2014 Guidelines and Standards for Educating Students with Visual Impairments in Texas

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To find this document on the web:
   Go to the Texas Education Agency website, Special Education/Visual Impairments, at http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147498410

Search for "2014 Guidelines and Standards" on the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired website, http://www.tsbvi.edu

NOTE: In this document, links for the Texas Education Code will open at the official state website for Texas Constitution and Statues, however, legislative changes from the 83rd Regular Session had not been updated as of early January 2014. To see the amended language of TEC 30.002 as mandated by Senate Bill 39 and House Bill 590, see Section XXI of this document.
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The 2014 revision is dedicated to the memory of James C. (Jim) Durkel, whose advocacy for students with visual impairments enhanced educational programs across Texas.

Photo of Jim Durkel, laughing
# Table of Contents

I. Need for this Document ................................................................. 7  

II. Purpose of this Document ............................................................ 8  

III. The Population of Students with Visual Impairments ............. 8  

IV. Determining Eligibility for Students with Visual Impairments ................................................................. 9  

V. The Full and Individual Evaluation for Students with Visual Impairments ................................................................. 13  

VI. Defining the Expanded Core Curriculum ............................... 15  

VII. Addressing Curricular Needs of Students with Visual Impairments ........................................................................... 20  

VIII. Evaluation and Instruction in the Expanded Core Curriculum ................................................................................. 22  

IX. Role of the Certified Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (TVI) ................................................................. 23  

X. Role of the Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS) .................................................................................. 27  

XI. Roles of Paraeducators for Students with Visual Impairments and Deafblindness ............................................................. 30  

XII. Role of the Family in the Individualized Family Service Plan/ Individualized Education Program (IFSP/IEP) Process for Students with Visual Impairments .................................................. 32  

XIII. Service Delivery for Infants with Visual Impairments ............ 33  

XIV. Appropriate Educational Placements for Students with Visual Impairments ............................................................... 35  

XV. Determining Service Time from the Teacher of Students
with Visual Impairments (TVI) and/or a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS).......................... 36

XVI. Determining Appropriate Caseloads for Vision Professionals................................................................. 40

XVII. Conclusion ........................................................................................................................................ 41

XVIII. Additional Resources .......................................................................................................................... 42
  Websites: .................................................................................................................................................. 42
  Reference Publications: .............................................................................................................................. 44
  Education Service Centers:.......................................................................................................................... 45

XIX. List of Guideline/Standards: .................................................................................................................... 47

XX. Frequently Asked Questions .................................................................................................................. 48

XXI. Senate Bill 39 and House Bill 590, 83rd Regular Session, modifying TEC 30.002. .................................................. 52
I. Need for this Document

Maximizing lifelong success is the goal of education. Students with visual impairments have unique learning needs that must be addressed if they are going to access the general education curriculum. Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' September 2010 Current Population Survey indicate that the unemployment rate for people who reported blindness or serious difficulty seeing and were currently looking for work was 13.1%. A significant 75% of the population with blindness or serious difficulty seeing were identified as "not in the labor force" and were not considered in the employment rate analysis. Thus, educators face a significant challenge in providing educational services that will lead to successful post-school outcomes. In addition to the general education core curriculum that all students receive, students with visual impairments, starting at birth, also need an **expanded core curriculum** to meet needs directly related to their visual impairment (TEC 30.002, Subsections (c-1) and (c-2))\(^1\). These expanded curriculum areas include instruction in:

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

\(^1\) In this document, links for Texas Education Code will open at the official state website for [Texas Constitution and Statues](http://www.texasconstitution.gov), however, legislative changes from the 83rd Regular Session had not been updated as of early January 2014. To see the amended language of TEC 30.002 as mandated by Senate Bill 39 and House Bill 590, see Section XXI of this document.
Making appropriate decisions about the development and implementation of programs and services for students with visual impairments requires a clear understanding of the unique learning needs of these students. Administrators must have knowledge about specialized personnel, materials, equipment, and educational settings to ensure appropriate individualized education program planning for these students with unique needs. Knowing the features of a quality program is also key for parents and caregivers so that they can advocate for appropriate services to meet the needs of their child.

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

II. Purpose of this Document

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

III. The Population of Students with Visual Impairments

The population of students with visual impairments is very diverse. These students:
• May be totally blind or have varying degrees of low vision
• Range from birth to 22 years of age
• May be born with a visual impairment or may have acquired a visual impairment at a later time in their life
• May or may not be learners on the academic level of their sighted age peers
• May have hearing impairments (deafblindness)
• May have any number of other disabilities (mild to severe intellectual disability, physical disability, other sensory loss, emotional or behavioral problems, autism and/or specific learning disabilities)
• May have impaired vision originating in a part of the structure of the eye or due to neurological causes (such as cortical visual impairment)
• May have additional medical needs and considerations

IV. Determining Eligibility for Students with Visual Impairments

Guideline/Standard #1:
Eligibility is determined by an individualized family service plan (IFSP) or an admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) committee. It is based upon a medical report, functional vision evaluation, and a learning media assessment. Also, an evaluation of orientation and mobility skills is now required for determination of initial eligibility and a COMS must be part of the team that determines the scope of any needed full and individual reevaluations.

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

1) A medical report by a licensed ophthalmologist or optometrist
2) A functional vision evaluation conducted by a certified teacher of students with visual impairments (TVI) and/or a certified orientation and mobility specialist (COMS)

3) A learning media assessment that must be conducted by a certified teacher of students with visual impairments (TVI)

4) For initial eligibility, the full individual and initial evaluation of the student must include an orientation and mobility evaluation by a certified orientation and mobility specialist (COMS) (TEC 30.002)

Federal law 34 CFR § 300.304(c)(4)\(^2\) requires that “the child is assessed in all areas related to the suspected disability” and 34 CFR § 300.304(c)(6) requires that “the evaluation is sufficiently comprehensive to identify all of the child’s special education and related services needs”. TEC 30.002 as amended in 2013, mandates effective with the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year that evaluations to determine initial eligibility as a student with a visual impairment must include an evaluation by a certified orientation and mobility specialist. A COMS must also be a member of the multidisciplinary team reviewing the scope of any needed reevaluation in subsequent years. TEA will propose rules in January 2014 to help districts implement this legislation.

- The *eye medical* report should indicate whether the student has no vision or a serious visual loss after correction, or a progressive medical condition that will result in no vision or serious vision loss after correction TAC § 89.1040(c)(12)(A)(i)(I) and TAC § 89.1040(c)(12)(A)(ii)(I).

- A *functional vision evaluation (FVE)* analyzes how a student actually performs visually in a variety of real life environments, requiring the use of both near and distance vision. TAC § 89.1040(c)(12)(A)(ii)(I). Input from both a TVI and a COMS ensures consideration of all aspects of functional use of vision:
  - The FVE must recommend whether the student should be referred for a *clinical low vision evaluation*. TAC § 89.1040(c)(12)(A)(ii)(I). Clinical evaluations are needed to prescribe low vision devices that are necessary for students

\(^2\) In this document, links for Federal legislation will open at the IDEA.gov website, http://idea.ed.gov/explore/home. To find specific sections of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, put the appropriate CFR code numbers in the search box.
with low vision to access printed material in an efficient manner (Low Vision Position Paper, AERBVI). Eye care specialists (ophthalmologists, optometrists) with specialized training in low vision conduct clinical low vision evaluations. If the IEP committee, based upon the recommendation of the FVE results, agrees to the need for a clinical low vision evaluation, it is the legal responsibility of the local education agency to provide this service (34 CFR § 300.154(b)(2))

- **A learning media assessment (LMA)** must include recommendations concerning which specific visual, tactual, and/or auditory learning media are appropriate for the student and whether or not there is a need for ongoing evaluation in this area. TAC § 89.1040((c)(12)(A)(ii)(II))

- **An orientation and mobility evaluation** must analyze the student’s level of safe and efficient movement in 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 and recommend needed instructional services for current and future mobility needs. (TEC 30.002, Subsection (c-1) and (c-2))

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

If a visual impairment is suspected in a child **under the age of three**, the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services – Division of Early Childhood Intervention (DARS-ECI) Program coordinates the referral process. As part of the eligibility process, ECI assists families with obtaining documentation of the vision problem from a licensed ophthalmologist or optometrist. ECI provides the local school district with doctors’ reports, consent for referral for evaluation, and consent for release of information. If the child is already being served by ECI when a vision loss is discovered, the timelines for evaluation and services should be governed by a local agreement between the school district and the area ECI program. It is strongly recommended that any evaluations/assessments be completed and reports provided to the ECI program within three weeks of the referral by the ECI program to the district. See Frequently Asked Questions on the TEA website at http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147496885.
For students who are deafblind, there are specific additional criteria for eligibility in both visual impairment and auditory impairment. **TAC § 89.1040(c)(2)(A-D).** Note: The field of deafblindness is moving toward the use of deafblind as a single word, to emphasize that the combined impact of dual sensory loss results in a unique disability. Legal documents typically still use the term deaf-blind. These are listed below:

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

(A) Meets the eligibility criteria for *auditory impairment* specified in subsection (c)(3) of this section and visual impairment specified in subsection (c)(13) 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. **TAC § 89.1040(c)(2)(A-D).**

(C) Has documented hearing and visual losses that, if considered individually, may not meet the requirements for auditory impairment or visual impairment, but the *combination of such losses* adversely affects the student's educational performance; or

(D) Has a documented medical diagnosis of a *progressive medical condition* that will result in concomitant hearing and visual losses that, without special education intervention, will adversely affect the student's educational performance
Visual impairment is a recognized eligibility category for special education and related services. Part C of IDEA[^3] mandates early childhood intervention services for children with disabilities birth through two years of age. (34 CFR § 300.25) IDEA Part B mandates services for students with disabilities ages three through twenty-one. Students must have educational programs that address the unique needs of the child that result from the child’s disability, and ensure access to the general curriculum (34 CFR § 300.39(b)(3)(ii)). A thorough FIE (full and individual evaluation) should be conducted to determine the full scope of a special education program for students with a documented or suspected visual impairment. A functional vision evaluation (FVE) should be conducted prior to all other evaluations in order to provide evaluation that is valid and appropriate for a student with visual impairments (34 CFR Sec 300.304(c)(4)).

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

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

Guideline/Standard #2:
Vision professionals provide expertise specific to visual impairments prior to and during the full and individual evaluation.

A full and individual evaluation (FIE) is required for any child being considered as eligible for special education as a result of a visual impairment. A FIE for initial eligibility or reevaluation for continued eligibility must include a comprehensive review of student progress in all areas related to the suspected disability, including, if appropriate, health,

[^3]: References to IDEA Part C, which apply for students between birth and three years of age, will link to OSEP’s IDEA Part C website at http://idea.ed.gov/part-c/search/new. For specific sections, enter those sections into the search box.
vision, hearing, social and emotional status, general intelligence, academic performance, communicative status, and motor abilities \( (34\ CFR\ §\ 300.304(c)(4)) \). Evaluation should be preceded by a Functional Vision Evaluation report shared prior to further evaluation, in order to ensure that results accurately reflect the child’s aptitude and not the impact of a visual impairment \( (34\ CFR\ §\ 300.304(c)(3)) \).

Texas Education Code 30.002 (c)(4) states that the statewide plan for the education of children with visual impairments must include methods to ensure that these students receive evaluation and instruction in the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC). Recent legislative action clarified the nine areas of the ECC that are related to the disability of visual impairment. See Section 6 for a complete explanation of these instructional areas, which should be included in a comprehensive evaluation of students with visual impairments and in developing the annual individualized education program.

There are significant changes in demands on visual and sensory systems as students grow older. For students under three years of age, the service coordinator must convene a meeting at least every six months to evaluate and revise the IFSP as needed \( (TAC\ Title\ 40,\ Part\ 2,\ Chapter\ 108,\ Subchapter\ J(d)(e),\ Rule\ Section\ 108.103) \). 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 children age birth to two who are eligible for vision services or who are suspected of having a visual impairment, the TVI must be given 10 days written notice of initial, six-month review and annual IFSP meetings. The 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. Every six months or annually for students under the age of three, it is critical to consider a student’s evaluation data to determine how that student is functioning in
new environments and whether new evaluation is needed. Information on new rules and rule changes will be posted on the TEA website at http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index4.aspx?id=2296.

Involvement of the teacher of students with visual impairments and certified orientation and mobility specialist in the FIE (34 CFR § 300.1(a)19 and TAC § 89.1001(a) and 34 CFR § 300.304(c)(iv) is 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), TAC § 89.1040(b), and TAC § 89.1040(c)(12)(A)(ii)(l) and (II)).

- **Performing the O&M evaluation** to establish eligibility and/or reevaluate the need for orientation and mobility instruction (TAC § 89.1040(b) and TAC § 89.1040(c)(12)(A)(ii)(l)).

- Ensuring that evaluation includes all appropriate areas of the **expanded core curriculum**; 34 CFR § 300.304(c)(4) and 34 CFR § 300.305 (a)(2)(ii), TEC 30.002 (c)(4).

- **Establishing assessment techniques**, methods, and materials for the Texas Student Assessment Program and local assessments;

- **Assisting other team members** in the use of appropriate evaluation tools and methods;

- **Providing input regarding evaluation results** as they relate to visual impairments, and

- **Developing appropriate programming** recommendations.

VI. Defining the Expanded Core Curriculum

Guideline/Standard #3:

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

For children who are blind or visually impaired, evaluations to document the present level of academic and functional performance for the
development of the individualized education program (IEP) are required by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). (34 CFR § 300.320 (a)(1)) and TEC 30.002. For students with visual impairments, local districts must provide each student with evaluation and instruction in the expanded core curriculum. TEC 30.002(b)(4)(A)(B).

The expanded core curriculum 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 (B) "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 skills be thoroughly evaluated and systematically taught to these students by teachers with specialized expertise. Without specialized instruction, children with vision loss may not be aware of the activities of their peers or acquire other critical information about their surroundings (NASDSE, 1999, p. 70).

Once eligibility as a student with visual impairment is established, the following unique skills related to the expanded core curriculum should be considered, based upon evaluation results, as the IFSP/IEP is being developed:

- **Compensatory Skills** needed to access the general curriculum, including:

  - Access to literacy and mathematics through braille (including literary and Nemeth Code) and/or print, handwriting skills and auditory skills. Texas Education Code assumes that all students who are functionally blind are to be taught braille unless their learning media assessment recommends different learning media. (TEC § 30.002(f)). Many students with low vision use regular print with magnification devices. Some students need both print and braille. Students with multiple disabilities, including deafblindness, may use a tactile or object symbol system for literacy.

  - Communication needs that will vary depending on degree of functional vision, effects of additional disabilities, and the task to be done. Students with deafblindness and others may have alternative communication systems such as tactile sign language, symbol or object communication, or calendar boxes.
Specialized instruction in concept development that may be significantly impacted when visual observation is limited. It is essential to offer specific and sequential hands-on lessons to build a broad base of experiences. In higher grades, there are many abstract mathematical, geographical, and scientific concepts that must be taught with alternative strategies and materials, including Nemeth Code and tactile graphics.

A child with little or no vision may have fragmented understandings of the world without systematic tactile exploration and clear verbal explanations. Some concepts are totally visual, such as colors, rainbows, clouds, and sky. Some are too large to experience completely, such as a building, mountain ranges, and oceans. Other items are too tiny or too delicate to understand through touch, including small insects, a snowflake, or an item under a microscope. Fragmented concepts can impede social, academic, and vocational development.

**Orientation and Mobility (O&M):** Safe and efficient travel throughout the environment is a critical component in the education of students with visual impairments. Orientation & mobility evaluation and instruction should begin in infancy with basic spatial concepts, purposeful and exploratory movement, and progress through more independent age-appropriate motor and travel skills in increasingly complex environments. Vision provides the primary motivation for infants to begin to move their bodies, to raise their heads to see people, to reach toward objects, to move through the environment, and to begin to play. Significant delays and differences in meeting motor milestones can impact overall development. The 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. Students with multiple impairments benefit from O&M instruction that facilitates purposeful movement and increases independence to the greatest degree possible.
• **Social Interaction Skills**: A visual impairment can socially isolate a student, impede typical social interactions, or limit social skill development. A student with a visual impairment may not be able to see facial expressions and subtle body language to participate in conversations and activities. Social skills that sighted children are able to observe and imitate may need to be taught to a child with a visual impairment.

• **Career Education and Planning**: Students with visual impairments need to be taught about the variety of work and career options that are available since they cannot casually observe people in different job roles. They need opportunities to explore their strengths and interests in a systematic, well-planned manner. This training may include the acquisition of specialized skills and equipment to compete in the job market. Students must be prepared for a wide range of vocational choices and the adaptations, including technological devices, which make them attainable. It is important to have opportunities to job shadow for concrete experience of different career choices and to learn about other persons with visual impairments who have successful vocational outcomes.

• **Assistive Technology, Including Optical Devices**: Technology permits students with visual impairments to access the general curriculum, to increase literacy options, and to enhance communication. There are a variety of high and low-tech assistive technology tools designed specifically for students with visual impairments that require specialized instruction. These devices include, but are not limited to: electronic braille notetakers, yellow transparencies, tactile symbols, calendar systems, video magnifiers, screen reader software, screen enlarging software, and hand-held optical devices.

• **Independent Living Skills**: Personal hygiene, dressing, food preparation, money management, housekeeping, and organization skills are critical skills for successful transition from school to independent living. Young children begin learning basic skills in independent living from visual observation and imitation. Most students with visual impairments, however, will need specific instruction and adaptations to standard equipment, such as modifications to read oven markings and to cook independently and safely. Depending on the level of vision, cognition and other individual characteristics of a student, adaptations may range from
minor highlighting to tactile clues for matching clothing. Students can learn to apply make-up and perform other grooming activities with magnifying lenses, specially marked containers, and highlighted dials on electric shavers. These skills are not typically evaluated or taught in a sequential and systematic basis in general education settings. Family members may require assistance and guidance to implement the proper adaptations that will permit independent practice and mastery of new skills within the home.

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

• **Self-Determination**: Self-determination includes personal decision-making, self-advocacy, problem solving and assertiveness. These skills lead to competence, as opposed to learned helplessness, and are important components of positive self-esteem. Generally, low societal expectations for people who are blind can be overcome with specialized instruction in developing self-determination skills so that students can meaningfully participate in their educational and transition planning and make positive adult lifestyle, job, and other life choices upon graduation.

• **Sensory Efficiency (includes visual, tactual, and auditory skills)**: Students who are blind and students with low vision need systematic instruction to learn efficient use of their senses.
  
  o Instruction in *visual efficiency* must be individually designed and may include using visual gaze to make choices, tracking car movements when crossing the street, responding to visual cues in the environment, and/or using optical devices such as magnifiers and telescopes.

  o For students who are blind and functionally blind, an increased reliance upon *tactual* skills is essential to learning. These skills should be considered as part of the IFSP/IEP development. It takes more detailed “hands-on” interaction and repetition to tactually understand a concept, such as relative size, that may be readily captured with a glance.
Systematic instruction in auditory skills is critical for successful mobility and learning. Students must learn to effectively use their hearing to respond appropriately to social cues, travel safely in schools and across streets, learn from recorded media, and use echolocation for orientation.

VII. Addressing Curricular Needs of Students with Visual Impairments

Guideline/Standard #4:
Appropriate instructional time, accommodations, and modifications are provided to meet all identified areas in individual student programs.

Since students with visual impairments have unique learning needs, instructional teams should consider creative strategies to meet those needs. 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 (5)). General and special education teachers are primarily responsible for instruction in the academic core content, with the support of VI professionals to accommodate or modify instructional design and materials to address the impact of visual impairment.

Instructional time: Instruction in the expanded core curriculum may require additional time beyond the regular school day and year. For students who are under three years old, year round services related to the visual impairment must be available 48 weeks of each year, based upon developmental needs and family priorities. To access the 2013 Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services and the Texas Education Agency, click on the Early Transition MOU link at http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147494975.

It is difficult to find time within the typical school program for addressing all needed elements of the core and expanded core curricula. The Texas
Education Code 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.
- Application for high school credit for vision-specific coursework, following state regulations and procedures.
- After-school programs sponsored either by the local education agency (LEA), regional education service center (ESC), or community or private agencies.
- Summer programs, either locally or offered by the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI).
- Short-term programs offered by TSBVI Short Term Programs
- Programs offered by DARS Division for Blind Services and/or
- Intervention in the child’s home or natural environment for children under three years of age.  (TEC 30.002)

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

**TEC 30.002 Subsection (c)(4) and 10 (e)(1-5)** mandate that each eligible student who is blind or visually impaired is entitled to receive educational programs that reflect evaluation and instruction in expanded core curriculum areas in order to derive lasting practical benefits from the education provided by school districts. A structured evaluation of each of the ECC areas is critical to measuring success and assuring independence. Both the TVI and/or the COMS have roles in evaluating or ensuring appropriate evaluation of the student’s needs in all areas of the expanded core curriculum. The TVI should take the lead in evaluation of compensatory skills, while the COMS must perform the O&M evaluations. In other areas of the expanded core curriculum, collaboration between the two professionals will ensure a comprehensive evaluation.

There are a variety of formal and informal evaluations that can appropriately determine the student’s functioning level in these vision-specific topics. Instructional needs in the expanded core curriculum areas can be addressed using a variety of service delivery models. The TVI and the COMS are the primary resources for instruction in the expanded core curriculum, although the family, early intervention specialists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech-language pathologists, classroom teachers, other district personnel, education service center staff, TSBVI programs or DARS Division for Blind Services can also play important roles in providing the needed instruction. Texas law specifically notes that there should be flexibility on the part of school districts to meet the special needs of children with visual impairments through a variety of instructional and service arrangement within and outside of the local district. *(TEC 30.002 ((c)(5) A-E and TEC 30.002 (10) A-E)*. For children under three years of age, the parent(s)/caregiver should be considered the primary instructor(s).

**Instruction** in the Expanded Core Curriculum may need to be provided outside of regular school hours. **TEC 30.002(c)(5)** requires local school districts to provide for flexibility to meet the special needs of children with visual impairments and section (e)(10) specifically requires a description of the arrangements for services beyond regular school hours. The 2013-2014 edition of the **Student Accounting Handbook** includes an example of O&M services offered in the evening in Section 3.6.5 Instruction Provided
Outside of the Regular School Day: "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 (e.g., speech therapy provided on Saturday as a result of the unavailability of speech therapists during the regular school week, orientation and mobility services/vision instruction provided outside the regular school day because they must be provided at night or in periods of darkness)."

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

Guideline/Standard #5:
Certified teachers of students with visual impairments perform required evaluations and instruction.

Certified teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs) are legally mandated team members for all students with visual impairments, including those with deafblindness. (CFR 300.321)(TAC §§ 89.1050(c)(4)(A) & 89.1050(c)(4)(C)). The educational needs of these students vary widely, and ongoing professional development is essential. From initial evaluation to instruction to ongoing assessment, the TVI plays a critical role in helping students, teachers, paraeducators, family members, and related service personnel. For information about certification requirements, university coursework, and programs for training TVIs, refer to the Administrator Tool Box at http://www.tsbvi.edu/program-and-administrative-resources/3226-administrators-toolbox-visual-impairments. A University newsletter is available at each ESC and on the TSBVI website: http://www.tsbvi.edu/how-do-i-become-a-vi-professional (answers to questions prospective students may have about the certification program).

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

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

**Direct Instruction in the Expanded Core Curriculum**

- Direct instruction in visual efficiency, tactile symbols, braille (including literary and Nemeth Code), assistive technology, auditory skills, social skills, use of near and distance low vision optical devices and other areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum.
- Supporting parents of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers as they help their children reach developmental milestones with adapted strategies specific to needs related to the visual impairment (services may be in the home, at an early intervention program, or in the community).
- Providing support to the student to facilitate development of self-esteem, self-determination, and social acceptance.

**Supporting Educational Teams**

The teacher of students with visual impairments (TVI) must be able to educate, support, and collaborate with family members and other members of the instructional team who work with the student. The TVI must be able to convey professional opinions in a diplomatic, collaborative manner in order to ensure that appropriate programming is recommended for the student with a visual impairment. The TVI’s supporting roles include:

- Supporting families in developing infant and early childhood goals and objectives related to their child’s visual impairment.
• Supporting transitions from ECI to preschool, preschool to elementary school, elementary to middle school, and middle school to high school.
• Providing opportunities for families to meet other families and to access training.
• Coordinating services for students with certified orientation and mobility specialists.
• Consulting with parents, teachers, and other professionals in the home, community, and school on providing instruction in the expanded core curriculum areas.
• Modifying the environment to accommodate specific visual needs.
• Modeling appropriate techniques for providing instruction.
• Providing, creating, and acquiring adapted materials.
• Providing in-service training and collaborative consultation to the 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 Texas Education Agency.
• Maintaining records on all evaluations, IFSPs/IEPs, and progress reports.
• Attending IFSP and ARD meetings.
• Monitoring and recording student progress toward IEP goals/objectives.
• Ordering and providing adapted textbooks as appropriate for each student.
• Ordering adapted materials from the American Printing House for the Blind through the Federal Quota program and from other resources.

Federal and state laws mandate specific involvement of certified teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs) in the educational programs of students with visual impairments, including those with deafblindness and other additional disabilities:

- Teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs) must be available to students with visual impairments, including deafblindness 34 CFR § 300.321, TAC § 89.1131(b)(3).
- TVIs should attend each ARD committee meeting unless they meet the exception conditions regarding attendance described in 34 CFR § 300.321(e)(1), or regarding excusal in 34 CFR § 300.321(e)(2).
- For each child birth-2 years of age with a visual impairment, including those with deafblindness, a TVI must attend initial and annual individualized family service plan (IFSP) meetings and any other IFSP meeting that addresses issues related to or impacted by the visual impairment. (Early Childhood Transition)4.
- IDEA requires that an individual who can interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results be a member of the IEP team. (Statute: 34 CFR § 300.321).
- No Child Left Behind (Public Law 107-110) mandates the provision of highly qualified professionals. Under most circumstances, the TVI is not the student’s highly qualified instructor in academic content areas; instruction in the general curriculum is the primary responsibility of the general education teachers.
- The district shall ensure that the ARD committee for each student with a disability includes the required members. (19 TAC § 89.1050 (c)) All special education and related service personnel shall be

4 To access the 2013 Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services and the Texas Education Agency, click on the Early Transition MOU link at http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147494975.
certified, endorsed, or licensed in the area(s) of assignments (34 CFR § 300.321)(19 TAC § 89.1131(a).

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

Guideline/Standard #6:
Certified orientation and mobility specialists perform required evaluations and instruction in orientation and mobility.

Movement, independent or supported, is critical for learning. The COMS is required to conduct an orientation and mobility (O&M) evaluation for initial eligibility of a student under the IDEA category of visual impairment (TEC 30.002 Subsections (c-1) and to be a member of the multidisciplinary team in evaluating needed reevaluations. Orientation & mobility is recognized in IDEA 2004 as a related service, which may be required to assist a child with a visual impairment to benefit from special education. Certified orientation and mobility specialists (COMS) provide services that enable students who are visually impaired to attain systematic orientation to and safe movement within home, school and community environments, and in addition support development of social, daily living, and recreation/leisure skills. COMS are critical members of the team for all students with visual impairments who have identified O&M needs (34 CFR § 300.34 (c)(7)). The O&M needs of these students vary widely and ongoing professional development for COMS is essential.

In the state of Texas, an orientation and mobility specialist must be certified by the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP) to provide orientation and mobility instruction in the schools (19 T.A.C. § 89.1131(e)). For information about university coursework and certification requirements and programs for training COMS, refer to the Administrator Tool Box at http://www.tsbvi.edu/program-and-administrative-resources/3226-administrators-toolbox-visual-impairments. A University newsletter is available at each ESC and on the TSBVI website: (http://www.tsbvi.edu/how-do-i-become-a-vi-professional) for information
to many questions prospective students may have about the TVVI and O&M certification program in Texas.

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

**Assessment and Evaluation**

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

**Direct Instruction in the Expanded Core Curriculum**

- Encouraging purposeful movement, exploration of immediate surroundings, and motor development for infants with visual impairments.
- Teaching spatial and environmental concepts and use of information received by the senses (such as sound, temperature, and vibrations) to establish, maintain, or regain orientation and line of travel (e.g., using traffic sounds at an intersection to cross the street).
- Facilitating purposeful movement and independence to the greatest degree possible for students with multiple impairments, including through active learning systems for students with severe disabilities.
- Facilitating development of self-esteem, self-determination, and social skills, independent living skills, and recreation and leisure.
- Orienting students to unfamiliar environments.
- Instructing in efficient use of low vision for movement.
- Teaching efficient use of optical devices.
- Teaching use of mobility tools, including the long cane and adaptive mobility devices, for safely negotiating the environment.
• 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 consultation to other team members in home, school, and community settings.
• Recommending orientation and mobility strategies for access to the general curriculum such as physical education class and participation in school and community extracurricular activities.

Administrative/Record Keeping Duties

• Maintaining records on all evaluations, IFSP/IEPs, and progress reports.
• Attending IFSP and ARD meetings.
• Ordering and providing adapted materials from the American Printing House for the Blind through the Federal Quota program and from other resources.
XI. Roles of Paraeducators for Students with Visual Impairments and Deafblindness

Guideline/Standard #7:

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

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

Classroom paraeducators may be hired to provide overall support to the larger class with particular duties for a student with a visual impairment and/or deafblindness. Their role may include assistance for activities of daily living, health and safety, and/or access to the environment. Many programs hire paraeducators to provide assistance with material preparation. Preparation may include copying, highlighting, enlarging, and scanning materials.

In addition, there are two unique categories of support staff for students who are blind and those who are deafblind. When there are students reading braille, districts will hire braille transcribers, typically hired as
paraeducators, who are highly trained to provide specialized braille materials using computer software and tactile graphics devices. **Interveners** are specially trained paraeducators who ensure appropriate access to instruction for students who are deafblind. (See [http://www.tsbvi.edu/deaf-blind-project/334-intervener-resources](http://www.tsbvi.edu/deaf-blind-project/334-intervener-resources)) Training should include information on deafblindness in general and also on the specific communication and learning strategies that are appropriate with individual students. Interveners are needed for some students with deafblindness who require assistance to connect with what is happening in the environment beyond what they can personally see or hear, often using highly individualized communication systems. There is a new category of community intervener within the Medicaid Waiver program. For information, see [http://www.dads.state.tx.us/handbooks/dbmd/index.htm](http://www.dads.state.tx.us/handbooks/dbmd/index.htm).

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

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

Sample job descriptions of interveners and other paraeducators are part of the Administrator's Tool Box found at [http://www.tsbvi.edu/program-and-administrative-resources/2260-job-descriptions-for-vi-professionals-and-paraprofessionals](http://www.tsbvi.edu/program-and-administrative-resources/2260-job-descriptions-for-vi-professionals-and-paraprofessionals).
XII. Role of the Family in the Individualized Family Service Plan/Individualized Education Program (IFSP/IEP) Process for Students with Visual Impairments

Guideline/Standard #8:
Families are active members of the educational team.

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

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

Families of students with visual impairments have the same rights and responsibilities as families of all students with any disabilities. IDEA compliance by states includes the full participation of families in the education of their children, as outlined in multiple sections of the statute, including 34 CFR §300.501(b), §300.306(a)(1), §300.322(c), §§300.501(c) and 300.327, §§300.501(c)(3) and 300.328.
XIII. Service Delivery for Infants with Visual Impairments

Guideline/Standard #9:
Vision professionals are members of the instructional team for all birth - two year old children with visual impairments and available for services 48 weeks a year.

Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services-Early Childhood Intervention (DARS-ECI) is the lead agency in Texas for infants with disabilities, with specialized services for infants with visual and/or auditory impairments provided by local district staff as mandated by IDEA Part C. More information on the ECI program can be found online at: http://www.dars.state.tx.us/ecis/index.shtml. A recent Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) governs roles and responsibilities and sets standards and funding agreements between DARS-ECI and the Texas Education Agency (TEA) for students with visual and/or auditory impairments. To access the 2013 Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services and the Texas Education Agency, click on the Early Transition MOU link at http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147494975. TEA has clarified in a new Q&A document (not posted as of early January 2014; check at http://www.tea.state.tx.us for updates) that: "Programs must have the capacity to provide the services identified in an IFSP a minimum of 48 weeks out of the year. This means that district and ECI personnel must be available to provide services or assess children during the summer months. Programs may not exceed two successive weeks without having services available for children who need them as determined by the child’s IFSP." (Q&A currently unavailable on the TEA website) The teacher of students with visual impairments (and a teacher of students with auditory impairments for a student with deafblindness) must attend each annual IFSP meeting as well as each IFSP meeting that addresses issues related to and impacted by the visual impairment and/or hearing impairment.

The MOU promotes interagency collaboration and a coordinated system of activities, policies, and procedures to support services for infants. The
ECI service coordinator arranges 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. Teachers of students with visual impairments and certified orientation and mobility specialists often provide services in the home setting as well as day care and other community settings for children under three.

It is the local district’s responsibility to provide AI/VI services to all infants residing within district boundaries. The location of service delivery is determined as part of the IFSP process, based upon the individual needs of the child 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.

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

- Make a formal or informal arrangement with the district that the daycare is in to provide the VI/AI services
- Provide services in the evening or on weekends in the child's home
- Provide services in the daycare that is outside district boundaries

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

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5 Rules regarding provision of ECI services are guided by Federal and State law and regulations. For questions, refer to the ECI website at http://www.dars.state.tx.us/ecis/index.shtml or call the hotline at 1-800-628-5115.
XIV. Appropriate Educational Placements for Students with Visual Impairments

Guideline/Standard #10:

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

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

For school-aged students, IDEA guides placement. “Part B regulations require public agencies to make available a continuum of alternative placements, or a range of placement options to meet the needs of students with disabilities for special education and related services. The options on this continuum, which include regular classes, special classes, separate schools, and instruction in hospitals and institutions, must be made available to the extent necessary to implement the IEP of each disabled student” (34 CFR §§ 300.115 and 300.116).

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

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

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

Guideline/Standard #11:

Times for specialized instruction by certified teachers of students with visual impairments and by certified orientation and mobility specialists are 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 services that a student will receive from a TVI or COMS based on the student’s assessed needs in both the general and expanded core curricula. These needs must be determined based on appropriate evaluation and/or assessment data. For infants, a plan must be based upon a comprehensive picture of the child, identification of functional goals, and the need for expertise from the TVI or COMS in strategies for achieving those outcomes.

Time for services from the TVI and COMS should not be determined based upon availability of personnel. The district should establish procedures for documenting student need and the vision professional’s time. There is an ongoing shortage of vision professionals in this state and country. Therefore, in order to ensure adequate current and future supplies of certified and qualified vision professionals, a district’s program should include active recruitment for new TVIs and COMS in conjunction with the regional service centers, TSBVI, and personnel preparation programs in the state.
• The following are examples of service delivery time options: (More detailed examples of times can be found at http://www.tsbvi.edu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=492:apsea-guidelines-for-determining-caseload-size-for-teachers-of-students-with-visual-impairments&catid=104). 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. An additional 2-3 hours per day will be needed for preparation of materials and collaboration with the team.

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

• To provide adequate time for community instruction, the COMS may schedule lessons in 2-hour blocks. Time needs to be built into a schedule to permit travel to appropriate settings as well as enough time to explore and learn decision-making skills for safety in unfamiliar situations.

• Students with low vision who are learning to use optical devices may initially require intensive direct instruction 1-3 times a week, followed by reduced time as mastery increases. Some visual conditions require flexible scheduling to support learning in nighttime environments.

• Students with multiple impairments need routines that create predictable patterns for learning. To support instruction in newly introduced skills in a transdisciplinary model, the TVI may initially schedule more intensive daily consultation for a specified period of time for:
  o Observing the student’s current skill levels
  o Working directly with the student to determine appropriate modifications to materials or instructional methodology
  o Modeling teaching to show other team members appropriate techniques
  o Monitoring student progress
• There should be scheduled time for active collaboration and consultation with the educational team, including family members, for each student. When the consultative model includes participating in team evaluations, contributing to the writing of IEPs, working periodically with the student, observing across activities, modeling appropriate teaching strategies, creating and preparing communication materials, and attending staffings on a student with complex needs, considerable time may be required from the TVI and/or COMS.

• An independent student with stable low vision may require minimal assistance beyond adapted materials and communication with the general education team and family. Assuming the student’s progress in the expanded core curriculum is evaluated by the TVI annually, this student may only require consultative services on a monthly or twice monthly basis.

• Service delivery for infants with visual impairments should be individually planned to match the needs of the family. The TVI and COMS may provide direct instruction to the infant and family. In addition, to ensure consistency and prevent fragmented services, home visits may be combined with other team members such as early interventionists, physical therapists, speech language pathologists, or social workers.

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

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

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

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

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

The district should establish procedures for documenting student progress and the vision professional’s time.
XVI. Determining Appropriate Caseloads for Vision Professionals

Guideline/standard #12:
Written caseload guidelines are used to evaluate caseloads of vision professionals.

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

Division 16, the Itinerant Services Division of The Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) position paper states that “a teacher’s caseload should be based on the time needed for the student to achieve the IEP goals, including time for direct service, collaboration/consultation, lesson and material preparation, evaluation, and driving. Caseloads based on the assessed needs of students will ensure that students will receive the amount of service necessary to meet their educational goals.”

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

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

There are a variety of effective and objective tools for determining caseloads. These are available for download from the caseload analysis chapter in the Administrator’s Tool Box at http://www.tsbvi.edu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=490:caseload-analysis-guidelines&catid=108&Itemid=151. Administrators can work with their vision professionals to implement the Michigan Severity Rating Scales, Iowa staffing pattern recommendations, Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority (APSEA) guidelines, Colorado Caseload Management Guidelines (1995), or the Quality Programs for Students with Visual Impairments (QPVI) program to assist in determining appropriate caseloads.

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

XVII. Conclusion

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

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

Websites:

- Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals: http://www.acvrep.org/
- American Council of the Blind of Texas: http://www.acbtexas.org/
- American Printing House for the Blind: www.aph.org
- Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired: www.aerbvi.org
- Council for Exceptional Children http://www.cec.sped.org
- DARS Division for Blind Services: http://www.dars.state.tx.us/dbs/index.shtml
- DARS Early Childhood Intervention: http://www.dars.state.tx.us/ecis/index.shtml
- DB-LINK: now part of the National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness http://nationaldb.org/
- Deaf Blind Multi-Handicapped Association of Texas: http://www.dbmat-tx.org/
- Hadley School for the Blind: http://www.hadley.edu/default.asp
- IDEA legislation: http://idea.ed.gov/
- Learning Ally: http://www.learningally.org/
- National Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments: www.napvi.org
- Stephen F. Austin State University: http://www.sfasu.edu/
• Texas Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments: www.tapvi.com

• Texas Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired: http://www.txaer.org/

• Texas Education Agency – Special Ed Home Page: http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147491399

• Texas Education Agency – Special Ed Rules & Regulations: http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147497444

• Texas Parents of Blind Children: http://www.tpobc.org/

• Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired: www.tsbvi.edu

• Texas Tech University: http://www.educ.ttu.edu/research/sowell/default
Reference Publications:


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

Texas Education Code, Commissioner’s Rules Concerning Special Education Services 89.AA. Chapter 89. Adaptation for Special Populations.

**Education Service Centers:**

There is a certified visual impairment specialist at every regional Education Service Center in Texas. To find the visual impairment
specialist at your ESC, go to the State Leadership Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired site at http://www.esc11.net/page/3257 or contact Olga Uriegas, SLSBVI State Lead at 817-740-7567.
XIX. List of Guideline/Standards:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

8. Families are active members of the educational team.

9. Vision professionals are members of the instructional team for all birth - two year old children with visual impairments and services identified in the IFSP must be available 48 weeks a year.

10. A continuum of services and placement options are available based on individual student needs.

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

12. Written caseload guidelines are used to evaluate caseloads of vision professionals.
XX. Frequently Asked Questions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

New legislation passed in the 83rd Regular Session of the Texas Legislature mandated an evaluation by a certified orientation and mobility specialist 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 re-evaluation would be necessary for subsequent full and individual evaluations, which must be considered no less than every three years (or annually for infants) (See Sections IV and XXI in this document.)

5. Do all students with visual impairments need IEP goals and objectives in all areas of the expanded core curriculum?

The expanded core curriculum (ECC) identifies critical skills that are impacted by the presence of a visual impairment. Legislation passed in the 83rd Regular Session of the Texas Legislature reinforced the need to provide assessment and instruction in all areas of the expanded core curriculum (See Section XXI of this document for the language of SB 39.) IDEA requires consideration of present levels of performance in both academic and functional areas. The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) has endorsed the term “expanded core curriculum” to describe areas that should be included in the comprehensive evaluation of students with visual impairments. An ARD committee should consider appropriate annual IEP goals and objectives when evaluation results indicate a need for instruction in areas of the ECC. (See Sections V and VI in this document.)
6. Which professionals must attend an ARD meeting for a student who is visually impaired?

According to Federal Law 300.306(a)(1) and Texas Administrative Code Sections 89.1040(b) and (c)(12)(A)(ii), a teacher who is certified in the education of children with visual impairments must attend each ARD for a child with a suspected or documented visual impairment including suspected or documented deafblindness. (See Section IX in this document and reference [http://info.sos.state.tx.us/pls/pub/readtac$ext.ViewTAC?tac_view=w=4&ti=19&pt=2&ch=89](http://info.sos.state.tx.us/pls/pub/readtac$ext.ViewTAC?tac_view=w=4&ti=19&pt=2&ch=89))

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

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

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

When an ARD 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 with deafblindness may require an intervener, a paraeducator with specific training in appropriate access to instruction for students with combined hearing and vision impairments. (See Section XI in this document.)

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

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

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

Yes. Students with hearing and/or visual impairments are eligible to be served from birth. The Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services-Early Childhood Intervention (DARS-ECI) is the lead agency for serving students from birth through 2 years of age. However, local district staff provides the specialized services for visual and/or auditory impairments as mandated by IDEA Part C. (See Section XIII in this document)

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

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

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

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 factors. It is an individualized decision for each student. There is a set of guidelines for amount of service developed in Michigan that is posted at http://www.tsbvi.edu/resources/2396-michigan-vision-severity-
rating-scale and other scales are in development (See Section XV in this document.)

XXI. Senate Bill 39 and House Bill 590, 83rd Regular Session, modifying TEC 30.002.

Texas S.B. No.39

AN ACT relating to the evaluation and instruction of public school students with visual impairments. BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

- SECTION 1. Subsections (b), (c), and (e), Section 30.002, Education Code, are amended to read as follows:
  - (b) The agency shall:
    - (1) develop standards and guidelines for all special education services for children with visual impairments that it is authorized to provide or support under this code;
    - (2) supervise regional education service centers and other entities in assisting school districts in serving children with visual impairments more effectively;
    - (3) develop and administer special education services for students with both serious visual and auditory impairments;
    - (4) evaluate special education services provided for children with visual impairments by school districts and approve or disapprove state funding of those services; and
    - (5) maintain an effective liaison between special education programs provided for children with visual impairments by school districts and related initiatives of the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services Division for the Blind Services, the Texas Department of State Health Services Mental Health and Substance Abuse Division, the Texas School for the Blind and
Visually Impaired, and other related programs, agencies, or facilities as appropriate.

- (c) The comprehensive statewide plan for the education of children with visual impairments must:
  - (1) adequately provide for comprehensive diagnosis and evaluation of each school-age child with a serious visual impairment;
  - (2) include the procedures, format, and content of the individualized education program for each child with a visual impairment;
  - (3) emphasize providing educational services to children with visual impairments in their home communities whenever possible;
  - (4) include methods to ensure that children with visual impairments receiving special education services in school districts receive, before being placed in a classroom setting or within a reasonable time after placement:
    - (A) evaluation of the impairment; and
    - (B) instruction in an expanded core curriculum, which is required for students with visual impairments to succeed in classroom settings and to derive lasting, practical benefits from the education provided by school districts, including instruction in:
      - (i) the training in compensatory skills, such as braille and concept development, and other skills needed to access the rest of the curriculum;
      - (ii) communicative skills, orientation and mobility;
      - (iii) and social interaction skills;
      - (iv) and the vocational or career planning;
- (v) assistive technology, including optical devices;
- (vi) independent living skills;
- (vii) recreation and leisure enjoyment;
- (viii) self-determination; and
- (ix) sensory efficiency counseling, required for those students to succeed in classroom settings and to derive lasting, practical benefits from the education in the school district;

- (5) provide for flexibility on the part of school districts to meet the special needs of children with visual impairments through:
  - (A) specialty staff and resources provided by the district;
  - (B) contractual arrangements with other qualified public or private agencies;
  - (C) supportive assistance from regional education service centers or adjacent school districts;
  - (D) short-term or long-term services through the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired or related facilities or programs; or
  - (E) other instructional and service arrangements approved by the agency;

- (6) include a statewide admission, review, and dismissal process;

- (7) provide for effective interaction between the visually impaired child’s classroom setting and the child’s home environment, including providing for parental training and counseling either by school district staff or by representatives of other organizations directly involved in the development and
implementation of the individualized education program for the child;

- (8) require the continuing education and professional development of school district staff providing special education services to children with visual impairments;

- (9) provide for adequate monitoring and precise evaluation of special education services provided to children with visual impairments through school districts; and

- (10) require that school districts providing special education services to children with visual impairments develop procedures for assuring that staff assigned to work with the children have prompt and effective access directly to resources available through:
  - (A) cooperating agencies in the area;
  - (B) the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired;
  - (C) the Central Media Depository for specialized instructional materials and aids made specifically for use by students with visual impairments;
  - (D) sheltered workshops participating in the state program of purchases of blind-made goods and services; and
  - (E) related sources.

- (e) Each eligible blind or visually impaired student is entitled to receive educational programs according to an individualized education program that:
  - (1) is developed in accordance with federal and state requirements for providing special education services;
  - (2) is developed by a committee composed as required by federal law;
  - (3) reflects that the student has been provided a detailed explanation of the various service resources available to the student in the community and throughout the state;
  - (4) provides a detailed description of the arrangements made to provide the student with the evaluation and
instructi0n required under Subsection (c)(4) orientation and mobility training, instruction in braille or use of large print, other training to compensate for serious visual loss, access to special media and special tools, appliances, aids, or devices commonly used by individuals with serious visual impairments; and

(5) sets forth the plans and arrangements made for contacts with and continuing services to the student beyond regular school hours to ensure the student learns the skills and receives the instruction training required under Subsection (c)(4)(B) (e)(4).

- SECTION 2. Subsection (e), Section 30.002, Education Code, as amended by this Act, applies beginning with the 2013-2014 school year.

- SECTION 3. This Act takes effect immediately if it receives a vote of two-thirds of all the members elected to each house, as provided by Section 39, Article III, Texas Constitution. If this Act does not receive the vote necessary for immediate effect, this Act takes effect September 1, 2013.

Texas HB 590

AN ACT relating to determining a child ’s eligibility for a school district ’s special education program on the basis of a visual impairment.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

- SECTION 1. Section 30.002, Education Code, is amended by adding Subsections (c-1) and (c-2) to read as follows:
  - (c-1) To implement Subsection (c)(1) and to determine a child ’s eligibility for a school district ’s special education program on the basis of a visual impairment, the full individual and initial evaluation of the student required by Section 29.004 must, in accordance with commissioner rule:
(1) include an orientation and mobility evaluation conducted:
   - (A) by a person who is appropriately certified as an orientation and mobility specialist, as determined under commissioner rule; and
   - (B) 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; and
(2) provide for a person who is appropriately certified as an orientation and mobility specialist to participate, as part of a multidisciplinary team, in evaluating data on which the determination of the child’s eligibility is based.

(c-2) The scope of any reevaluation by a school district of a student who has been determined, after the full individual and initial evaluation, to be eligible for the district’s special education program on the basis of a visual impairment shall be determined, in accordance with 34 C.F.R. Sections 300.122 and 300.303 through 300.311, by a multidisciplinary team that includes, as provided by commissioner rule, a person described by Subsection (c-1)(1)(A).

SECTION 2.
(a) Not later than January 1, 2014, the commissioner of education shall adopt rules necessary to implement Sections 30.002(c-1) and (c-2), Education Code, as added by this Act.
(b) Not later than the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year, Sections 30.002(c-1) and (c-2), Education Code, as added by this Act, shall be implemented.

SECTION 3. This Act takes effect immediately if it receives a vote of two-thirds of all the members elected to each house, as provided by Section 39, Article III, Texas Constitution. If this Act does not receive the vote necessary for immediate effect, this Act takes effect September 1, 2013.