

Update to Policy #99: Braille Instruction

~~For the purpose of this section, student is defined as: any student who has a visual impairment that, even with correction, adversely affects the student's educational performance and who is determined eligible for special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Act.~~

Definitions

- **"Accessible assistive technology device"**, an assistive technology device, as defined in 20 U.S.C. Section 1401, as amended, that provides blind or visually impaired students the benefits of an educational program in an equally effective and integrated manner as that provided to nondisabled students;
- **"Adequate instruction"**, the quality teaching of blind or visually impaired students, as it pertains to general education and necessary blindness skills, in alignment with the U.S. Department of Education's definition of free appropriate public education, as defined in 20 U.S.C. Section 1401, as amended;
- **"Blind or visually impaired student"**: A child who: (i) Has an individualized education program (IEP) or an individualized family service plan (IFSP), as such terms are defined in 20 U.S.C. Section 1401, as amended, or a 504 plan created under Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. Section 794, as amended; and (ii) Is identified as having the disability of visual impairment (including blindness) within the definition of child with a disability in 20 U.S.C. Section 1401, as amended; OR An individual who is deaf-blind under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as amended, or other federal law;
- **"Braille"**, the system of reading and writing through touch;
- **"Expanded core curriculum"**, a disability-specific curriculum that compensates for vision loss, is foundational to all other learning, and that covers the nine essential areas of compensatory access, sensory efficiency, assistive technology, orientation and mobility, social interaction, recreation and leisure, independent living, self-determination, and career education;
- **"Grade level instruction"**, instruction that aligns with state-designated content standards and curricula for students of the same age or level of maturity, based on the development of intellectual, emotional, physical, and behavioral capacity that is typical for the student's age or age group;
- **"Local educational agency" or "LEA"**, the same definition as in 20 U.S.C. Section 1401, as amended;
- **"Nonvisual access"**, the ability of a blind or visually impaired student to use all functions of a device, without using the student's vision, in an equally effective, equally integrated manner and with equivalent ease of use as the student's sighted peers;
- **"Nonvisual skills"**, skills that are taught in such a way that the student does not need to use any vision;
- **"State educational agency"**, the same definition as in 20 U.S.C. Section 1401, as amended;

- **"Technology-mediated learning environments and methods"**, the settings in which electronic and information technology including, but not limited to, the following is used:
 - Computer-based applications and simulations;
 - Personal and mobile computing devices such as smartphones or tablets;
 - Web-based platforms;
 - Online or distance-learning programs;
 - Video games; and
 - Exhibits or installations that feature digital media, wearable technology, or other tools that support participants' engagement with new knowledge, skills, or practices;
- **"U.S. Access Board"**, the independent federal agency created in 1973 that promotes equality for people with disabilities through leadership in accessible design and the development of accessibility guidelines and standards.

Braille Instruction

A Each blind or visually impaired student shall receive instruction in braille reading and writing as part of their individualized education plan (IEP) or individualized family support plan (IFSP) unless the ~~individual education program~~ IEP or IFSP team determines, after an evaluation of a student's reading and writing skills, needs, and appropriate reading and writing media, including, but not limited to, 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. No blind or visually impaired student shall be denied instruction in Braille reading and writing solely because the student has some vision. During the evaluation and IEP process, consideration shall be given regarding appropriate Braille instruction based on a potential vision loss due to a degenerative medical diagnosis.

In conjunction with the U.S. Department of Education's Braille presumption requirement in the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as amended, instruction in braille reading and writing shall be sufficient to enable each blind or visually impaired student to communicate effectively and efficiently at a level commensurate with the student's same age and with the student's ~~nondisabled peers or comparable intellectual ability. sighted peers of comparable grade level and intellectual functioning.~~

The student's ~~individual education program~~ IEP or IFSP shall specify:

1. The results obtained from an evaluation of the blind or visually impaired student's reading and writing skills, needs, and appropriate reading and writing media including, but not limited to, an evaluation of the blind or visually impaired student's needs for instruction in Braille or the use of Braille including, but not limited to, consideration regarding appropriate Braille instruction based on a potential vision loss due to a degenerative medical diagnosis;
2. How braille will be implemented, if needed as determined by the IEP team, as the primary mode for learning through integration with ~~other normal~~ classroom activities. ~~If braille will not be provided to a child who is blind, the reason for not incorporating it in the individualized education plan shall be documented.~~

3. The length of the period of instruction and the frequency and duration of each instructional session as determined by the IEP team, which shall, as closely as appropriate based on individual needs, be identical to the level of instruction provided to nondisabled peers; ~~and the date on which braille instruction will commence;~~
4. The level of competency in braille reading and writing to be achieved by the end of the period covered by the individualized education plan; ~~and~~
5. ~~The duration of each session.~~

Use, and provision, of Braille materials for reading and writing shall be addressed in 504 plans for blind or visually impaired students created under Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. Section 794, as amended.

In conjunction with academic achievement and functional performance requirements of 34 CFR 300.320(a)(2)(i), as amended, instruction in expanded core curriculum shall be provided to blind or visually impaired students to support progress in the general education curriculum.

Instruction In Assistive Technology

Each blind or visually impaired student shall receive instruction in assistive technology as part of the student's individualized education program (IEP) or individualized family support plan (IFSP) unless the IEP or IFSP team determines, after an evaluation of a student's needs, that instruction in assistive technology is not appropriate. No student shall be denied instruction in assistive technology solely because the student has some vision.

In conjunction with accessible assistive technology requirements of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 20 U.S.C. Section 1412(a)(12)(B)(i), as amended, the blind or visually impaired student shall receive grade-level instruction that will equip the blind or visually impaired student with the appropriate technology-mediated learning environments and methods to perform on the same level of proficiency expected of peers of comparable intellectual ability and grade level. The blind or visually impaired student's IEP or IFSP shall specify:

1. The results obtained from an assessment of the blind or visually impaired student's skills, needs, and appropriate accessible assistive technology including, but not limited to, an evaluation of the future needs for accessible assistive technology training or the use of accessible assistive technology;
2. How accessible assistive technology will be implemented as a primary mode for learning through integration with other classroom activities;
3. The frequency and duration of each instructional session;
4. The level of mastery of the accessible assistive technology specified by the blind or visually impaired student's assessment to be achieved by the end of the period; and
5. Acknowledgment that either:
 - a. The blind or visually impaired student may transport the accessible assistive technology to and from school without the need for payment,

- family assumption of liability for loss or damage, or any other cost to the blind or visually impaired student or the family; or
- b. If the accessible assistive technology remains at school, the LEA will provide duplicate accessible assistive technology in the blind or visually impaired student's home without requiring payment, family assumption of liability for loss or damage, or any other cost to the blind or visually impaired student or the family.

Use, and provision, of accessible assistive technology shall be addressed in 504 plans for blind or visually impaired students created under Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. Section 794, as amended.

Instruction in Orientation and Mobility

Each blind or visually impaired student shall receive instruction in orientation and mobility as part of the student's individualized education program (IEP) or individualized family support plan (IFSP) unless the IEP or IFSP team determines, after an evaluation of a student's needs, that instruction in orientation and mobility is not appropriate. No student shall be denied instruction in orientation and mobility solely because the student has some vision.

In conjunction with orientation and mobility services requirements of 34 CFR 300.34(c)(7), as amended, blind or visually impaired students shall receive orientation and mobility instruction to equip each blind or visually impaired student with the age-appropriate tools, techniques, and nonvisual skills to navigate in and around the student's home, schools, communities, and other environments as applicable, and as expected of peers of comparable intellectual ability and grade level. The blind or visually impaired student's IEP or IFSP shall specify:

1. The results obtained from an evaluation of the blind or visually impaired student's orientation and mobility needs including, but not limited to, an evaluation of the blind or visually impaired student's future needs for instruction in orientation and mobility;
2. How orientation and mobility will be integrated into the home, school, and community;
3. The date on which orientation and mobility instruction will commence;
4. The frequency and duration of each instructional session; and
5. The level of mastery of orientation and mobility skills to be achieved by the end of the period.

Orientation and mobility equipment, accommodations, and modifications shall be addressed in 504 plans for blind or visually impaired students created under Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. Section 794, as amended.

An orientation and mobility evaluation shall be conducted by a person who is appropriately certified by the National Blindness Professional Certification Board (NBPCB) with a National Orientation and Mobility Certification (NOMC), or through the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals

(ACVREP) as a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS), or who holds a nationally recognized certification related to orientation and mobility.

The orientation and mobility evaluations described in this section shall occur in familiar and unfamiliar environments, during the daytime and nighttime, and around the home, school, and community as determined age appropriate by the blind or visually impaired student's IEP or IFSP.