573-0731
FAX: (361) 576-4804

Region 4 – Houston

7145 West Tidwell
Houston, TX 77092-2096
(713) 462-7708
FAX: (713) 744-6514

Region 5 – Beaumont

350 Pine Street, Suite 500
Beaumont, TX 77701
(409) 951-1700
FAX: (409) 951-1800

Region 6 – Huntsville

3332 Montgomery Road
Huntsville, TX 77340-6499
(936) 435-8400
Fax: (936) 295-1447

Region 7 – Kilgore

1909 N. Longview Street
Kilgore, TX 75662-6827
(903) 988-6700
FAX: (903) 988-6708

Region 8 – Mount Pleasant

4845 U.S. Highway 271 N.
Pittsburg, TX 75686-4303
(903) 572-8551
FAX: (903) 575-2611

Region 9 – Wichita Falls

301 Loop 11
Wichita Falls, TX 76306-3706
(940) 322-6928
FAX: (940) 767-3836

Region 10 – Richardson

400 E. Spring Valley Road
Richardson, TX. 75081-5101
(972) 348-1700
FAX: (972) 231-3642

Region 11 – Fort Worth
1415 S. Cherry Lane
White Settlement, TX 76108
(817) 740-3600
FAX: (817) 740-7600

Region 12 – Waco
P.O. Box 23409
Waco, TX 76702-3409
Location: 2101 W. Loop 340,
Waco, TX 76712
(254) 297-1212
FAX: (254) 666-0823

Region 13 – Austin
5701 Springdale Road
Austin, TX 78723-3675
(512) 919-5313
FAX: (512) 919-5374

Region 14 – Abilene
1850 Highway 351
Abilene, TX 79601-4750
(325) 675-8600
FAX: (325) 675-8659

Region 15 – San Angelo
P. O. Box 5199
San Angelo, TX 76902-5199
Location: 612 South Irene
Street, San Angelo, TX 76903
(325) 658-6571
FAX: (325) 655-4823

Region 16 – Amarillo
5800 Bell Street
Amarillo, TX 79109-6230
(806) 677-5000
FAX: (806) 677-5001

Region 17 – Lubbock
1111 West Loop 289
Lubbock, TX 79416-5029
(806) 792-4000
FAX: (806) 792-1523

Region 18 – Midland
P. O. Box 60580
Midland, TX 79711-0580
Location: 2811 LaForce Blvd.,
Midland, TX 79711
(432) 563-2380
FAX: (432) 567-3290

Region 19 – El Paso
P.O. Box 971127
El Paso, TX 79997-1127
Location: 6611 Boeing Drive,
El Paso, 79925
(915) 780-1919
FAX: (915) 780-6537

Region 20 – San Antonio
1314 Hines Avenue
San Antonio, TX 78208-1899
(210) 370-5200
FAX: (210) 370-5750

XXII. List of Guidelines/Standards

- I. Eligibility is determined by an individualized family service plan (IFSP) or by an admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) committee. It is based upon an eye medical report, functional vision evaluation, a learning media assessment, and an orientation and mobility evaluation. A COMS must be part of the team that determines the scope of any needed full and individual reevaluations.
- II. VI professionals provide expertise specific to visual impairments prior to and during the full and individual evaluation.
- III. Evaluations of all areas of the expanded core curriculum are used to determine individual student programs.
- IV. Appropriate instructional time, accommodations, and modifications are provided to meet all identified areas in individual student programs.
- V. Certified teachers of students with visual impairments perform required evaluations and instruction.
- VI. Certified orientation and mobility specialists perform required evaluations and instruction in orientation and mobility.
- VII. Written job descriptions identify comprehensive roles of paraeducators supporting instruction of students with visual impairments, including those who are deafblind.
- VIII. Families are active members of the educational team.
- IX. VI professionals are members of the instructional team for all birth through 2-year-old children with visual impairments and are available for services year-round.
- X. A continuum of services and placement options are available based on individual student needs.
- XI. Times for specially designed instruction by certified teachers of students with visual impairments and by certified orientation and mobility specialists are supported by appropriate evaluation in all areas of the expanded core curriculum for each student.
- XII. Written caseload guidelines are used to evaluate caseloads of VI professionals.

XXIII. Innovative Courses

Innovative Courses allow districts to offer state-approved innovative courses to allow students to master competencies not included in the essential knowledge and skills of the required general education curriculum ([Texas Administrative Code \[TAC\] Section 74.27](#)). With the approval of the local board of trustees, school districts and charter schools may offer any state-approved innovative course for state elective credit only. A district does not need to apply to the agency to offer approved innovative courses. The following are approved innovative courses with relevance to students with visual impairments.

Braille

This course will provide instruction in pre-braille skills, tactual discrimination, the reading and writing of the braille code, and the development of efficient braille reading, including fluency and comprehension. The braille reading and writing course will emphasize the conventions and mechanics of braille. It will, therefore, facilitate and support tasks completed in all subject areas and work environments.

General Employability

This course will provide instruction in general employability skills as well as the prerequisite skills for general employability. Employability skills are the skills and attitudes that allow employees to get along with their co-workers, make important work-related decisions, and become strong members of the work team. Discovering job possibilities that link skills, abilities, interests, values, needs, and work environment preferences is an experiential learning process that takes place over time.

This course is designed to guide students through learning these skills that can be transferable among a variety of jobs and careers and are considered essential in any employment situation. Students will learn and apply basic knowledge of what is expected in the world of work.

Methodologies for Academic and Personal Success (MAPS)

The Methodology for Academic and Personal Success courses focus on the skills and strategies necessary for students to make a successful transition into high school and an academic career. Students will explore the options available in high school, higher education, and the professional world in order to establish both immediate and long-range personal goals. After identifying their individual learning styles and abilities, students will build on these abilities by developing critical time management, organization, and study skills. The courses focus on self-understanding, decision-making, resiliency, attitude, character education, and leadership to help students maximize personal achievement. Students will develop the specific strategies necessary to achieve their personal and professional goals. The course emphasizes proactive problem solving, self-determination, independent thinking, and learning skills. In addition, students will explore and experience collaboration as a tool for creative

problem solving. As part of the goal setting and leadership activities, students may complete an outside community service learning experience in addition to class assignments.

Please note that the approved courses may serve as state graduation elective credit only and are not approved to substitute for any required state graduation requirements. Use the following codes to identify approved innovative courses. These codes may only be used by school districts that have the approval of their local board of trustees to offer these courses in accordance with 19 TAC §74.27. [Information](#) is available from TEA.

Course Title	Number
Braille	N1100505
General Employability	N1270153
MAPS	N1130021

XXIV. Frequently Asked Questions

1. Is an eye 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 an eye medical report, a functional vision evaluation, a learning media assessment, and an orientation and mobility evaluation that indicate that there is a visual impairment that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance. This is outlined in TAC §89.1040.

Eligibility for a child under three years of age is governed by the rules for Part C of IDEA. New language proposed for the TEC will clarify that the child can meet eligibility for VI services if the IFSP indicates the child meets IDEA Part B eligibility, has a visual impairment or a developmental delay because of the sensory impairment, or has a medical condition with high probability of developmental delay because of the vision loss or impairment.

See Section IV in this document.

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

An LMA is an evaluation to determine recommendations concerning which specific learning media are appropriate for the student and whether or not there is a need for ongoing evaluation in this area. Under TAC §89.1040, a TVI 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 include 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.

See Sections IV and V in this document.

3. If a student has a mild visual impairment and is hard of hearing, does the student qualify as deafblind?

An ARD/IEP committee considers evidence to determine the eligibility of a student for services as a student who is deafblind. The committee must use evaluation data to decide whether the combination of sensory losses, regardless of severity, has an adverse impact on learning. Texas law establishes deafblind eligibility 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 deaf or hard of hearing or visual impairment, but the combination of such losses adversely affects the student's educational performance." Eligibility of children under the age of three falls under eligibility guidelines in Part C of IDEA.

See Section IV in this document.

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

TEC §30.002 mandates an evaluation by a COMS for initial consideration of eligibility of a student as having a visual impairment. A COMS must also be part of the multidisciplinary committee reviewing information to determine whether a reevaluation would be necessary for subsequent full and individual evaluations, which must be considered no less than every three years (or annually for infants)

See Section IV in this document.

5. Do all students who are blind or have low vision (including those who are deafblind) need IEP goals and objectives in all areas of the ECC?

The ECC identifies critical skills that are impacted by the presence of a visual impairment. TEC §30.002 clarifies the need to provide assessment and instruction in all areas of the ECC. If a student continues to meet the criteria as a student with visual impairment, then the district should have a systematic process to ensure that all areas listed in TEC §30.002 have been considered, including the areas of the ECC. A COMS needs to be a member of the committee that determines what evaluations are needed.

An ARD/IEP committee should have a system to consider appropriate annual IEP goals and objectives when evaluation results indicate a need for instruction in areas of the ECC. There are many resources now available to assist in the evaluation process.

See Sections VI and VII in this document.

6. Which sensory professionals must attend an ARD/IEP committee meeting for a student who has a visual impairment?

According to 34 CFR §300.306(a)(1) and TAC §89.1050(b) and §89.1050(c)(3)(A), a TVI must attend each ARD/IEP committee for a child with a suspected or documented visual impairment including a child who is or is suspected to be deafblind. A TDHH must also attend each ARD/IEP committee meeting for a student who is or is suspected to be eligible as deafblind.

See Section VIII in this document.

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

According to TAC §89.1050(3)(C), for a student who is suspected or documented to be deafblind, the ARD committee shall include a TVI and a TDHH.

See Section IV in this document.

8. Are there specific roles for paraeducators working with students who are blind, have low vision, or who are deafblind?

When an ARD/IEP committee determines that a paraeducator 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 to support implementation of the IEP. Students who are deafblind may require an intervener—a paraeducator with specific training in appropriate access to instruction for students with combined hearing and vision impairments.

See Section X in this document.

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

According to the MOU between TEA and the ECI, the TVI, and a TDHH for a student who is deafblind, 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 XII in this document.

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

Yes. Students with hearing loss and/or visual impairments are eligible to be served from birth. The HHSC-ECI is the lead agency for serving students from birth through 2 years of age. However, local district staff provide the specialized deaf or hard of hearing and visual impairment services as mandated by IDEA Part C.

See Section XII in this document.

11. How does a student get referred to attend the TSBVI?

For admission to TSBVI, a student must have been determined by their local school district to be eligible for educational services as a student who has a visual impairment or who is deafblind. 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 who are blind or have low vision or are deafblind. Documents for [district personnel](#) (go to: and for [parents](#) have been developed to help explain the unique role of the TSBVI in Texas and are posted on the TSBVI website.

See Section XIII in this document.

12. How much time should a TVI or a COMS provide to students with visual impairment?

Determination of the amount of service time and the type of service delivery is based upon the assessed needs of the student, the educational setting, the types of skills to be taught, and other relevant factors. It is an individualized decision for each student. [The VISSIT and VISSIT/O&M tools](#) are available to help TVIs and COMSs determine the amount of direct and collaborative services to recommend to the IEP team, based on evaluation.

See Section XIV in this document.

XXV. Selected legal references related to services for children with visual impairments from birth through two years

Collaboration and coordination between the LEA and ECI providers are necessary to implement the timelines discussed in the regulations below.

More information is included in the [Memorandum of Understanding](#) that was drawn up between the Health and Human Services Commission and TEA.

IDEA Part C Regulations

§303.342 Procedures for IFSP development, review, and evaluation provide guidance for IFSP meetings

- (d) Accessibility and convenience of meetings.
 - (1) IFSP meetings must be conducted--
 - (i) In settings and at times that are convenient for the family; and
 - (ii) In the native language of the family or other mode of communication used by the family, unless it is clearly not feasible to do so.
 - (2) Meeting arrangements must be made with, and written notice provided to, the family and other participants early enough before the meeting date to ensure that they will be able to attend.

Texas Administrative Code

26 TAC §350 .1011 Participants in Meetings for a Child with Auditory or Visual Impairments

In addition to the requirements in 26 TAC §350.1009 of this title (relating to Participants in Initial and Annual Meetings to Evaluate the IFSP), the IFSP team for an initial IFSP meeting or annual meetings to evaluate the IFSP must include a certified teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing or a certified teacher of the visually impaired [sic] if the child is documented as deaf or hard of hearing or has a documented visual impairment as described in 19 TAC §89.1040 (relating to Eligibility Criteria).

- (b) Unless there is documentation that the LEA has waived notice, the contractor must:
 - (1) provide the teacher at least a 10-day written notice before the initial IFSP meeting, any annual meetings to evaluate the IFSP or any review and evaluation that affects the child's auditory or vision services; and
 - (2) keep documentation of the notice in the child's record.
- (c) The IFSP team cannot plan auditory or vision services or make any changes that affect those services if the certified teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing or certified teacher of the visually impaired is not in attendance.
- (d) The IFSP team must route the IFSP to the certified teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing or certified teacher of the visually impaired for review and signature when changes to the IFSP do not affect the child's auditory or vision

services.

(e) The certified teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing and the certified teacher of the visually impaired may submit a request within five days of the IFSP meeting to have another IFSP meeting if the teacher disagrees with any portion of the IFSP.

Student Attendance Accounting Handbook (SAAH)

3.3.9 Infants and Toddlers who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing or have a Visual Impairment or Both

Infants and toddlers, birth through 2 years of age, who are deaf or hard of hearing or have a visual impairment or both and an individualized family services plan indicating a need for services by the district must be enrolled in the local district or regional day school program for the deaf (RDSPD). If district services are to be provided through the RDSPD, the RDSPD must involve the home district. Local education agencies should collaborate with the RDSPD to ensure that appropriate services are provided. (See 4.10 Special Education Services for Infants and Toddlers)

4.10 Special Education Services for Infants and Toddlers

Infants and toddlers (children ages two or younger) who have visual impairments or are deaf or hard of hearing or both and who are served by your district are eligible for special education services and are eligible to generate ADA....

XXVI. Standards for LEA Collaboration with ECI

Child Find

- (a) ECI and the LEA share Child Find obligations for children from birth to three years of age with suspected visual impairments and/or hearing loss. This requires strong communication and collaboration between the LEA and ECI providers.

When a child with a **suspected** visual impairment is referred to an early intervention team, the TVI and COMS are considered vital members of the collaborative early intervention team.

When a child with a **suspected** hearing loss is referred to an early intervention team, the TDHH is considered a vital member of this collaborative early intervention team.

Parental consent is required for ECI and the LEA to share confidential information. ECI will be required to obtain a Release of Information prior to consultation and/or referral. With parental consent, a TVI or TDHH may be consulted for ways to obtain the required medical documentation leading to a full referral. Consultation may include phone calls, emails, and/or home visits if necessary.

- (a) Collaborative consultation will aid in preventing children from experiencing delays in service due to a lack of medical follow-up. Consultation will also improve the quality of referrals, therefore saving time for the LEA professionals who are evaluating for hearing and vision loss.

Evaluations

ECI is responsible for providing the LEA with current ophthalmological evaluation when there are signs of visual impairment, and/or current audiological evaluations for suspected hearing loss. Proposed modifications to Texas rules will delete the requirement for otological reports.

The LEA is responsible for the communication assessment for students being evaluated due to hearing loss and for the FVE, LMA, and O&M assessment for children being evaluated for visual impairment.

When a suspected visual impairment or hearing loss drives the referral to ECI, the LEA service providers must collaborate with ECI to meet the 45-calendar day timeline for an initial evaluation.

In the event that the child has already been evaluated and is receiving ECI services due to a medically diagnosed condition or a developmental delay, before visual impairment or hearing impairment is suspected, the timeline for evaluation is determined by a local agreement between the LEA and ECI. Best practice is to complete the evaluation within 3 weeks of referral. **It is important to complete the evaluation and begin services for the family as quickly as possible.**

The initial evaluation is a baseline, which should be revised on an ongoing basis as services are delivered. Reviewing and updating evaluations is required on an annual basis for Part C services; this includes FVE, LMA, ECC review, and O&M evaluations for children with visual impairments, as well as the communication evaluation for children who are deaf and hard of hearing.

Family Services

All services delivered to a family through an IFSP must follow the IDEA Part C guidelines. This includes services that are provided through LEA service providers. Part C guidelines indicate that IFSP services are centered on evidence-based practices in early childhood including coaching and supporting families in interacting with their child in their natural environment. Service time should be planned and delivered to meet individual family needs. A parent or caregiver must be an active participant.

Service providers, including TDHH, TVI, and COMS, must follow the schedule of services set in the IFSP according to the 12-month calendar year. The IFSP is based on the child/family need, and providers making an exception for a holiday based on provider need is not indicated in either the MOU or in rule. Sessions that are cancelled or going to be cancelled for any reason, including but not limited to sickness, holidays, or vacation, should be discussed with the family, documented on a progress note, and a plan for make-up sessions should be agreed upon by both the family and provider.

LEA Procedures

Students must be enrolled at the LEA before receiving services. Families must follow district policies for enrolling children from birth through two years old. These procedures are currently under revision by the Texas Education Agency and will be reflected in an updated [Student Attendance and Accounting Handbook](#). **LEAs should set up a policy on enrolling infants that encourages and supports families in this process.** These policies may include setting up a single location for all infants to enroll, having the LEA service provider facilitate the process at the school or at the home, communicating with ECI to obtain required documentation that they may have on file, and/or waiving a district requirement for the parent to appear in person at the school.

According to IDEA Part C guidelines, there is a statutory responsibility to provide services for infants and toddlers who have hearing or vision impairments. Texas has established, through an MOU, that LEAs are required to work in collaboration with ECI to meet the Part C guidelines for this population of students. LEAs and ECI share the responsibility of ensuring that services begin within 28 calendar days after the initial IFSP. It is important that district enrollment procedures do not cause the LEA or ECI to fall out of compliance in delivery of timely services.

References for this section were drawn from the following sources:

IDEA 34 CFR §303

Title 26. Health and Human Services Part 1. Texas Health and Human Services Commission Chapter 350. Early Childhood Intervention Services

Texas Education Agency. [*Student Attendance Accounting Handbook*](#) (SAAH).

Texas Education Agency. ["Technical Assistance: Child Find and Evaluation"](#), Revised June 2020.

Texas Health and Human Services Commission and Texas Education Agency. ["Memorandum of Understanding"](#). 2023.

XXVII. Acronyms Used in the Document Text

AER – Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired

ARD/IEP committee – Admission, Referral, and Dismissal committee; also known as the Individualized Educational Program (IEP) committee

AT – Assistive Technology

CEC – Council for Exceptional Children

COMS – Certified orientation and mobility specialist

DHH – Deaf or hard of hearing

ECC – Expanded core curriculum

ECI – Early Childhood Intervention

ESC – Education service center

ESSA – Every Student Succeeds Act

FIIE – Full and Individual Initial Evaluation

FVE – Functional vision evaluation

IDEA – Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

IEP – Individualized Education Plan

IFSP – Individualized Family Service Plan

HHSC – Texas Health and Human Services

LEA – Local education agency (local school district)

LMA – Learning Media Assessment

MOU – Memorandum of Understanding

O&M – Orientation and mobility

TEA – Texas Education Agency

TDB – Teacher of students who are deafblind

TDHH – Teacher of students who are deaf or hard of hearing

TSBVI – Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

TVI – Teacher of students with visual impairments

VI – Visual Impairment