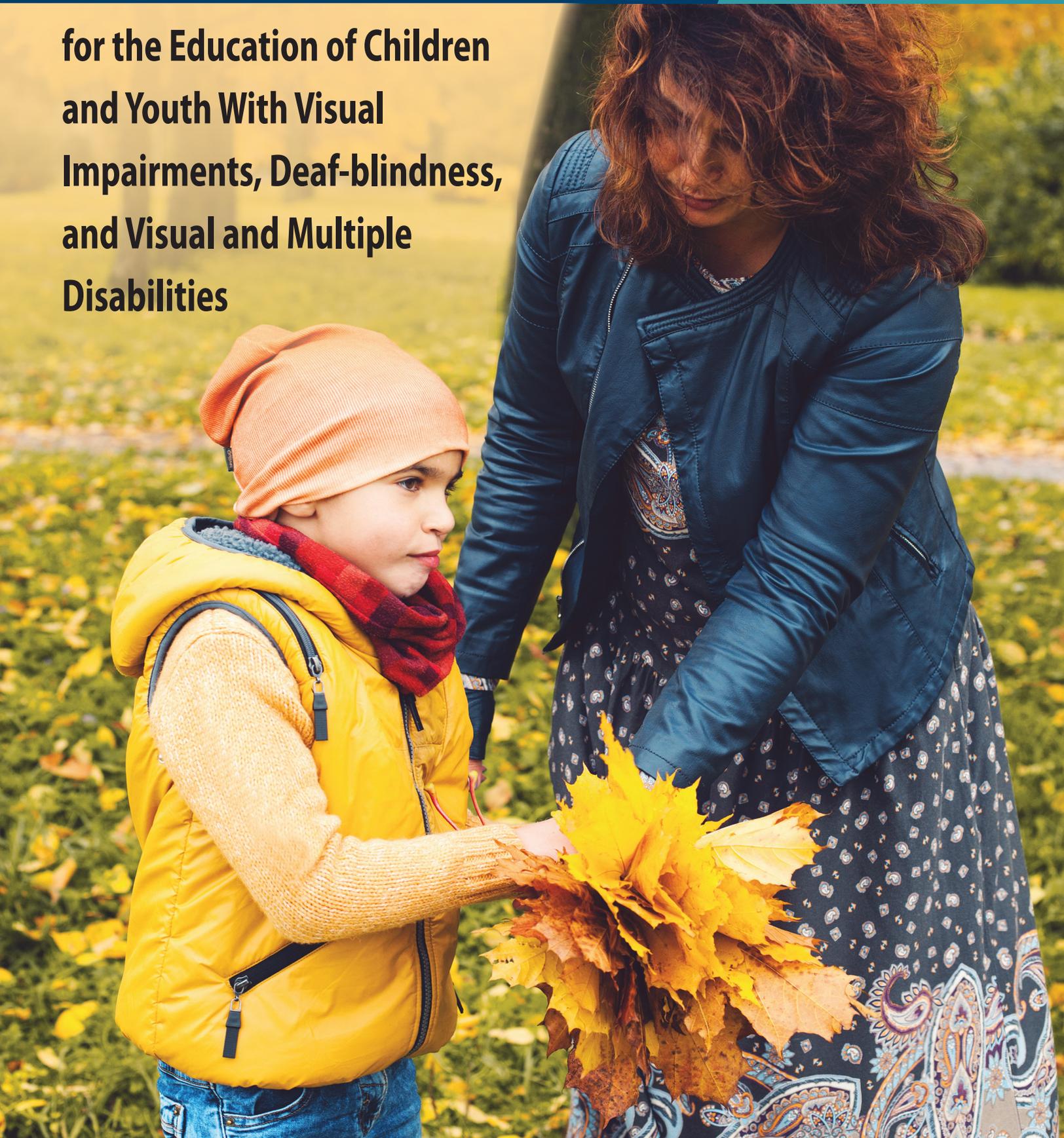


# Pennsylvania's Approach to the National Agenda

**for the Education of Children  
and Youth With Visual  
Impairments, Deaf-blindness,  
and Visual and Multiple  
Disabilities**



# Table of Contents

Introduction . . . . .	3
Referral – Goal 1 . . . . .	5
Family Participation – Goal 2 . . . . .	7
Personnel Preparation – Goal 3 . . . . .	9
Provision of Educational Services – Goal 4 . . . . .	11
Array of Services – Goal 5 . . . . .	11
Assessment – Goal 6 . . . . .	13
Access to Instructional Materials – Goal 7 . . . . .	15
Curricular Needs – Goal 8 . . . . .	17
Transition Services – Goal 9 . . . . .	19
Professional Development – Goal 10 . . . . .	21

# Introduction

Students with visual impairments have unique learning needs. Vision loss can affect all aspects of a child's development, and specific instruction and supports are needed in order to provide access to all learning environments. Over 60 percent of students with visual impairments have additional disabilities such as hearing loss, cognitive challenges, physical challenges, and autism.

The *National Agenda for the Education of Children and Youths with Visual Impairments Including Those with Multiple Disabilities* was a grass-roots reform movement aimed at improving the education of students with visual impairments, as well as students whose multiple disabilities include visual impairment. The movement centered on a document by the same name, which outlined a set of priorities that are stated as goals (Corn, Hatlen, Huebner, Ryan, & Siller, 1995; Huebner, Merk-Adam, Stryker, & Wolffe, 2004). Stakeholders such as parents, professionals, organizations, and individuals with visual impairments participated in the development of the National Agenda and continued to work on achieving its goals.

As affirmed in the movement's 1998 Report to the Nation, "The National Agenda came about because of an acknowledgement that children and youths with visual impairments are not consistently or universally receiving the quantity or quality of educational services appropriate for their special learning needs" (Corn & Huebner, 1998, p.3).

Like other states, Pennsylvania responded to the National Agenda and tailored it to meet the particular strengths and challenges of the commonwealth. *Pennsylvania's Approach to the National Agenda (PANA)* is the customization of the National Agenda to meet the educational needs and priorities of children and youth with visual impairments, deaf-blindness, and visual and multiple disabilities in the commonwealth.

PANA contains a set of goals and actions that are designed to ensure positive educational outcomes. These goals support the State Performance Plan Indicators that correspond with the areas of the National Agenda and are divided into ten major areas: referral, family participation, personnel preparation, provision of educational services, array of services,

assessment, access to instructional materials, curricular needs, transition services, and professional development.

**Referral (Goal 1):** Students with visual impairments, deaf-blindness, and visual and multiple disabilities and their families will be referred to an appropriate education program within 30 days of identification of a suspected visual impairment. Teachers of students with visual impairments and orientation and mobility (O&M) specialists will provide appropriate quality services.

**Family Participation (Goal 2):** All parents and guardians of students with visual impairments, deaf-blindness, and visual and multiple disabilities will be informed of their right to full participation and equal partnership in the educational process.

**Personnel Preparation (Goal 3):** Stakeholders in the field of visual impairment need to be ambassadors of information and actively recruit individuals for preparation programs to prepare a sufficient number of teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs) and orientation and mobility (O&M) specialists to meet personnel needs in Pennsylvania.

**Provision of Educational Services (Goal 4):** Students with visual impairments will receive the appropriate amount of services as determined by the IEP team from a teacher of students with visual impairments (TVI) and/or orientation and mobility specialist (COMS).

**Array of Services (Goal 5):** IDEA requires the provision of a Free and Appropriate Public Education, or FAPE. Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) and Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team members will develop a plan that will meet students' needs and will ensure least restrictive environment placement options and appropriate service delivery based on the identified needs of the student.

continued . . .

**Assessment (Goal 6):** Students with visual impairments will be assessed in all areas of a suspected disability and evaluated using appropriate assessment accommodations. Such assessments will be administered by, and/or in partnership with personnel having expertise in the education of students with visual impairments.

**Access to Instructional Materials (Goal 7):** Access to developmental and educational services will include an assurance that textbooks and instructional materials are available to students in the appropriate media and at the same time as their sighted peers.

**Curricular Needs (Goal 8):** All educational goals and instruction will address the academic and expanded core curricula based on the assessed needs of each student with visual impairments.

**Transition Services (Goal 9):** Transition services will address both the educational and functional needs of the student and assist the student and family in setting goals and implementing strategies commensurate with the student's aptitudes, interests, and abilities.

**Professional Development (Goal 10):** All service providers will possess current and applicable state or professional certifications, as well as engage in ongoing local, state, and national professional development activities to improve student learning.

While all ten goals are critical to the success of children and youth with visual impairments, including deaf-blindness, and visual and multiple disabilities, Curricular Needs (Goal 8), has been identified as a priority goal to teach the total set of disability-specific skills needed

to lead full, independent lives. The need for instruction in each area of the ECC is determined through assessment of individual students. The nine ECC areas include:

- Compensatory/Access Skills
- Orientation and Mobility (O&M)
- Social Interaction Skills
- Independent Living Skills
- Assistive Technology/Technology
- Recreation and Leisure Skills
- Sensory Efficiency
- Career Education
- Self-Determination

For additional information about PANA, contact PaTTAN at [www.pattan.net](http://www.pattan.net)

For additional information about the National Agenda, go to [www.tsbvi.edu/national-agenda](http://www.tsbvi.edu/national-agenda)

## References

Corn, A. L., Hatlen, P., Huebner, K. M., Ryan, F. & Siller, M. A. (1995). *The national agenda for the education of children and youths with visual impairments, including those with multiple disabilities*. NY: AFB.

Corn, A. L. & Huebner, K. M. (Eds.). (1998). A report to the nation: *The national agenda for the education of children and youths with visual impairments, including those with multiple disabilities, revised*. NY: AFB Press.

Huebner, K. M., Merk-Adam, B., Stryker, D., & Wolffe, K. (2004). *The national agenda for the education of children and youths with visual impairments, including those with multiple disabilities*. NY: AFB.

**Students with visual impairments, deaf-blindness, and visual and multiple disabilities and their families will be referred to an appropriate education program within 30 days of identification of a suspected visual impairment. Teachers of students with visual impairments and orientation and mobility (O&M) specialists will provide appropriate quality services.**

When a child has a suspected visual impairment, whether in infancy or as a teenager, it is important that the child's eye condition be examined by a medical and/or eye care professional. If a visual impairment is diagnosed, the child should be immediately referred to appropriate educational services. Developmental and educational services for children with visual impairments, deaf-blindness, and visual and multiple disabilities are most effective when the need is identified early, and services are established quickly.

## Communication and Collaboration

It is essential for eye care professionals, families, and service providers to work together in order for the child to receive appropriate services in a timely manner. The following information can help facilitate communication and collaboration among these individuals.

Information to **ask** eye care professionals:

- What is the child's eye condition? (diagnosis/Dx)
- What caused the eye problem? (etiology)
- Will my child's eye condition change? (stability status)
- What part of the eye or brain is involved? (location)
- How much can my child see? (visual acuity, both near and distance/size of object)
- Will eyeglasses or contact lenses help?
- Will low vision rehabilitation or vision enhancement devices help?
- Will an eye report be made available in order to communicate the results with all school team members?

Information to **share** with eye care professionals:

- Eye condition, if known
- Results of previous eye exams (when conducted and by whom)
- Any other diagnosis (e.g., Hearing loss, CP, ADHD, Autism)
- Current medications and drug allergies
- Reason for referral (what signs and symptoms have been noted)
- Neurological findings (including radiology summary from CT or MRI studies, if appropriate)
- Current services provided, frequency of services, and who is providing the services (e.g., teacher of students with the visual impairments, orientation and mobility specialist, occupational therapist, physical therapist)

## Referral Information

A child who has been diagnosed by an eye care professional as blind or visually impaired, or who is blind or has a suspected visual impairment, may qualify for specialized educational services at no cost.

The CONNECT helpline assists families in locating resources and provides information regarding child development for children from birth to age 5. In addition, CONNECT can assist parents in making a direct link to their county early intervention program or their local

preschool early intervention program. Children from birth to age 5 who have special needs due to development delays and disabilities are eligible to receive early intervention services. Families of children younger than school age can contact the CONNECT Early Intervention Helpline at 800-692-7288.

Once the child is in school, contact the local school district. To qualify for services, the child must have an identified disability and a need for specially designed instruction.

## Yearly Vision Screenings and Evaluations

After a child has been diagnosed as blind or visually impaired, yearly vision screenings and evaluations must be completed. With some eye conditions, vision can fluctuate or deteriorate, or the health of the eye can be affected. Yearly screenings and eye examinations will detect changes in a child's visual functioning and give the child a better opportunity to develop educationally, socially, emotionally, and physically.

For more information about the National Agenda, go to [www.tsbvi.edu/national-agenda](http://www.tsbvi.edu/national-agenda)

**All parents and guardians of students with visual impairments, deaf-blindness, and visual and multiple disabilities will be informed of their right to full participation and equal partnership in the educational process.**

Families are an important part of the implementation, focus, and follow-through of their child's educational programming. Through partnerships with families, an appropriate and meaningful education program can be established and implemented. The earlier families become involved in the educational process, the more powerful the effects. Team members, who are professionals trained in the education and rehabilitation of students with visual impairments, have the specialized knowledge and skills to assess and instruct students. However, over a child's lifetime, members of the team will change regularly, but parents and family will remain constant. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which is the federal law ensuring services to children with disabilities, guarantees the right of families to participate in the education of their children as equal and integral members of the educational team.

### The Family's Expectations for Their Child's Success

Success for all individuals includes being happy and healthy in full, productive, independent lives. A family's expectations and attitudes toward achievement can strongly influence a child's success. Parents can help by setting reasonable age-appropriate goals, working toward those goals through active engagement, and teaching their child to problem solve and self-advocate. While working on these goals may be time-intensive, the child will reap the benefits over time.

Children with visual impairments, deaf-blindness, and visual and multiple disabilities need access to the general education curriculum, with appropriate supports, to learn at the same grade level as their sighted peers. Some examples include how to tell time; how to write a persuasive essay; how to complete tasks independently and interdependently; how to engage in extracurricular activities; and how to navigate school, home, and community environments.

### The Family's Role in the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) and Essential Assessments

The expanded core curriculum (ECC) is an additional set of skills that children with visual impairments need to master for life after school beyond the general education curriculum. The ECC should be used as a framework for assessing students, planning individual goals, and providing instruction. Parents and the educational team can use the framework of the ECC to promote enriched experiences at home and in the community to support their child's well-rounded learning and independence. Although this may seem like a lot for any child to accomplish, the child's

educational team will decide which of these skills the child needs to focus on at any given time, always keeping the end in mind.

The essential assessments for students with visual impairments must be included, in addition to the assessments that are used with all students. These essential assessments include functional vision assessment (FVA), learning media assessment (LMA), and ECC needs assessment. In addition, a communication assessment and plan must be completed for a child with deaf-blindness.

## The Family's Involvement in Their Child's Preparation for Adult Life

Transition planning is required for all students with disabilities at the age of 14; however, for students with visual impairments, it is often beneficial to engage them much earlier in planning activities for career education and life after school. Students, families, and schools must be actively involved in frequent opportunities to plan, express, and pursue goals, as well as evaluate progress and adjust

actions accordingly. These opportunities will promote self-determination and empowerment.

After graduation, available supports and services may be different from those your child experienced during high school, because the adult system is based on eligibility rather than entitlement.

## The Family's Role in Educational Team Collaboration

Parents and educational team members are equal partners in the education of students with visual impairments. The team should consider the following questions to enhance team collaboration:

- Do you know the rights and responsibilities of parents in the educational process?
- Do you know how parents' rights and responsibilities change when a student transitions to adult services?
- Have effective methods for communication among family members, school administrators, and team members been identified?
- Did the team members (including family members) provide input into the FVA, LMA, and ECC Needs Assessment?
- Does the team understand the results of the FVA, LMA, and ECC Needs Assessment?
- Has the family worked with the educational team to identify priorities and IFSP/IEP goals based on strengths and needs, assessment results, and data?
- Has the educational team discussed the student's progress in all areas of instruction and adjusted the goals as needed based on data regarding proficiency?
- Has the team discussed the necessary supports and services in both the short-term and long-term that lead to the student's success in life after school?
- Has the family provided opportunities for active engagement at home (e.g., chores, regular routines, responsibilities, participating in leisure activities)?
- Has the family discussed the future with their child, including adult life, career goals, and supports?
- Has the family assisted their child in identifying his own strengths and abilities, understanding her disability, and learning how to effectively advocate for himself?
- Has the family taught their child appropriate social skills (e.g., accepting constructive criticism, being courteous, and responding appropriately to authority)?
- Has the family assisted their child in job-related skills (e.g., punctuality, dressing appropriately, taking pride in doing a good job)?

For more information about the National Agenda, go to [www.tsbvi.edu/national-agenda](http://www.tsbvi.edu/national-agenda)

**Stakeholders in the field of visual impairment need to be ambassadors of information and actively recruit individuals for preparation programs to prepare a sufficient number of teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs) and orientation and mobility (O&M) specialists to meet personnel needs in Pennsylvania.**

Individuals interested in working with children and youth with visual impairments can enter this specialized field through a university preparation program. These programs provide a comprehensive and systematic sequence of instruction that teaches preservice and emergency-certified professionals the knowledge and skills needed to provide professional services to children and youth with visual impairments from early intervention to adulthood.

Each program has a different focus and offers different certifications. The certification areas include Teaching the Visually Impaired (TVI), Orientation and Mobility (O&M), Vision Rehabilitation Teaching (VRT), and Low Vision Rehabilitation (LVR). The programs range from undergraduate to doctoral level. Program structure ranges from traditional on-campus experiences to hybrid models, which use online learning platforms along with periodic face-to-face instruction. Program options include both full-time and part-time study. There are three university programs in Pennsylvania that offer a degree and/or certification for the field.

The following sections focus on the services that trained professionals typically provide in schools.

### Teachers of Students With Visual Impairment (TVIs)

TVIs are specialized teachers trained to address the diverse needs of the heterogeneous population of children with visual impairments. TVIs may work with a variety of age groups and within a variety of instructional settings. Students' diverse needs may be addressed through individualized goals and instruction in the expanded core curriculum (ECC) areas. This curriculum is the body of knowledge and skills that are needed by children with visual impairments due to their unique disability-specific needs.

A sampling of TVIs' roles and responsibilities includes: providing direct instruction; addressing student's basic core curriculum and ECC needs; consulting with school staff, parents, and students; preparing, acquiring, and adapting materials; conducting functional vision assessments and learning media assessments; translating medical information into educational practices; and serving as liaison between the school and community organizations and resources.

### Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Specialists

O&M specialists help students with visual impairments learn to travel as independently as possible. The goal of O&M instruction is to enable these individuals to move confidently and safely through familiar and unfamiliar environments, whether in the school, home, or community. O&M instruction is a sequential process in which individuals with visual impairments are taught to utilize their remaining senses to determine their position in space and to use specific techniques to safely and efficiently navigate from one place to another.

O&M specialists may work with a variety of age groups and within a variety of instructional settings. Services may include: developing basic concepts such as laterality and directionality,

traveling with a human guide, executing cane techniques, using maps in familiar and unfamiliar areas, using low-vision devices, planning route travel, soliciting and declining assistance, executing street crossings, using public transportation, and using maps.

A person employed in the position of Orientation and Mobility Specialist must hold a current credential as an Orientation and Mobility Specialist issued by the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP) or the National Orientation and Mobility Certification (NOMC) issued by the National Blindness Professional Certification Board (NBPCB).

## University Programs

For more information about the three universities in Pennsylvania that offer personnel preparation programs in the field of visual impairment, please contact:

- Kutztown University, Department of Special Education, Kutztown, PA 19530  
<https://www.kutztown.edu/academics/colleges-and-departments/education/departments/special-education/programs/visual-impairment-program.htm>
- Salus University, College of Education and Rehabilitation, Elkins Park, PA 19027  
<http://www.salus.edu/Colleges/Education-REhabilitation/Low-Vision-Rehabilitation-Programs.aspx>
- University of Pittsburgh, Vision Studies Program, Pittsburgh, PA 15260  
<http://www.education.pitt.edu/academics/vision-studies-programs>

For more information about the National Agenda, go to [www.tsbvi.edu/national-agenda](http://www.tsbvi.edu/national-agenda)

# Provision of Educational Services

## Goal 4

Students with visual impairments will receive the appropriate amount of services as determined by the IEP team from a teacher of students with visual impairments (TVI) and/or orientation and mobility specialist (COMS).

# Array of Services

## Goal 5

**IDEA requires the provision of a Free and Appropriate Public Education, or FAPE. Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) and Individualized Education Program (IEP) team members will develop a plan that will meet students' needs and will ensure least restrictive environment placement options and appropriate service delivery based on the identified needs of the student.**

The needs of students with visual impairments, deaf-blindness, and visual and multiple disabilities vary widely. The type and degree of loss, the existence of additional disabilities, and age when the loss occurred greatly affect the needs of the student. Because the needs of each student change as the student progresses through school into young adulthood, the supplemental aids, supports, and services and the environment in which those supports and services are provided may need to change over time. The overall goal is to enable each student to grow into an inspired, productive, fulfilled lifelong learner, no matter where he or she is served or supported. Therefore, a variety of service options is necessary in order to address each student's unique needs.

### Addressing Educational Needs

For students with visual impairments to be successful, they must be taught by qualified professionals; provided with instruction based on their skill level; and encouraged to be engaged, active, and productive participants in their educational environment.

Students with visual impairments must have access to an academic curriculum that is aligned with the state standards, have access to educational materials in the appropriate media at the same time as others in the class, and demonstrate continuous progress and achievement.

Students with visual impairments also need systematic instruction in compensatory and functional skills or in both.

These skills can be taught and tailored through instruction in the expanded core curriculum (i.e., accessing print and other visually-presented materials, including learning to read through braille; orientation and mobility; daily living skills; social interaction skills; appropriate accommodations; or the use of assistive technologies).

Addressing the grade-level classroom expectations, the expanded core curriculum skills, and instructional needs can be challenging due to competing needs and time constraints. The IEP team must prioritize each student's needs, balance short-term goals with long-term goals, and implement services with the long-term goals in mind.

## Providing a Continuum of Support

Decisions regarding educational placements are made by the IEP team. The decisions are based on the amount and type of services appropriate for the student and the identified needs of that student.

To the maximum extent appropriate, students with visual impairments will be educated alongside their nondisabled peers. The general education setting in the neighborhood school should be evaluated before considering a more restrictive environment. An educational placement in a special class or separate school should occur when, even

with the use of supplementary aids, supports, and services, the student's education in the general education environment cannot be achieved satisfactorily.

Placement can vary along a spectrum from the general education classroom to a resource room to an approved specialized school. It is important to provide ongoing assessment for appropriateness of supplemental aids and supports. The placement decision should be reevaluated at least every year during the IEP meeting and possibly more frequently as dictated by student progress.

## Identifying Providers and Determining Caseloads

TVIs and COMSs fulfill a variety of roles that differ greatly from the typical roles of classroom teachers. Services provided by these professionals may include instruction, collaborative consultation, material adaptation, ordering and production of materials, instructional planning, assessment, case management, required meetings, and travel. Service is usually time-intensive because of the variety of student needs and the nature of one-on-one instruction. Students with deaf-blindness may also need the support of a Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and/or an intervener to provide access to communication, the environment, and instruction.

Chapter 14 of Pennsylvania's School Code determines caseloads for TVIs. The caseloads for individual TVIs is based on the assessed needs of the individual students involved. Thorough assessments of each individual student's strengths and needs are used to develop an appropriate education

plan. Caseloads based on these education plans ensure that each student receives the amount of service necessary to meet his or her educational goals.

The number of hours a student is served by a TVI is based solely on the identified needs in the IEP. In determining an appropriate caseload size, the following factors should be considered: direct service hours needed to implement IEP goals, time for preparation of materials, time spent in collaboration and consultation with other team members, time spent in assessment, and driving time to reach schools. An itinerant teacher's caseload must allow enough time in the contracted work week to complete these responsibilities for each student.

For more information about the National Agenda, go to [www.tsbvi.edu/national-agenda](http://www.tsbvi.edu/national-agenda)

**Students with visual impairments will be assessed in all areas of a suspected disability and evaluated using appropriate assessment accommodations. Such assessments will be administered by, and/or in partnership with, personnel having expertise in the education of students with visual impairments.**

Assessments serve a multitude of purposes and are fundamental tools for educational program planning. Students receiving special education services must be evaluated in all areas of suspected disability using assessments that provide relevant information about their strengths, needs, and abilities. Without the essential assessments data, the educational team will not have the information necessary to make effective decisions regarding appropriate programs, supports, and services. Data from assessments should inform and guide day-to-day instruction, provide guidance with benchmarks, determine educational needs, and check progress relevant to the standards.

## Essential Assessments

For students with visual impairments, assessment should include, at a minimum, a Functional Vision Assessment (FVA), a Learning Media Assessment (LMA), and assessment in the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC). These assessments must be completed when a student is first referred for services and should be revisited and updated by the team through both formal and informal means, including ongoing data collection throughout the two- or three-year reevaluation report cycle or natural transitions, (e.g., from middle school to high school). The data gathered and analyzed in these assessments may result in a recommendation for additional assessments in areas such as assistive technology and orientation and mobility to ensure full access to both the general and expanded core curriculums. For students who are deaf-blind, additional assessments should address language and communication and hearing loss.

### Functional Vision Assessment (FVA)

Gather accurate, current information about a student's functional use of vision and help determine the visual needs of the learner. An FVA consists of observations; direct assessment of functional visual skills; and interviews with the student, parent, and other educational staff. This assessment provides essential information for the educational team regarding a student's functional use of vision, access and accommodations to materials, optimal visual distances, and environmental and positional considerations, such as lighting. A report from an eye care professional provides information about cause, treatments, and prognosis of visual impairment, but this is not sufficient to address a student's visual needs in the educational setting, as well as home and

community. A teacher of students with visual impairments (TVI), or in some cases a certified orientation and mobility specialist (COMS), will complete the FVA.

### Learning Media Assessment (LMA)

Identify the student's primary and secondary learning and literacy media for reading and other activities. Accessible media can be visual, tactual, auditory, or a combination of all three. The LMA includes observations of the student completing a variety of literacy tasks. This evaluation of the use of sensory channels reveals the student's primary and secondary ways of accessing information. The LMA involves an assessment of the student's ability to read and write using a variety of media including regular print, enlarged print, Braille, and auditory materials. It should also assess the student's ability to access distance information, such as classroom screens and boards. The LMA process guides the educational team in making deliberate and informed decisions about the total range of instructional media needed to facilitate learning for each assessed student. The LMA should be completed for all students, including those with deaf-blindness or additional disabilities. The LMA is completed by a TVI.

### Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) Needs Assessment

In addition to receiving instruction in the general education curriculum, students with visual impairments need specific instruction and training in the ECC to gain skills and knowledge that typically developing learners gather incidentally through vision. The ECC needs assessment is a screening

tool that collects strength-based information on the student's compensatory access skills, social interaction skills, orientation and mobility skills, independent living skills, recreation and leisure skills, career education, assistive technology skills, self-determination, and sensory efficiency skills.

The ECC needs assessment tool collects information from teachers, families, students, and other service providers. Based on these findings, the team selects two or three priority areas on which to focus during the upcoming

school year. This tool and process begin the conversation about the student's instruction in the ECC and facilitate the understanding and common terminology. This tool and procedure do not replace an age-level or grade-level assessment, but rather they supplement them.

Orientation and mobility (O&M) is often a priority area that prompts an orientation and mobility assessment, which is conducted by a COMS to determine the needs of the student related to safe and efficient travel across a variety of environments.

### Individualized Education Program (IEP) Development Based on Assessment

Following a complete and comprehensive set of assessments, an IEP is developed. The results of the assessments are used as the basis for determining the student's strengths and needs, including the development of a communication plan for any student with a hearing loss. The needs are prioritized with input from all team members, including the family and the student. The IEP team members prioritize the student's need without regard to the availability of services, but rather on the needs that are identified in the evaluation.

Goals and objectives are written based on the team's priorities and are related to the areas of the ECC and the general curriculum. Each goal should be directly tied to an area of need identified in the assessments.

After the goals and objectives are written, the team decides how much time is needed from each specialist for the

student to achieve these goals. The time determined is based solely on the time needed to achieve the goals and not on the availability of service providers. Data are regularly collected over time to chart the progress of each goal. Comparison of the data is used to determine the effectiveness of the instruction provided.

Objectives from the IEP are always provided in the least restrictive environment and are embedded into routines and lessons in the natural environment whenever possible. However, students may sometimes benefit from individual lessons outside of the general classroom with a TVI, COMS, assistive technology consultant, or other specialist, particularly during introductory lessons. The use of Braille must be addressed in the IEP, indicating why it will or will not be used.

### Assessment Accommodations

Students with visual impairments may require accommodations to participate in certain types of instructional or standardized assessments. Recommendations for specific types of accommodations must be based on the results of the FVA, LMA, and ECC needs assessments and are made by the IEP team, which includes the TVI. The recommendations must be identified in the specially designed

instruction section and the state assessment sections of the student's IEP.

For more information about the National Agenda, go to [www.tsbvi.edu/national-agenda](http://www.tsbvi.edu/national-agenda)

**Access to developmental and educational services will include an assurance that textbooks and instructional materials are available to students in the appropriate media and at the same time as their sighted peers.**

Provisions within the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004) require that textbooks and related core instructional materials are provided to students with print disabilities in specialized formats in a timely manner (IDEA 2004 Final Regulations, Sec 300.172). The Pennsylvania Special Education Regulations: Chapter 14 further defines how core instructional materials are provided to students. The term “timely” indicates that every effort should be made to ensure that students who are blind or visually impaired receive instructional materials in a specialized format at the same time their sighted classmates receive these materials in standard print.

### Identifying Core Instructional Materials

Core instructional materials include printed textbooks and related materials published with the texts. This also includes other materials required by state education agencies or local education agencies (LEAs) for use by students in the classroom. Thus, instructional materials refer to both textbooks

and all of the other printed materials a student may be required to access in order to fully participate in the curriculum. This may include workbooks, teacher-developed worksheets, newspaper or journal articles, educational software, websites, and other documents.

### Accessing Materials

All students who qualify for vision services and have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) may obtain instructional materials in specialized formats under the Chafee Amendment to the Copyright Law. These materials may be obtained through various agencies or produced locally using assistive technology tools. Texts are also available through the National Instructional Materials Access Center (NIMAC), a repository where publishers can safely store National Instructional Materials Access Standard (NIMAS) copies of their texts. These texts in the NIMAS format can be easily

converted into one of the four specialized formats by authorized materials producers. The term “specialized formats” refers to an alternative means of presenting standard printed materials and may include:

- Braille and tactile graphics
- Enlarged print and graphics
- Audio presentation of text or graphics
- Digital text and graphics

## Selecting Appropriate Materials

Students who are blind or visually impaired should receive a functional vision assessment and a learning media assessment conducted by a teacher of students with visual impairments. These assessments will assist the student's education team to determine the types of specialized formats that are most appropriate for each individual student. Students who use audio or digital formats should also participate in an assistive technology assessment to determine the most appropriate tools and training necessary for the student to effectively access these materials. Students who prefer to use Braille or enlarged print may also require tools and instruction to access these formats using electronic files.

Once the education team has determined that a student cannot effectively use standard print materials to access the general curriculum, they should:

- Determine the type(s) of specialized formats that will allow the effective access to core instructional materials
  - Determine the most appropriate specialized format to be used for specific tasks and in specific environments
- When possible, identify existing sources of the student's instructional materials in appropriate specialized formats
  - Determine which tools will be necessary to produce or access the specialized formats
  - Determine what instruction and supports will be necessary to allow the student and others to effectively prepare or access the specialized formats
  - Develop, in a timely manner, a plan for obtaining or preparing materials in the specialized formats

The IEP team must include individuals who are very familiar with the student's strengths, needs, and preferences. An assistive technology specialist should be consulted to ensure that all appropriate options for preparing and using the specialized formats are considered and assessed.

## Obtaining Instructional Materials

All students with qualifying visual impairments can sign up for free memberships to organizations that produce materials in specialized formats. These organizations include:

- The National Library for the Blind and Print Impaired ([www.loc.gov/nls](http://www.loc.gov/nls))
- Learning Ally ([www.learningally.org](http://www.learningally.org))
- BookShare ([www.bookshare.org](http://www.bookshare.org))

Many textbooks and other instructional materials can be obtained from these agencies free of charge with qualifying memberships. Given adequate lead time, BookShare can produce materials that are not in their collection. The education team should investigate these resources and assist families to obtain the appropriate memberships. LEAs may also obtain organizational memberships to assist in the timely acquisition of instructional materials.

The Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network's (PaTTAN) Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM) Center is an additional resource for materials in specialized formats for Pennsylvania students. Visit [www.pattan.net](http://www.pattan.net) to learn how to submit a request to the PaTTAN AIM Center to produce materials in any of the specialized formats.

For more information about the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS) go to <http://nimac.us>

For more information about the National Agenda, go to [www.tsbvi.edu/national-agenda](http://www.tsbvi.edu/national-agenda)

**All educational goals and instruction will address the academic and expanded core curricula based on the assessed needs of each student with visual impairments.**

The educational needs of students with visual impairments, deaf-blindness, and visual and multiple disabilities extend far beyond academic learning and the general education curriculum. For these students to be successful and as independent as possible, they must be specifically and purposefully taught the body of knowledge and skills that typically developing children gather incidentally through vision.

This body of knowledge is referred to as the expanded core curriculum (ECC). The ECC addresses areas that are needed for students with visual impairments to achieve and maintain a healthy and active life, as well as to achieve equal footing with their same-age peers. The ECC should be used as a framework for assessing students, planning individual goals, and providing instruction. All areas of the ECC can be addressed by the child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, which typically includes a teacher of students with visual impairments (TVI) and/or a certified orientation and mobility specialist (COMS), and an assistive technology consultant.

Adoption and implementation of instruction in the ECC will ensure that students have the opportunity to be functioning and contributing members of society. Accomplishments and joys such as shopping, dining, attending and participating in recreational activities are a right, not a privilege, for all persons, including individuals with visual impairments. Responsibilities such as banking, taking care of health needs, and using public and private services are also a part of a full life for all individuals. It cannot be assumed that individuals with visual impairments will actively participate in the community without skills and/or accommodations learned through the ECC.

## Areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum

### **Compensatory or Functional Academic Skills:**

Compensatory and functional skills include concept development, spatial understanding, study and organizational skills, speaking and listening skills, and adaptations necessary for accessing information and materials. These skills are not sufficiently addressed in the general education curriculum. All students with visual impairments should be provided with instruction in the compensatory and functional skills appropriate to meet their needs. For example, communication needs vary depending on the degree of functional vision, effects of additional disabilities, and the task to be completed. Students may communicate using braille, enlarged print, print with the use of optical devices, regular print, tactile symbols, a calendar system, sign language, an augmentative communication device, and/or recorded materials. These compensatory and functional needs will differ with each student. Instruction in this area should be provided by a TVI to address the skills that must be mastered. Additional specialists may be needed to support students who are deaf-blind or who have additional disabilities. An Intervener can provide access to communication and instruction for students who are deaf-blind.

### **Orientation and Mobility (O&M):**

O&M instruction is a sequential process in which individuals with visual impairments are taught to utilize their remaining senses to determine their position in space and to use specific techniques and tools to safely and efficiently navigate from one place to another. It emphasizes the fundamental need and basic right to travel and explore as independently as possible. The goal of O&M instruction is to enable individuals to move confidently and safely through familiar and unfamiliar environments whether in the school, home, or community. COMS are the professionals qualified to provide this kind of instruction.

### **Social Interaction Skills:**

For students with visual impairments, it is difficult for social interaction skills to be learned casually and incidentally. Almost all social skills used by sighted children and adults have been learned by visually observing the environment and the interactions of other people within it. Instruction in social interaction skills as part of the ECC is so fundamental that it can often mean the difference between social isolation and a satisfying and fulfilling life as an adult. An intervener may be needed to provide access for social interaction for students who are deaf-blind.

### **Independent Living Skills:**

Independent living skills are often referred to as “daily living skills.” It includes all the tasks and functions individuals perform, in accordance with their abilities, to lead lives as independently as possible. These curricular needs vary and include skills in personal hygiene, food preparation, money management, time monitoring, and organization, to name a few. Some independent living skills are addressed in the general education curriculum; however, they appear sporadically in learning activities. Traditional classes in family and consumer sciences assume a basic level of knowledge typically acquired through vision and are therefore not adequate to prepare for adult life. If planned, sequential, deliberate instruction is not provided, gaps in learning or splinter skills may result.

### **Recreation and Leisure Skills:**

Recreation and leisure skills are typically taught in the form of team games and athletics. Students with visual impairments need to learn the skills necessary to safely and independently participate in recreation and leisure activities throughout their lives. The teaching of recreation and leisure skills must be planned and deliberately taught and should focus on the development of life-long skills.

### **Career Education:**

Unemployment and underemployment are primary issues facing adults with visual impairment, which makes this portion of the ECC vitally important for students with visual impairments of all ages.

While the skills and knowledge about career options offered to students through general vocational education can be of value to students with visual impairments, these students are at a disadvantage when it comes to understanding career options. They lack the ability or lack access to spontaneously acquired information about work and jobs that their peers acquire through visual observation. Career education provides students with visual impairments with the opportunity to learn first-hand the work done by various occupations, such as doctors, lawyers, teachers, psychologists, social workers, bank tellers, gardeners, and artists.

Career education provides the opportunity to explore student strengths and interests in a systematic, well-planned

manner. Because unemployment and underemployment have been primary issues facing adults with visual impairments, this portion of the ECC is vital for students with visual impairments of all ages.

### **Assistive Technology:**

Technology and the use of assistive technology provide students with visual impairments with the tools to effectively communicate and to access information; therefore, they are great equalizers. This may include accessing, responding, storing, and/or retrieving information, as well as communicating in school and home environments. Assistive technology assessments help determine the most appropriate tools for the task and the environment, and the training needed for students to effectively use them.

### **Sensory Efficiency Skills:**

Instruction in sensory efficiency skills teaches students with visual impairments how to integrate all of the remaining senses to counter the impact of any missing or impaired sense. These skills help students with visual impairments use their senses, including any functional vision, hearing, touch, smell (olfactory), and taste (gustatory). Examples of sensory efficiency skills that students may learn include the use of optical devices to enhance remaining vision; the use of augmentative and alternative devices to increase communication; the use of amplification to provide enhanced sound; the use of touch and vision to identify personal items; the use of tactual, gustatory, and olfactory input rather than visual cues to identify foods; and the use of hearing to identify familiar people.

### **Self-Determination:**

Self-determination is the ability for people to control their lives, reach goals they have set, and take part fully in the world around them. Self-determination skills enable students with visual impairments to become effective advocates for themselves, based on their own needs and goals. These skills focus on students believing in themselves, advocating for themselves, and understanding their abilities and limitations.

For more information about the National Agenda, go to [www.tsbvi.edu/national-agenda](http://www.tsbvi.edu/national-agenda)

**Transition services will address both the educational and functional needs of the student and assist the student and family in setting goals and implementing strategies commensurate with the student's aptitudes, interests, and abilities.**

The success of students with visual impairments, deaf-blindness, and visual and multiple disabilities is improved by extensive planning and input from a wide variety of resources throughout their educational career and into adulthood. This information may come from family members, educators, medical professionals, vocational services, and adult service providers.

## Secondary Transition Process

Secondary transition is an ongoing process that begins in middle school and continues through high school. It can be thought of as a bridge between school programs and the opportunities of adult life. The process includes assessment,

planning, and goal setting in the areas of postsecondary education and training, employment, and independent living.

## Effective Secondary Transition Planning

Effective secondary transition planning addresses both the educational and functional needs of the student and assists the student and family in setting goals and implementing strategies appropriate for the student's aptitudes, interests, and abilities. It involves assessing the student's current abilities and planning for services and supports that will be needed to achieve their goals. In Pennsylvania, this planning process is required for all students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and begins in the year that the student turns 14, or earlier if determined appropriate by the IEP team.

Secondary transition planning must include information regarding student preferences, interests, future goals, strengths, and abilities. This information can be gathered by a multitude of both formal and informal assessment tools. The assessment results drive the IEP and lead to further instruction in areas that are appropriate to the student's

postsecondary goals, including academics, independent living skills, social skills, and employment skills.

It is important that issues regarding self-determination and self-advocacy are incorporated into the student's secondary program to ensure active participation in high school and in adult life.

During the student's final year in high school, transition planning may include actual participation in selected transition goals. For example, a student planning to attend college may take one college course; a student planning to work may identify a particular field or employer and participate in an internship that translates into resume experience; or a student planning to move to a day program may spend one day a week in that program. For students who are deaf-blind or have additional disabilities, multiple years of instruction and additional experiences may be needed prior to graduation.

## Participants in Transition Planning

The student plays a vital role in the transition planning process and, at age 14, must be invited to attend the IEP meeting. It is essential to include all required members of the IEP team and to expand the team based upon the student's postsecondary goals. This may include inviting other family members, community members, and/or outside agency personnel who have or will play a role in

the student's life. If these additional participants are unable to attend the transition planning/IEP meeting, a statement addressing the student's interests, strengths, needs, and effective accommodations may be obtained. It may help to include information about activities that are motivating, attainable, and enjoyable, as well as activities that are challenging or stressful for the student.

## Resources for Transition Planning

There are a number of resources available for transition planning and addressing both immediate and long-range goals. Students should be registered with appropriate agencies, which may include:

- Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services (BBVS)
- Helen Keller National Center (for students who are deaf-blind);
- Mental Health/Intellectual Disabilities (MH/ID), county services for the blind

Other agencies of interest – mentors can be identified through:

- American Council for the Blind (ACB)
- National Federation of the Blind (NFB)
- Pennsylvania Associations for the Blind (PAB)

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**All service providers will possess current and applicable state or professional certifications, as well as engage in ongoing local, state, and national professional development activities to improve student learning.**

Students with visual impairments are a heterogeneous, low incidence population, which means individual students and their needs may vary widely. Services for these students are typically provided by teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs) and orientation and mobility (O&M) specialists. In order for these service providers to address the needs of their students, it is necessary for them to participate in ongoing professional development. In this way, professionals can maintain state of the art knowledge to better address the needs of their students.

There are professional development opportunities to obtain (pre-service) and maintain (in-service) certification for service providers in the field of visual impairments. There are three universities within the commonwealth that prepare TVIs and O&Ms for certification. Once TVIs are certified, professional development and continuing education credits (Act 48 hours) are a requirement in order to maintain certification.

A person employed in the position of Orientation and Mobility Specialist must hold a current credential as an Orientation and Mobility Specialist issued by the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP) or the National Orientation and Mobility Certification (NOMC) issued by the National Blindness Professional Certification Board (NBPCB).

### Continuing Education/In-Service Opportunities

There are various professional development opportunities to maintain certification. They may consist of workshops, site-based training activities, webinars, and conferences. Programs may be one hour, several hours, single or multiple sessions, and even multiple days in the case of conferences or institutes. Act 48 professional education hours and/or ACVREP hours can be accrued through these activities.

Topics may include researching evidence-based best practices in effective instruction or literacy, implementing instruction aligned with the standards, or providing assessment. Opportunities also include planning for individualized goals and instruction in the expanded core curriculum (ECC) areas, which is the body of knowledge and skills needed by students with visual impairments due to their unique needs.

Conferences with a focus on visual impairments are provided by professional organizations, the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN), local service agencies, and grassroots efforts. Due to the small number of service providers, training opportunities may be held nationally, statewide, regionally, or locally. Web-based activities allow service providers to share and problem-solve through in-service training and electronic communication.

Some conference opportunities are as follows:

- The AER International Conference, a biennial conference offered through the professional organization Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER)
- Getting in Touch with Literacy, a biennial grassroots conference for professionals serving those with visual impairments
- Penn-Del AER Conference, an annual statewide conference geared for the field of visual impairment
- HELIX (High Expectations for Students with Low Incidence Disabilities), which is an annual conference that has at least one strand focused on visual impairment and/or deaf-blindness

Service providers can also provide training opportunities in schools, organizations, and community groups. Conducting an information session for colleagues during a staff meeting, holding office in local or state chapters of professional organizations, and working together with community groups are some ways that professionals can develop their talents as educators and act as ambassadors for the field in both formal and informal settings.

## Pre-service/Preparation Program Opportunities

Service providers interested in working with individuals with visual impairments may enter this small field through a university preparation program. These programs provide a comprehensive and systematic sequence of instruction, which gives pre-service and emergency-certified professionals the knowledge and skills to begin providing professional services to children with visual impairments from early intervention to adulthood.

There are three preparation programs in Pennsylvania that offer a degree and/or certification programs for the field. Each program has a different focus and offers different certifications. The certification areas include Teaching the Visually Impaired (TVI), Orientation and Mobility (O&M), Vision Rehabilitation Teaching (VRT), and Low Vision Rehabilitation (LVR). They range from undergraduate to doctoral level, depending on the program. Program options include full-time and part-time study; traditional college experiences; and, hybrid or blended learning online and face-to-face learning, with coursework submitted via internet learning platforms.

University websites provide program information in detail:

- Kutztown University, Department of Special Education, Kutztown, PA 19530  
<https://www.kutztown.edu/academics/colleges-and-departments/education/departments/special-education/programs/visual-impairment-program.htm>
- Salus University, College of Education and Rehabilitation, Elkins Park, PA 19027  
<http://www.salus.edu/Colleges/Education-REhabilitation/Low-Vision-Rehabilitation-Programs.aspx>
- University of Pittsburgh, Vision Studies Program, Pittsburgh, PA 15260  
<http://www.education.pitt.edu/academics/vision-studies-programs>

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# Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Tom Wolf, Governor

