Answering Special Considerations
for Students Who Are Blind
or Visually Impaired

IEP Special Considerations

I. SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS THE IEP TEAM MUST CONSIDER BEFORE DEVELOPING THE IEP. ANY FACTORS CHECKED AS "YES" MUST BE ADDRESSED IN THE IEP.

Is the student blind or visually impaired?

If **Yes** is checked, the IEP must include a description of the instruction in braille and the use of braille unless the IEP team determines, after an evaluation of the student's reading and writing skills, needs, and appropriate reading and writing media (including an evaluation of the student's future needs for instruction in braille or the use of braille), that instruction in braille or the use of braille is not appropriate for the student.

Students who are identified as blind or visually impaired are heterogeneous and also reflect a diverse spectrum of visual functioning, which ranges from unusable to usable vision; that is, with or without light perception or have various levels of low vision. These students may be blind or visually impaired as their only disability or have additional disabilities including deaf-blindness. Students with visual impairments (VI), regardless of their level of visual functioning, are expected to have access and the skills to participate fully in the school environment and to progress at the same rates as their peers.

Special considerations presumes that when a student is identified as visually impaired, braille must be provided unless the individualized education program (IEP) team determines that the instruction in and use of braille is not appropriate. Determining whether the student will be a tactual (braille) or visual (print) access learner is guided by the Learning Media Assessment (LMA) process. LMA results and informed discussions provide the needed platform to determine access decision(s).

The LMA is a systematic approach to collect and analyze data regarding a student's sensory preferences, learning environments, and interventions and methods to read, write, and compute. It is used in conjunction with the functional vision evaluation to describe the sensory abilities of a student with VI. The LMA occurs when a student is first referred for services and continues as an ongoing monitoring process.

An emergent or beginning reader needs to start with tactual or visual access as the primary modality to learn critical literacy skills and acquire information. Auditory access is to be considered a secondary means of learning, which may confirm tactual or visual information. As the student's literacy skills progress toward being a competent or skilled reader, the introduction of additional access tools and the use of mixed media provides the mechanism to consume and produce information to meet demands of the classroom. Knowledge of what is expected in core curriculum is critical to ensure the student has the needed skills, materials in the preferred format, and access to the tools to complete grade-level demands and instructional delivery styles. Ongoing analysis of LMA data can help the team address the increasing demands to access core curricular content for the student with VI.

The following are questions and helpful information for the team:

What are the student's sensory preferences?

- How does the student naturally approach materials and tasks, visually or tactually?

- Has the student had rich experiences, both visually **and** tactually, to observe preferences to access material?

Characteristics of students who may be:

Braille learners

Does the student:

- Show a preference for exploring the environment tactually?
- Efficiently use the tactual sense to identify small objects?
- Identify name in braille and/or understand that braille has meaning?
- Use braille to accomplish other reading and writing tasks?
- Have an unstable eye condition or poor prognosis for retaining current level of vision in the near future?
- Have a reduced or nonfunctional central field to the extent that print reading is expected to be inefficient?
- Show steady progress in developing tactual skills necessary for efficient braille reading?
- Have additional disabilities that would interfere with progress in a literacy program in braille?

Print learners

Does the student:

- Use his vision efficiently to complete tasks at near distances?
- Show interest in pictures and demonstrate the ability to identify pictures and/or elements within pictures?
- Identify her name in print and/or understand that print has meaning?
- Use print to accomplish other reading and writing tasks?
- Have a stable eye condition?
- Have an intact central visual field?
- Show steady progress in learning to use his vision as necessary to assure efficient print reading?
- Have additional disabilities that would interfere with progress in a literacy program in print?

Is the student's academic progress impeded by the current method of reading, writing, and computing?

- Are the current literacy tools appropriate to meet the curricular demands?
- Do other literacy tools need to be introduced to provide a progressive means to access information? (e.g., moving from enlarged print and electronic magnification to keyboarding skills with screen enlarging software, to digital access to textbooks)
- Is there data to show that each access tool is monitored for efficiency for the given task?

How long can the student sustain time on task before fatigue and/or visual fatigue impedes task completion?

Does the use of enlarged print or electronic magnification improve the student's posture and the physical demands of visual access?

Is the student's academic and functional progress commensurate with same-age peers?

Is there a prognosis for continued vision loss or is the vision stable?

Does the student require other supplementary aids or services, including considerations for assistive technology to get and give information?

Can the student shift his visual focus from distance (e.g., reading the chalk board) to near (e.g., taking notes at desk) and back?

Does the student have the literacy skills demonstrated by grade-level progress?

- Does the student have the content knowledge based on rote learning or experiences?
- Is grade-level fluency and comprehension monitored?

In addition to determining sensory preferences, IEP teams need to be able to answer the following questions:

What is standard print size?

- Primary print size: 16 to 18 point font
- Standard print size: 12 point font
- Standard enlarged hard copy print: 18 to 24 point font

What are the ranges for near, intermediate, and distance viewing targets?

- Near: 0 to 16 inches
- Intermediate: 16 inches to 3 feet
- Distance: 3 feet or greater

When visually examining classroom materials, what is the natural working distance the student uses?

How does the student access visual information during instruction?

Is there a pattern of reliance on vision, touch, or other senses to gather information?

Is the student able to read her own handwriting?

Does the student have a portable method of reading, writing, and computing?

Koenig, A. & Holbrook, M. C. (1995). *Learning media assessment of students with visual impairments: A resource guide for teachers*, (2nd ed.). Austin, TX: Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired.