

*Poudre School District
Integrated Services*

Guidelines for Serving Students Identified as Visual Impairment, Including Blindness



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In 2013, Poudre School District conducted a comprehensive evaluation of vision services and programming through an independent, outside evaluation process. The Vision Services Program is a special education program that provides services and support for students with visual impairments, and are identified under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Exceptional Children's Educational Act (ECEA), who reside in Poudre School District. This evaluation included extensive feedback from Integrated Services staff, general education staff, and administrators, as well as parents of students with a visual impairment, including blindness. The results and recommendations of this program evaluation are the foundation for this document that outlines research-based and best practice constructs for improving programming and outcomes for students with a visual impairment, including blindness. The primary sources used in the development of this document were *Educating Students with Visual Impairments in Texas: Guidelines and Standards, 2010*; as well as the expertise of the Poudre School District Teachers of the Visually Impaired; the Colorado Department of Education; and information from the program evaluation.

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*"The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched.
They must be felt with the heart"*

--Helen Keller

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents

DEFINING VISION SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS	1
THEORY OF ACTION	4
GUIDING PRINCIPLES	4
PROGRAM BELIEFS	4
INCLUSIVE PRACTICES	6
PROGRAM COMPONENTS.....	7
Program Component 1: Eligibility	7
Program Component 2: Expanded Core Curriculum.....	10
Program Component 3: Curricular needs of students with visual impairments	12
Program Component 4: Appropriate educational placements for students with visual impairments .	13
Roles and Responsibilities.....	15
Roles and Responsibility 1: Certified Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (TVI) / Certified Orientation & Mobility Specialist (COSM)	15
Roles and Responsibilities 2: Braillists for Students with Visual Impairments	18
Roles and Responsibilities 3: Service Delivery	19
Roles and Responsibilities 4: Determining Appropriate Caseloads for Vision Professionals	21
APPENDIX	22
Additional Resources	23
AT A GLANCE	24
Frequently Asked Questions	25
ACRONYMS	27
Reference Publications	29

DEFINING VISION SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS

Addressing lifelong success is the goal of education. Students with visual impairments, including blindness have unique learning needs that must be addressed if they are going to access the regular core curriculum and become independent, productive citizens to the greatest degree possible. According to the National Federation for the Blind (NFB, Employment Statistics, 2011) 36.8% of working adults ages 21-64, with significant vision loss, were employed. In Poudre School District, 0.43% of all students identified as having a disability meet eligibility requirements for having a vision impairment or blindness. Many students with visual impairments have additional coexisting impairments and are thus classified in an alternate disability category. This is also true in the Poudre School District where the population of students with visual impairments is quite diverse. For example, on the December 1, 2012 student count, 10 students were identified as having a primary disability as a visual impairment or blindness, but in actuality, 34 students with visual impairments were currently being served and identified as having one or more coexisting disabilities that impacted their learning. Designing an appropriate educational program requires a program as diverse as the population that is being served. Educators face a significant challenge in providing educational services that will lead to successful post-school outcomes. In addition to the general education that all students receive, students with visual impairments, including blindness also need an **expanded core curriculum** to meet needs directly related to their vision disability (NASDSE, 1999, p. 70). These expanded curriculum areas include instruction in:

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

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 individual educational program planning for these students with unique needs. Further, knowing the features of a quality program is key for parents and caregivers so that they can advocate for appropriate services to meet the needs of their child.

The population of students with visual impairments, including blindness is very diverse. These students:

- May be totally blind or have varying degrees of low vision
- Range from 3 to 21 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 (deaf/blindness)

Guidelines for Serving Students Identified as Visual Impairment, Including Blindness

- May have any number of other disabilities (mild to severe cognitive impairment, physical disabilities, other sensory losses, emotional or behavioral problems, autism and/or learning disabilities)
- May have a visual impairment in any part of the eye structure or due to neurological causes (such as cortical visual impairment)
- May have additional medical needs and considerations

In the Poudre School District, students with a visual impairment including blindness are served with an itinerant services model. Students receive services in their neighborhood school to the maximum extent possible. Service may be direct, indirect, and/or consultation services.

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 deaf/blindness may require combined services. Students who read braille need a brailist to be included on their instructional team.

The primary purpose of this document is to provide those involved with the provision of services a set of guidelines and standards by which they can determine the quality programs serving students with visual impairments including blindness. In analyzing a program's current components, this document offers 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 federal and state laws, rules and regulations in the state of Colorado that impact the education of students with visual impairments including blindness in the least restrictive environment.

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Free Appropriate Public Education or FAPE means special education and related services that are provided at public expense, under public supervision and direction, and without charge. FAPE must meet all standards and guidelines set forth in current state and federal legislation. Services are provided in conformity with an individualized education program. [ECEA 2.19]

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are nondisabled. Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the general educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in general educational classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. [ECEA 2.29] The Integrated Services Department will work to ensure that students with disabilities are educated in the least restrictive environment. Decisions about individualized programming will be driven by each student's unique needs. In many cases, the home school has or can arrange programming for students who have mild to moderated needs. Students with extensive needs may attend programs housed outside their home school.

Provision of FAPE and LRE in Poudre School District

Students with significant support needs may be provided supports and services through an Integrated Learning Support (ILS) program at center based schools throughout the district. Other center based special education programs may include programs for students with autism, students with significant emotional/behavioral disabilities, and students with significant hearing disabilities including deafness, or students who are deaf/blind. Students in these categories, who do not need a significant level of support through placement in a center-based program, are provided supports and services in a multi-categorical special education program at their neighborhood school.

THEORY OF ACTION

If we, in the vision services department (i.e. Teacher of the Visually Impaired/Orientation & Mobility Specialist, and Braillist), provide services using a continuum of inclusive practices to develop and provide accessible learning opportunities in a variety of environments through relevant and research-based practices, then students with a visual impairment including blindness will have the opportunity to become contributing members of their community and live life as independently and productively as possible.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Academic Achievement

Through vision services, students are able to access instruction in a standards-based curriculum.

Expanded Core Curriculum

Through vision services, and based upon individual needs, students receive instruction in the eight areas that extend beyond the academic curriculum including; compensatory skills, sensory efficiency, orientation & mobility (O&M), assistive technology, social skills, independent living skills, recreation & leisure skills, career education, and self-determination.

Community Membership

Every student is a valued and active member of their community.

PROGRAM BELIEFS

We believe:

- All students can learn
- All students will lead productive lives
- All students deserve to be treated with dignity and respect
- All students should be provided equal opportunity to participate in the general education environment, core curriculum, and expanded core curriculum, activities, and peer relationships
- Each student is an individual and has unique strengths and goals
- Learning objectives must address each student's individual educational needs
- In assuming the competency and ability of each student
- Independence, self advocacy and communication are foundational skills present in every learning opportunity and educational environment
- In a strengths and evidence based approach to teaching and supporting students
- The community, including general education teachers and typical peers, need to be educated about and supported through the practice of inclusion, and how to support students with visual impairments including blindness in an inclusive environment

Guidelines for Serving Students Identified as Visual Impairment, Including Blindness

- It is essential to set high, realistic and consistent expectations for learning, behavior, and social interactions
- Learning opportunities can occur in multiple, integrated, and naturally occurring environments
- Every team member, including students and parents, is part of a collaborative decision-making process
- School should be a positive, supportive, engaging, and safe place for all students
- Friendships and peer interactions are important for all students
- In the importance of working with families to best meet the needs of their child and help prepare them for life now and in the future
- Education is one process, among many, that will impact a student's growth, development, and future outcomes
- Students have a voice and the right to participate in their education
- All concerns need to be heard and validated through a respectful, collaborative process

INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

Students in Poudre School District who are determined to have a disability under current federal and state guidelines will receive a free and appropriate education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). This will include a continuum of services designed to meet each student's individual needs as defined in their IEP, with those services generally being viewed as support services to general education, rather than a place where services are provided.

The Continuum of Services is provided in the context of inclusion and general education with the belief that all students are general education students, and, whenever possible, should attend their neighborhood school. Least Restrictive Environment decisions are made through the IEP process and the IEP team student-centered, decision-making process that addresses the student's learning needs. Vision services are provided through an itinerant service delivery model.

At the heart of inclusive practice is the expectation of participation, fulfillment, and success (NCSL West-Burnham, 2008). Successful and effective practices of inclusive education and decision-making are related to several important characteristics. Of primary importance is having the vision of shared ownership for all students and their progress in the general education curriculum (Stetson & Assoc., 2011). Characteristics of inclusive education include "presumed competence, authentic membership, full participation, reciprocal social relationships, and learning to high standards by all students with disabilities" (NCIE, 2011).

In developing a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) and determining how special education services will be provided, the general education curriculum and classroom is the "starting point." This is based on the premise that supports and services for students with disabilities can be provided in the general education classroom (Stetson & Assoc., 2011). Recent legislation, including the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the subsequent alignment of the Individuals with Disabilities Act 2004, and the No Child Left Behind Act all require that all students be provided with supports and services that allow them to participate and progress in the general education curriculum. "The intent of this and related mandates is increased access to the general curriculum in order to prepare students for meaningful and successful lives as they enter adulthood" (2010, Copeland & Cosbey).

Students with visual impairments may not engage in the general education curriculum in the same way as students without disabilities. In addition, students with a visual impairment may need instruction in the various areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum. The goals and objectives on the IEP (Individualized Educational Plan) are based on the student's current level of performance, strengths and needs, as well as the expected outcomes for post-secondary transition.

In Poudre School District we are committed to promoting inclusive practices in all learning environments. We believe all members of the school community need to have a shared commitment to inclusive practices and model acceptance of all students. This includes collaborative planning, shared decision making, participation in ongoing staff development around best practices and implementation of age-appropriate activities based general education curriculum and materials.

PROGRAM COMPONENTS

Program Component 1: Eligibility

Eligibility is determined through the IEP process, based upon a medical report, functional vision evaluation and learning media assessment.

Visual Impairment, Including Blindness – Colorado Department of Education (CDE) Eligibility criteria 3/2013

ECEA (Exceptional Children Educational Act) Rules: Rules for the Administration of the Exceptional Children's Educational Act 1 CCR 301--8 October 2012 Visual Impairment, Including Blindness

2.08 (11) A child with a Visual Impairment, Including Blindness shall have a deficiency in visual acuity and/or visual field and/or visual functioning where, even with the use of lenses or corrective devices, he/she is prevented from receiving reasonable educational benefit from general education.

2.08 (11) (a) A determination that a child is an eligible child with a Visual Impairment, Including Blindness shall be based upon one or more of the following:

2.08 (11) (a) (i) Visual acuity of no better than 20/70 in the better eye after correction;

2.08 (11) (a) (ii) Visual field restriction to 20 degrees or less; and/or

2.08 (11) (a) (iii) A physical condition of visual system which cannot be medically corrected and, as such, affects visual functioning to the extent that specially designed instruction is needed. These criteria are reserved for special situations such as, but not restricted to cortical visual impairment and/or a progressive visual loss where field and/or acuity deficits alone may not meet the aforementioned criteria.

2.08 (11) (b) As a result of the Visual Impairment, Including Blindness, as set out above, the child requires specialized instruction, which may include special aids, materials, and equipment, for learning, literacy, activities of daily living, social interaction, self-advocacy, and, as needed, orientation and mobility.

2.08 (11) (c) The term "Visual Impairment, Including Blindness" does not include children who have learning problems which are primarily the result of visual perceptual and/or visual motor difficulties.

In order for a student to be eligible for services as a student with a visual impairment, under state law they must have:

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 teacher of students with visual impairments (TVI)

Federal law 34 CFR §300.304(c)(4) requires that “the child is assessed in all areas related to the suspected disability” and 34 CFR §300.304(c)(6) 10 “the evaluation is sufficiently comprehensive to identify all of the child’s special education and related services needs”. Therefore, it is recommended that an evaluation of orientation and mobility skills by a certified orientation and mobility specialist (COMS) be requested, along with the evaluation by a teacher of students with visual impairment (TVI), as part of determining the need for eligibility as a student with a visual impairment.

- 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
- A *functional vision evaluation (FVE)* analyzes how a student actually performs visually in a variety of environments, including familiar and unfamiliar environments, in different lighting conditions, requiring the use of both near and distance vision. Input from both a TVI and COMS ensures consideration of all aspects of functional use of vision:
 - The functional vision evaluation (FVE) must include recommendations concerning the need for an *orientation and mobility evaluation*, to determine whether there is a need for specific instruction to ensure safe and efficient travel in the home, school and community. Input from a COMS during the FVE provides informed decision making regarding the need for an O&M evaluation.
 - Clinical Low Vision evaluations are needed to prescribe certain low vision devices. Eye care specialists (ophthalmologists, optometrists) with specialized training in low vision, conduct clinical low vision evaluations.
- 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.
- An *orientation and mobility evaluation* must analyze the student’s level of safe and efficient movement in familiar and unfamiliar environments in the home, school and community and recommend needed instructional services for current and future mobility needs.

A complete evaluation is required for any child being considered as eligible for special education as a result of a visual impairment. This evaluation is required for initial eligibility or re-evaluation for continued eligibility, and must include a comprehensive review of student progress in all areas related to the suspected disability, including, if appropriate, health, vision, hearing, social and emotional status, general intelligence, academic performance, communicative status, and motor abilities. A Functional Vision Evaluation (FVE) is needed to ensure that assessment results accurately reflect the child’s aptitude and not the impact of a visual impairment.

In 1999, the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) recognized that critical skills were impacted by the presence of a visual impairment or blindness. The NASDSE endorsed the term expanded core curriculum (ECC) to describe additional areas that *should be included in a comprehensive evaluation* of students with visual impairments and in developing the annual individualized education program. <http://www.tsbvi.edu/national-agenda>

For the initial evaluation and at least every three years, 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.

Involvement of the teacher of students with visual impairments (TVI) and certified orientation and mobility specialist (COMS) in the evaluation is critical for:

- performing the FVE and LMA to establish eligibility and appropriate modifications and accommodations for evaluation and instruction
- performing the O&M evaluation to establish or reevaluate the need for orientation and mobility instruction (the COMS)
- ensuring that evaluation includes all appropriate areas of the expanded core curriculum;
- establishing assessment techniques, methods and materials for the Colorado 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

Early Childhood Visual impairment

Early Childhood Visual Impairment is a recognized eligibility category for special education and related services. Part C of IDEA mandates early childhood intervention services for children with disabilities birth through two years of age. (34 CFR § 300.8) 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. A thorough 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.

If a visual impairment is suspected in a child under the age of three, the referral process is coordinated by a Colorado Part C Service Coordinator, who develops the IFSP (Infant Family Service Plan), and arranges for service delivery with identified service providers. As part of the eligibility process, families must obtain documentation of the child's vision from a licensed ophthalmologist or optometrist. Poudre School District has a current memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Larimer County Community Centered Board for serving infants and toddlers with a disability under the age of three. The MOU states that Poudre School District does assess and identify infants and toddlers with disabilities; however, special education services for children under three are not provided by Poudre School District.

At age three, Part C Service Coordinators facilitate transition into Poudre School District with the Early Childhood Assessment Team members including the TVI/COMS, doctors' reports, consent for referral for evaluation, consent for release of information, as appropriate.

Deaf-blindness

Deaf-blindness means simultaneous hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational problems that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness. 34 CFR, § 300.8(c)(2)

- Must meet the eligibility criteria for hearing impairment and visual impairment
- Must meet the criteria for a student with a visual impairment and has a suspected hearing loss

- Must have documented hearing and vision losses that, if considered individually, may not meet the requirements hearing impairment or visual impairment, but the combination of such losses adversely affects the student's educational performance; or
- 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

Program Component 2: Expanded Core Curriculum

Evaluations of all areas of the expanded core curriculum (ECC) 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)) The term expanded core curriculum is used to define concepts and skills typically learned incidentally by sighted students that must be sequentially presented to the student who is blind or has low vision. The expanded core curriculum areas include; (A) 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 § 300.320 (a)(2)(A)(B)). 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.

As the IEP is being developed, the following unique skills related to the expanded core curriculum should be considered:

- **Compensatory Skills** needed to access the general curriculum, including:
 - Access to literacy through Braille and/or print, handwriting skills and auditory skills. The Colorado Braille Bill of 1994, assumes that all functionally blind students are to be taught Braille unless their learning media assessment recommends different literacy media. Many students with low vision use regular print with magnification devices. Some students need both print and Braille. Students with multiple disabilities, including deaf-blindness, 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 deaf-blindness 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 mathematical, geographical and scientific concepts that must be taught with adapted materials and strategies for students unable to learn from pictures and visual diagrams. 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.

- **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.
 - 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.
 - For most students with visual impairments including blindness, an increased reliance upon *tactual* skills is essential to learning. These skills should be considered as part of the 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 digital media and use echolocation for orientation.
- **Orientation and Mobility (O&M):** Safe and efficient travel throughout the environment is a critical component in the education of students with visual impairments including blindness. 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 blind child 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 is understood. More advanced age-appropriate travel skills such as street crossings, bus travel and community experiences are needed, as the student gets older.
- **Assistive technology:** 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.
- **Social skills:** A visual impairment including blindness 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 learn incidentally, may need to be taught to a child with a visual impairment.

- **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 systematic 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.
- **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. Poudre School District students are informed of statewide and regional opportunities in which they may participate. 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.
- **Career education:** Students with visual impairments need to be taught about the variety of types 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. Students in Poudre School District may access the Alternative Cooperative Education (ACE) program and other on-the job awareness and training programs in their secondary educational programming.
- **Self-determination:** Self-determination includes personal decision-making, self-advocacy, 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.

Program Component 3: Curricular needs of students with visual impairments

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. General and special education teachers are primarily responsible for instruction in the academic core content, with the support of Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVI) and Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists 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. It is difficult to find time within the typical school program for addressing all needed elements of the core and expanded core curricula. The expanded core curriculum may need to be addressed in many ways, including, but not limited to:

- A longer school day (which might require flexible instructional work times, alternate transportation and locations)
 - Community and home-based learning opportunities
- Additional years in school
- Applying for high school credit for vision-specific coursework, following state regulations and procedures
- Summer programs, either locally or offered by the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind (CSDB)
- Short-term placements offered by CSDB Outreach Department.

Instructional accommodations/modifications: In addition to the specific areas of the expanded core curriculum, students with visual impairments including blindness 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. The TVI works on developing concepts to allow students to participate in the general education curriculum. Individualized instruction for certain skills that may be difficult to learn in a large group setting may be needed for learning basic concepts such as map skills, advanced math concepts, and spatial concepts. Specialized equipment and materials may also be needed. 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.

Program Component 4: Appropriate educational placements for students with visual impairments

An array of services and placement options are available in Poudre School District based on individual student needs.

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.” (OSEP Regulations, 34 CFR §§300.115 and 300.116).

The IEP (Individualized Educational Plan) team should determine the most appropriate learning environment for each student based upon individual educational needs. The IEP team consists of, at a minimum, the parent, special education director or designee, general education teacher, and a licensed specialist in the identified area of disability. By law, the IEP team 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 or

blindness. The law requires the IEP team 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 the IEP team must carefully select from the full array of potential settings and service delivery models: general education classroom; itinerant teacher services; resource level support; multi-categorical programming; self-contained or center-based programs for significant support needs students in the district; short term programs or summer programs at the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind (CSDB); or, placement at schools that have a residential component, are all equal options to be considered by the IEP team. 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)

Roles and Responsibilities

Roles and Responsibility 1: Certified Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (TVI) / Certified Orientation & Mobility Specialist (COSM)

Teacher of the Visually Impaired: TVI certified teachers of students with visual impairments perform required evaluations and instruction.

Certified teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs) are team members for all students with visual impairments, including those with deaf-blindness or blindness. The educational needs of these students vary widely. From initial evaluation, to instruction, to assessment, the TVI plays a critical role in helping students, teachers, paraprofessionals, family members and related service personnel. Vision services by a TVI are special education services. A TVI is a special educator that provides specially designed instruction. For information about certification requirements, university coursework, and programs for training TVI/COMS, refer to the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) website: www.cde.state.co.us/edu.co

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 or blindness
- 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, assistive technology, auditory skills, social skills, use of near and distance low vision devices, and other areas of the expanded core curriculum
- Supporting parents as they help their children reach developmental milestones with adapted strategies specific to needs related to the visual impairment or blindness
- 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 appropriate goals and objectives related to the visual impairment or blindness
- Supporting transitions from preschool to elementary school, elementary to middle school and middle school to high school
- Ensuring that necessary skills are attained for transitioning from school to adult life
- Providing opportunities for families to meet other families and to access training
- Consulting with parents, and providing in-service to teachers and other professionals with regard to the expanded core curriculum areas
- Modeling appropriate techniques for providing instruction
- Providing, creating and acquiring adapted materials
- Recommending adapted strategies for access to the general curriculum and participation in the school community
- Building independence and success in home, community and school environments

Indirect Services/Record Keeping Duties

- Registering/Exiting each eligible student with the Colorado Instructional Materials Center (CIMC)
- Maintaining records on all evaluations, IEPs, and progress reports
- Attending IEP meetings
- Ordering textbooks and 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 deaf-blindness and other additional disabilities:

- Teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs) must be available to students with visual impairments, including deaf-blindness.
- IDEA requires that an individual who can interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results related to a visual impairment must be a member of the IEP team. (Statute: [TITLE I / B/ 614 / d/ 1/ B/ v](#)).
- All special education and related service personnel shall be certified, endorsed, or licensed in the area(s) of assignments. (www.cdestate.co.us)
- 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.

Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists: COMS perform required evaluations and instruction.

Movement, independent or supported, is critical for learning. Orientation & mobility (O&M) is recognized in IDEA 2004 as a related service, which may be required to assist a child with a visual impairment or blindness to benefit from special education. Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists (COMS) provide services that enable students who are visually impaired or blind to attain systematic orientation to and safe movement in school, home and community environments. 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)). In the state of Colorado, orientation and mobility instruction must be provided by a certified orientation and mobility specialist (COMS), who is certified by the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP) and must hold a CDE license in Peripatology (Orientation and Mobility Specialist). For information regarding university coursework and certification requirements and programs for training COMS, refer to www.cdestate.co.us

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

Assessment and Evaluation

- Conducting the functional vision evaluation.
- 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 students 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).
- Providing support to the student to facilitate development of self-esteem, self-determination and social acceptance.
- Orienting students to unfamiliar environments.
- Instructing in efficient use of low vision for movement.
- Teaching efficient use of low vision devices.
- Teaching use of mobility tools, including the long cane and adaptive mobility devices, for safely negotiating the environment.
- Providing travel experiences 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 that appropriate vision-specific supports are in place and the necessary skills attained for transitioning from school to adult life.
- Modeling appropriate O&M techniques for other team members.
- Providing, creating and acquiring adapted materials such as tactual 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.

Indirect/Record Keeping Duties

- Maintaining records on all evaluations, IEPs, and progress reports.
- Attending IEP meetings.
- Ordering and providing adapted materials from the American Printing House for the Blind through the Federal Quota program and from other resources.

Roles and Responsibilities 2: Braillists for Students with Visual Impairments

Written job descriptions identify comprehensive roles of braillists supporting instruction of students with visual impairments.

A braillist is part of a student's support team when the Learning Media Plan has determined that braille is the primary learning mode. The braillist works under the direction of the TVI to provide braille and tactile materials, as needed, in order to support the student in the learning environment. These staff members need specific and ongoing training in order to effectively support learning. Colorado Braille certification is required.

There are two unique categories of braillists for students who are blind.

Site-based braillist: school-based braillist that provides on-site braille and support for the student, as needed, as directed by the TVI

District braillist: cover braille needs for the district on an ongoing basis

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

- Assisting vision professionals and 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
- Maintains inventory of brailled materials, equipment and the library

Roles and Responsibilities 3: Service Delivery

An established procedure for documenting student needs and the vision professional's time is best practice.

The following are examples of service delivery time options:

- Students require intensive instructional time when beginning to learn braille. A certified TVI should provide braille instruction on a daily basis, often for 1-2 hours a day. Additional hours per day may 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 throughout a variety of environments. Vision professionals also have important roles in encouraging campus staff and family members to reinforce 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, followed by reduced time as mastery increases. Some visual conditions require flexible scheduling to support learning in nighttime environments.
- Students with multiple disabilities need routines that create predictable patterns for learning. To support instruction in newly introduced skills in a trans-disciplinary model, the TVI may initially schedule more intensive daily consultation for a specified period of time for:
 - observing the student's current skill levels
 - working directly with the student to determine appropriate modifications to materials or instructional methodology
 - modeling teaching to show other team members appropriate techniques
 - monitoring student progress
- There should be time allotted for active collaboration and consultation with the educational team for each student. When the consultation 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 IEP meetings, increased time may be required from the TVI/COMS.
- A successful 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 assessed by the TVI annually, this student may only require consultation services on a monthly or twice monthly basis.

The TVI/COMS will make the recommendation as to whether direct or indirect (consultation) 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 low vision 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 may schedule time with the other team members and the family

to ensure consistency in programming. Consultation is a model that can be used effectively to support a variety of educational purposes. Consultation services can be used to ensure that a student has multiple opportunities in a day to use a particular skill and those modifications are implemented throughout all instructional settings.

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.

Many IEP goals and objectives can be developed and addressed collaboratively by classroom teachers, with support from the vision professional. Progress is documented through progress monitoring and quarterly reports.

Roles and Responsibilities 4: Determining Appropriate Caseloads for Vision Professionals

Written caseload guidelines are used to evaluate caseloads of vision professionals.

It is important that caseloads allow for necessary instruction and services to meet the unique educational needs of students with visual impairments. Each TVI/COMS provides current caseload information when evaluating caseloads. The Guidelines for Caseload Formula for Teachers Certified in the Area of Visual Impairment, 2003 (www.cde.state.co.us) may provide valuable information related to the individual needs of each student.

Factors to be considered when determining caseloads may be based upon:

- Number of schools served- impacts the time spent traveling and the number of working relationships required on each campus.
- Ages and grade levels of students- Emergent readers, both tactile and low vision, require intensive intervention and coordination with teachers. As students enter middle school and high school, multiple teachers require consultation each semester.
- Service delivery, direct vs. indirect: direct service includes lesson planning for goals and objectives in addition to consultation with staff; and, Indirect service requires scheduling opportunities to collaborate with staff, evaluate and attend IEPs.
- Travel time- Travel is a critical part of the job, but is time-and budget-consuming. Planning related to numbers and locations of students should be considered for efficiency.
- Prep time needed- Each student's program is individualized (15 students=15 or more preparations) and time must be allotted for preparation, research, collaboration with parents and professionals.
- Number of braille students- Braille students requires extra preparation, planning, and consultation for them to be integrated smoothly into general education classes. Braille readers from pre-kindergarten through 2nd grade may require more time than older students that are braille readers. If the VI teacher is responsible for braille, the amount of time may increase (especially math and science materials).

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/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.

APPENDIX

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 for the Blind of Colorado: <http://www.acbco.org>
- American Foundation for the Blind: www.afb.org and Family Connect website www.afb.org/familyconnect.org
- American Printing House for the Blind: www.aph.org
- Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired: www.aerbvi.org
- Bookshare: www.bookshare.org
- Colorado AER: www.co.aerbvi.org
- Colorado Department of Education (CDE): www.cdestate.co.us
- Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind (CSDB): www.csdb.org
- Colorado Talking Book Library (CTBL): www.cde.state.co.us
- Council for Exceptional Children: <http://www.cec.sped.org>
- Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVS): www.dvrcolorado.com
- DB-LINK: www.dblink.org
- Early Intervention Colorado: www.eicolorado.org
- Exceptional Children's Education Act (ECEA): www.cdestate.co.us
- Hadley School for the Blind: www.hadley.edu
- IDEA legislation: www.idea.ed.gov
- Learning Ally: www.learningally.org (RFBD)
- National Association of Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (NAPVI): www.Napvi.org
- National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness: www.nationaldb.org
- National Federation for the Blind (NFB): www.nfb.org
- National Library Service (NLS): www.loc.gov/nls
- University of Northern Colorado UNC: www.unco.edu

AT A GLANCE

1. Eligibility is determined by an IEP team 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 / orientation and mobility specialists perform required evaluations and instruction.
6. Families are active members of the instructional team.
7. An array of services and placement options are available based on individual student needs.
8. Times for specialized instruction by certified teachers of students with visual impairments and by certified orientation and mobility specialists are determined by appropriate evaluation in all areas of the core and expanded core curriculum for each student.

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.

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. 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>.

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

An IEP team considers evidence to determine the eligibility of a student for services as a student with deaf/blindness. Colorado law establishes eligibility for deaf/blindness.

4. Do all students with a visual impairment, including blindness need evaluation by a certified orientation and mobility specialist?

Federal law 34 CFR §300.304(c)(4) requires that "the child is assessed in all areas related to the suspected disability" and 34 CFR §300.304(c)(6) "the evaluation is sufficiently comprehensive to identify all of the child's special education and related services needs". Therefore, it is recommended that an evaluation of orientation and mobility skills by a certified orientation and mobility specialist (COMS) be requested, along with the evaluation by a certified teacher of students with visual impairment (TVI), as part of determining the need for eligibility as a student with a visual impairment. The functional vision evaluation performed by a TVI and/or a COMS must include recommendations concerning the need for an orientation and mobility evaluation.

5. Do all students with visual impairments need IEPs 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. [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. Annual IEPs should be considered by an IEP team when evaluation results indicate a need for instruction in areas of the ECC.

6. Which professionals must attend an IEP meeting for a student who is visually impaired?

Along with the required IEP team members (parent, general education teacher, Special Education Director or designee, and any other service providers), 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 deaf-blindness.

7. Which professionals must attend an IEP meeting for a student who is deaf/blind?

For a student with suspected or documented deaf/blindness, the IEP team 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 hearing impairments.

8. How does a student get referred to attend the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind (CSDB)?

For admission to CSDB, students must have been determined by their local school district to be eligible for educational services as students with a visual impairment, including blindness or deaf/blindness. Referrals for consideration for admission must be originated by the student's local school district in collaboration with the student's parent. CSDB cannot accept direct parent referrals. The CSDB is one placement option in the continuum of placement options for students with visual impairments and/or deaf/blindness.

9. How much time 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.

10. Do all students with a visual impairment, including blindness require an IEP?

Not all students with a visual impairment, including blindness require an IEP. In some situations a 504 plan with appropriate accommodations may be sufficient.

ACRONYMS

<p>ACE Alternative Cooperative Education ACV American Council for the Blind ACVREP Association for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals ADA Americans with Disabilities Act AER Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired APH American Printing House for the Blind ASL American Sign Language AYP Adequate Yearly Progress BIP Behavior Intervention Plan CBM Curriculum-Based Measurements CCB Community Center Board CDE Colorado Department of Education CEC Council for Exceptional Children CIMC Colorado Instructional Materials Center CO-ALT Colorado Alternate Assessment COMS Certified Orientation & Mobility Specialist CPI Crisis Prevention Institute CSDB Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind CSEAC Colorado Special Education Advisory Committee CTBL Colorado Talking Book Library D/B Deaf/Blind DHH Deaf or Hard of Hearing DVR Division of Vocational Rehabilitation</p>	<p>ECC Expanded Core Curriculum USDE United States Department of Education ELL English Language Learners ELL English Language Learners ESL English as a Second Language ESY Extended School Year ESY Extended School Year FAPE Free Appropriate Public Education FBA Functional Behavior Assessment FERPA Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act FVE Functional Vision Evaluation HCAP Health Care Action Plan HCAP Health Care Action Plan HCP Health Care Program for Children with Special Needs HKNC Helen Keller National Education Center IDEA Individuals with Disabilities Education Act IEP Individualized Education Program IFSP Individualized Family Service Plan ILP Individual Literacy Plan ILS Integrated Learning Support IS Integrated Services LB Legally Blind LMA Literacy Media Assessment LP Light Perceptions LRE Least Restrictive Environment</p>
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Guidelines for Serving Students Identified as Visual Impairment, Including Blindness

<p>NIL No Vision NIMC National Instructional Materials Access Center NLS National Library Service O & M Orientation and Mobility OCR Office of Civil Rights OD Right Eye OP Object Perception OS Left Eye OSEP Office of Special Education Program OT Occupational Therapy OU Both eyes Part B Special Education services ages 3-21 PART C IDEA/Early Intervention Services for Children Birth to 3 Years PBIS Positive Behavior Intervention and Support PEAK Parent Education and Assistance for Kids PEP Parents Encouraging Parents PLC Professional Learning Community Poudre SCHOOL DISTRICT Poudre School District PT Physical Therapy RtI Response to Intervention S/L Speech Language SEAC Special Education Advisory Committee SLP Speech Language Pathologist SPED Special Education</p>	<p>SRO School Resource Officer SSI Supplemental Security Income SWAAAC State Wide Augmentative Alternative Assistive Communication TVI Teacher of the Visually Impaired UNC University of Northern Colorado ECEA Exceptional Children’s Education Act</p>
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