

E.9 Visual Impairments

Definition

Visual impairment is a generic term that covers a range of difficulties with vision and includes the following categories: blind, legally blind, partially sighted, low vision, and cortically visually impaired.

For educational purposes, a student with visual impairment is one whose visual acuity is not sufficient for the student to participate with ease in everyday activities. The impairment interferes with optimal learning and achievement and can result in a substantial educational disadvantage, unless adaptations are made in the methods of presenting learning opportunities, the nature of the materials used and/or the learning environment. It is not intended to include students described as having visual perceptual difficulties unless they also have a vision loss as described below.

For information pertaining to students who are deafblind, refer to [Section E.7 Deafblind](#).

To be eligible for supplemental funding as a student with a visual impairment, the following conditions must be met:

In the opinion of an ophthalmologist, optometrist, orthoptist or the Visually Impaired Program at British Columbia's Children's Hospital, the student's functioning may be described by one of the following:

- a visual acuity of 6/21 (20/70) or less in the better eye after correction;
- a visual field of 20 degrees or less;
- any progressive eye disease with a prognosis of becoming one of the above in the next few years; or
- a visual problem or related visual stamina that is not correctable and that results in the student functioning as if their visual acuity is limited to 6/21 (20/70) or less; and

The student must meet the above eligibility criteria; and

- A current IEP is in place that includes:
 - individualized goals,
 - adaptations and/or modifications where appropriate,
 - the strategies to meet these goals, and
 - measures for tracking student achievement in relation to the goals.
- The student is receiving inclusive education services that are directly related to the student's visual impairment on a regular basis from a qualified teacher of the visually impaired.
- The inclusive education services being provided are beyond those offered to the general student population and are proportionate to the level of need(s).
- The inclusive education services are outlined in the IEP and directly relate to the student's identified disabilities or diverse abilities.
- Reduction in class size is not by itself a sufficient service to meet the definition.

Identification and Assessment

School personnel should recommend to parents that their child see an Optometrist whenever they suspect a student is experiencing difficulties or is having trouble learning which may be due to vision problems.

General health information about school-age children and their eyes is available at the following website: <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/>.

Health Authorities vary in the services they provide in communities to identify vision problems in young children. A case finding approach that identifies children who may be at risk is preferable to annual screenings.

School districts should develop and implement referral procedures to ensure that every visually impaired student is identified, and receives an appropriate educational program.

In order to plan the educational program the teacher of the visually impaired should conduct functional vision and learning media assessment to identify the educational implications of the student's vision loss. In the case of students with a severe visual impairment, a qualified orientation and mobility instructor should also assess the students' skills in orientation and mobility.

Planning and Implementation

A component essential to the establishment of an effective system of delivery of services to students with visual impairment is the availability of qualified, experienced teachers who have regular classroom experience and in addition are competent to adapt materials, teach braille, use visual aids and technological devices and plan, develop, deliver, and monitor all aspects of schooling affected by visual impairment.

With appropriate support services, many students can follow the curriculum with adaptation of learning resources or instructional methods. When necessary, however, the curriculum should be modified to reflect individual needs. The student's educational requirements and any special measures that are to be taken in order to help meet those requirements should be documented in a formal Individual Education Plan.

When an IEP is developed, the following needs should be considered:

- orientation and mobility skills;
- visual skills;
- specialized instruction and adaptations for reading and writing (e.g., braille, magnified print, electronic text);
- specialized instruction and adaptations in mathematics (e.g., abacus, Nemeth Code);
- access to technologies (e.g., braille writers and notetakers, audio calculators, computers);
- daily living skills;
- social skills;
- vocational planning and skill development;
- study skills and note-taking strategies; and
- concept development.

Orientation and mobility (O&M) is an essential component of the curriculum for students with severe visual impairments. It provides students with the skills necessary to know where they are in the school or community, where they want to go and how to get there in a safe and efficient manner with as much independence as possible. Orientation and mobility training should not be restricted to the school environment but should include other environments in which the student is required to function at different times of the day.

At the secondary level, school districts may develop and approve orientation and mobility programs or braille programs for visually impaired students as locally developed or independent study courses for credit toward graduation.

A working or instructional area for instruction in specific skill development by the itinerant or resource teacher should also be provided. This instructional area should be conducive to effective instruction (i.e., in compliance with health and safety codes, quiet, adequately lit, ventilated and free from distractions).

Evaluation and Reporting

The **K-12 Student Reporting Policy** pertains to all learners in the B.C. education system. A student who has a disability or diverse ability should receive regular communications of student learning in the same way as their peers in any other program and at the same time as the school and/or districts' regular reporting periods.

Due to factors such as visual fatigue, slow reading and writing speed, and the visual components of evaluation tools such as video or maps the student may require adaptations to the usual classroom testing situation. Such adaptations could involve additional time, the use of a reader or scribe, the use of specialized equipment, reduction in the volume of work to be completed while retaining the same Learning Standards, the provision of a description of the visual components, such as a video, and the use of an alternate setting for completing the work. These adaptations should be documented in the student's IEP and monitored for their appropriateness and effectiveness.

As outlined in the Inclusive Education section of the **K-12 Student Reporting Policy**, regular reporting procedures are used to communicate student learning for students who use adaptations to access and show their learning.

For students writing provincial examinations, braille, large print, or electronic versions of examinations can be provided if applied for well in advance. See Appendix H.3 Adjudication: Supports for Graduation Assessments for more information on procedures for adapting provincial examinations to accommodate students with visual impairment.

Personnel

Teacher of the visually impaired

Specialist teachers with responsibilities for supporting students in this category should fulfill the qualifications described for a learning assistance teacher (see Section D.1 Learning Assistance Services).

A specialist teacher of the visually impaired should have:

- a valid B.C. Teaching Certificate, and
- a Master's degree or diploma in the education of the visually impaired.

Where a district is unable to employ a specialist teacher of the visually impaired, this requirement may be met by providing regular services through sharing arrangements with other districts or through a fee-for-service arrangement with qualified specialist teachers of the visually impaired.

Orientation and mobility instructor

To ensure that students have access to appropriate orientation and mobility services, school districts should obtain services from qualified orientation and mobility instructors. The Ministry defines a qualified orientation and mobility instructor as one who:

- meets standards established by the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation & Education Professionals (ACVREP); or
- has a Master's degree in orientation and mobility; or
- has completed post-graduate studies in orientation and mobility which include at least 300 hours of supervised practice in orientation and mobility working with individuals with a variety of visual impairments.

They should have a solid foundation and expertise in the areas of education of students with visual impairment and child growth and development. They should also demonstrate skills in human relations and communication.

Many teachers of the visually impaired have taken additional training and are also qualified as orientation and mobility instructors. In other cases, school districts may find it necessary to contract for specialized orientation and mobility instructors to provide this training.

Education assistants

If the support of a education assistant is warranted the teacher of the visually impaired should consult with the classroom teacher to assist him or her in developing, directing, and monitoring the assistant's activities. Education assistants should have sufficient training and understanding of visual impairments for the duties they are assigned, and be able to demonstrate an understanding of the social, emotional and educational implications of vision loss.

Education assistants working with braille-using students should either have, or be working in a timely manner toward completion of, a braille transcribing course.

Braillists

Districts enrolling braille-using students will need to obtain braille transcription services for tests, examinations and teacher-made materials. A staff braillist should be available to provide these transcription services.

Information about personnel training for braille is available through the Provincial Resource Centre for the Visually Impaired (PRCVI).

Resources

Provincial Resource Centre for the Visually Impaired - PRCVI

School districts may borrow learning resources, reference materials and equipment for the use of students with visual impairments from the Provincial Resource Centre for the Visually Impaired (PRCVI).

