



Guidelines:

For the Specialized Assessment of Students with Visual Impairments

July 2012

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
75 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA 02148-4906
Phone 781-338-3000 TTY: N.E.T. Relay 800-439-2370
www.doe.mass.edu



Acknowledgments

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Special Education Planning and Policy Development Office wishes to acknowledge the enormous contribution made by the experts who work in special education, specifically with students who are visually impaired. These guidelines for assessing students with visual impairments for special education purposes, is the product of a lengthy process and the input of many individuals with different perspectives who played a critical role in identifying the central topics emphasized in this document. The following individuals were vital in the development of this document: Nan Alphen, Ann Barber, Andrea Bloch, Carrie Brasier, Susan Bruce, Beth Caruso, Kim Charlson, Eileen Curran, Tracy Evans Luiselli, Donna Harlan, Richard Jackson, Carla Jentz, Mary Koert, Susan LaVenture, Maggie Lawler, Robert McCulley, Thomas Miller, Tammy Reisman, Marianne Riggio, Meg Robertson, Karen Ross, John Stager, Susan Stager, Janet Ulwick-Sacca, Darick Wright. In particular, the SEPP office would like to acknowledge and thank Karen Ross, Ph.D. for her specific contributions in sections 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3, and Appendix B Forms D, E and F, adapted from her work, Ross, Karen S. (1987) *Family Consultation Competencies for Educators of the Visually Impaired*.

This document was prepared by the
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.
Commissioner

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, an affirmative action employer, is committed to ensuring that all of its programs and facilities are accessible to all members of the public. We do not discriminate on the basis of age, color, disability, national origin, race, religion, sex or sexual orientation. Inquiries regarding the Department's compliance with Title IX and other civil rights laws may be directed to the Human Resources Director, 75 Pleasant St., Malden, MA 02148 781-338-6105.

© 2012 Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
*Permission is hereby granted to copy any or all parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes.
Please credit the "Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education."*

This document printed on recycled paper

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
75 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA 02148-4906
Phone 781-338-3000 TTY: N.E.T. Relay 800-439-2370
www.doe.mass.edu



Table of Contents

Introduction	1
The Impact of Vision Loss on Learning	1
The Evaluation Process.....	3
Specialized Assessments of Students with Visual Impairments	4
1. Information from the Eye Doctor.....	4
2. Parent/Guardian Interview	4
3. Classroom Teacher/ Related Service Provider/ Staff Interview.....	5
4. Student Interview.....	5
5. Functional Vision Assessment.....	6
6. Learning Media Assessment	7
7. Assistive Technology Assessment.....	8
8. Orientation and Mobility Assessment (O & M)	9
Expanded Core Curriculum for Students with Visual Impairments (ECC)	9
Appendices.....	11
<i>Appendix A: Definitions</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Appendix B: Sample Assessment Forms.....</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Appendix C: Job Descriptions for Specialized Professionals</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Appendix D: Resources.....</i>	<i>45</i>

Introduction

The purpose of the **Guidelines for the Specialized Assessment of Students with Visual Impairments**¹ is to:

- Review types of assessments and provide sample assessment forms for an initial evaluation or three-year reevaluation to support the eligibility determination of special education services for students with visual impairments. See the [Evaluation Consent Form \(N1A\)](#)
- Help ensure a common understanding of the purpose and complexity of conducting specialized assessments of students with visual impairments.
- Assist Teams in designing instruction and supports for students with visual impairments to ensure access to the general curriculum and life of the school.
- Provide resources to help general and special educators and related service providers meet the unique needs of students with visual impairments and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living.

Note: This guide is intended to address the evaluation of students with vision loss and the impact of this loss on their education and their ability to participate in the life of the school. Additional specialized assessments will be needed for students with deaf-blindness or other disabilities.

The Impact of Vision Loss on Learning

Communication and learning styles are significantly affected by vision loss, whether these losses or impairments are lifelong, intermittent, or increase over time. Since most assessments are developed for students who see, it is critical that professionals trained in the education of students with visual impairments select and administer specialized assessments for these students that determine:

- the strategies and modalities for learning and communication;
- the appropriate media for literacy development and access to the general education curriculum, which may include print, Braille, tactile communication systems, and/or picture systems; and
- the areas of need relative to orientation and mobility, social skills, daily living skills, career education, visual efficiency, assistive technology, and compensatory skills as appropriate.

Most students with visual impairments are educated in inclusive settings and receive instruction from general education teachers. The students may also receive services from special education teachers and/or related service providers. Although licensed in their specific

¹ Massachusetts Special Education Regulations are found at 603 CMR 28.00. Federal regulations under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) are found at 34 CFR 300. Evaluation of students with disabilities is addressed in state regulations at 603 CMR 28.04 and 28.05(2)(b), and in federal regulations at 34 CFR 300.301 *et seq.*

disciplines, the training programs for these professionals generally provide limited knowledge of and experience with the evaluation and education of students with visual impairments.

Fully understanding the sensory capacity, learning profiles, and communication styles of students with visual impairments will provide evaluators the information they need to select, administer, and/or adapt the most appropriate assessments for a student. This knowledge will also assist teachers, therapists, school administrators and other school personnel to understand how a visual impairment affects a student's ability to function across all settings in the school environment. Understanding the following "hidden" characteristics of a vision loss will enable non-vision specialists to facilitate meaningful inclusion and participation of students with visual impairments.

Students with visual impairments:

- Have limited ability to learn incidentally. This affects how they form concepts and develop schema or frameworks for understanding new ideas and vocabulary that provide essential foundation skills for comprehension and abstract reasoning. Learning social skills, play skills and adaptive living skills are likewise affected. Interpreting non-verbal, social interactions especially body language, understanding another person's point of view, and working in cooperative learning groups are markedly enhanced by "seeing" other's responses to these interactive activities. Mastering these skills may require explicit instruction for students with visual loss. Limited incidental learning also affects performance on standardized assessments, especially cognitive and achievement tests, where questions are based on assumptions about the kinds of information that should be known by certain chronological ages. Tests that have not been standardized on students with visual impairments may underestimate students' true abilities and the results should be interpreted with caution.
- Use their other senses differently from their teachers, therapists and peers with vision. This has far-reaching implications for both the methodology and the content of instruction. Teachers typically teach using "visual" vocabulary and strategies to describe how things look (colors, shapes, outlines), where they exist in the environment (in the small drawer above the atlas), how they are ordered (first, last, etc.) in order for students to code information into visual images that will help them take in, store and recall information. Students with visual impairments rely on their other senses to do this. Teachers need to understand this in order to adapt their instruction and use other sensory information to explain concepts and directions, such as how something smells, or feels, or tastes. In this manner, teachers can incorporate the learning style of the student with visual impairment into their directions, the class discussions, and student performance expectations.
- Differ from one another and from day to day. Two students with the same levels of vision and cognition may "see" differently due to the etiology of their vision loss and/or environmental factors related to the nature of the task they are viewing, such as the lighting or the visual complexity of the task. Moreover, the same student may "see" differently from day to day because of internal, personal factors including fatigue, motivation, attention, and other considerations.

Vision education specialists are experts in understanding and applying this information to assist in the design and implementation of appropriate services for specific students with vision loss to ensure their access to the general education curriculum and successful participation in a general education environment, regardless of the educational setting where services are

provided. They are also experts in providing consultation and technical assistance to school personnel around understanding how these characteristics of vision loss affect students in non-academic areas of the school and community.

The Evaluation Process

Each of the thirteen disability categories listed in federal special education regulations² has discrete criteria, described in the regulations, which assist the Team in determining whether a student's learning characteristics are consistent with a specific disability. The impact of the disability, including whether or not the disability interferes with a student's ability to make effective progress in the general curriculum, is determined by the Team through the evaluation process. Both of these criteria have to be met for the student to be found eligible for special education services: the student must have a disability and the disability must impede the student's ability to make effective progress in the general curriculum. Depending on the needs of the student, a Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments or other specialists will help to guide and support this assessment process and assist the Team in making this determination.

The evaluation must include statements of the student's current academic and functional performance levels, and statements of how the disability affects his/her participation in the general curriculum, or for preschool children, how the disability affects the child's participation in appropriate activities.

Because of the low incidence of students with visual impairments, districts may not have the vision specialists within their district. Therefore, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education encourage districts to seek appropriate specialist through their collaborative or by joining other districts to utilize the vision experts in their region.

For students with known or suspected visual impairments, the following qualified, vision personnel may provide specialized assessments. (For more in-depth descriptions of the roles and responsibilities of these personnel, see Appendix D.)

- A licensed **Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (TVI)** conducts assessments that help determine strategies and modalities for learning and communication and the appropriate media for literacy and for access to the general education curriculum.
- A licensed **eye care professional** (ophthalmologist, optometrist, etc) determines the degree and type of vision loss, and evaluates to determine the need for optical aids and low vision devices.
- A **Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS)** conducts an orientation and mobility evaluation in the areas of: body image, motor coordination skills, visual and listening abilities, understanding of environmental concepts, analysis of traffic controls, street crossing skills, use of public transportation, use of low vision devices, and/or potential need for an adaptive mobility device or a long cane.
- Personnel trained in **assistive technology (AT)** evaluate and implement assistive technology needs for students with visual impairments. AT refers to equipment, devices, and methods to provide access to the environment, materials and to print information.

² 300 CFR 300.8(c).

AT includes optical, non-optical, tactile, and auditory devices, as well as computer hardware and software and other electronic equipment.

- Either a **Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist (CVRT)** or a licensed TVI conducts an independent living skills evaluation.

Additional information on the eligibility determination process can be found in the Department documents: [Is Special Education The Right Service?](#) and [The IEP Process Guide](#).

Specialized Assessments of Students with Visual Impairments

The following section describes specialized assessments for students with known or suspected visual impairments. The first four assessments (eye care specialist report, parent/guardian interview, teacher or related service provider interview, and student interview) include sample forms/templates that can be completed electronically or printed into hard copies. The remaining assessments include links to external sources for resources (forms, websites, additional materials, etc.). Both the assessment forms and resource links are found in Appendix B.

Sample Assessment Forms:

1. Information from the Eye Doctor (see [Appendix B, Form A, B, & C](#))

1.1 Purpose

The student's ophthalmologist or optometrist communicates accurate, up-to-date visual medical information that is vital to the successful evaluation of a student with visual impairment.

There are three sample forms to be completed in this section (see Appendix B):

- Parent/Guardian Authorization (Form A);³
- School request for medical information (Form B);
- Eye report to be completed by the eye care specialist (Form C).

1.2 Completing the Assessment

Recommended for Health Assessment on [Evaluation Consent Form \(N1A\)](#)

2. Parent/Guardian Interview (see [Appendix B, Form D](#))

2.1 Purpose

The parent/guardian interview determines the parents' knowledge and understanding of their child's visual impairment, what they perceive to be the child's immediate and long-term needs, and how the child's vision is impacting his/her overall development. The purpose of the interview is to create an opportunity for open-ended dialogue, rather than to provide a checklist of functional activities.

Note: If English is not the primary language in the home, or if anyone in the family has a hearing impairment, an interpreter may be required for the parent interview.

³ Medical providers may insist on using their own authorization to release records to ensure their compliance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA).

2.2 Interview Guide Description

The interview guide provides generic questions designed to elicit purposeful information in five main categories: medical background, visual functioning, social/emotional development, social/educational milestones, and general life experiences. If a question is not applicable, “NA” should be indicated and a brief explanation added.

2.3 Completing the Assessment

Districts should consider a Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments as the appropriate person to conduct the interview. Recommended for Home Assessment on the [Evaluation Consent Form \(N1A\)](#)

3. Classroom Teacher/ Related Service Provider/ Staff Interview (see [Appendix B, Form E](#))

3.1 Purpose

The interview allows the teacher to describe his/her observations and questions about the student's in-school interests, abilities, social relationships, and other unique needs. The interview also determines the kinds of teaching methods and strategies that have already been implemented, with or without success.

3.2 Interview Guide Description

The Teacher/Related Service Provider/Staff Interview Guide includes questions in three categories: communication/learning style, visual behaviors, and social/emotional behaviors.

3.3 Completing the Interview

It is suggested that a licensed Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments conduct the interview as a recommended assessment under the “Observation of the Student” section of the [Evaluation Consent Form \(N1A\)](#)

4. Student Interview (see [Appendix B, Form F](#))

4.1 Purpose

The student interview is intended to provide an opportunity for the student to articulate how he/she views himself or herself as a student by:

- Describing his/her understanding of his/her visual impairment and how the impairment impacts day-to-day academic and non-academic activities;
- Expressing any comments, questions, or concerns about his/her visual impairment and educational experiences in general;
- Reflecting on any special interests, abilities, goals, frustrations, barriers, and/or feelings that may impact future planning.

4.2 Interview Guide Description

The student interview guide provides questions to promote dialogue with students in a non-threatening and meaningful way, in order, to gain information and encourage a trusting and open relationship. Some questions may be answered with short and simple responses, while others may involve longer explanations that require careful listening for relevant details and accuracy. While some questions include possible responses and examples to help frame the interview, it is appropriate to add anecdotal comments that the student may offer beyond the original scope of the question.

Depending on the age and functional level of the student, the interviewer may need to rephrase or explain some of the terminology to meet the student's level of comprehension. Some students may be reluctant to express themselves at first, because:

- they deny that they experience any vision issues;
- they are embarrassed or resentful to have been taken out of class;
- they do not have the cognitive or social maturity to express themselves;
- their vision, or lack of it, may never have been explained to them.

4.3 Completing the Assessment

A qualified individual, such as a licensed Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments, should complete this interview as a recommended assessment under the "Assessment in All Areas Related to Suspected Disability(ies)" section of the [Evaluation Consent Form \(N1A\)](#)

Note: Interviews with younger students or students with multiple disabilities may rely more on structured observations than on verbal responses to specific questions.

Assessment Links:

5. Functional Vision Assessment (see [Appendix B, Section G](#))

5.1 Purpose

The Functional Vision Assessment (FVA) assesses the student's functional acuities, visual field loss, eye motor control, and eye-hand coordination, as well as, reading, writing, functional life skills, and processing in all school settings. A FVA is closely associated with a [Learning Media Assessment \(LMA\)](#) and helps to determine the student's learning style and appropriate teaching strategies and accommodations.

Although it is important for each student with a suspected visual impairment to receive comprehensive and ongoing clinical assessments by an ophthalmologist or low vision specialist, an essential role of the Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments is the functional assessment of the student's visual skills. How an individual student is using his or her vision within his/her daily tasks and environments may differ significantly from the visual conclusions derived from clinical assessment. Clinical assessments occur within controlled environments to optimize the accuracy of the results and offer educators an informational tool to frame their assessments.

Daily tasks within the classroom, home, or other environments, however, generally occur under less than optimal conditions. Factors such as glare, distance from tasks and print size may compromise a student's ability to see and process visual information. Classroom and environmental noises may inhibit access to spoken directions, ability to orient oneself in space, and/or efficient processing of auditory information. The evaluator needs to assess both how the student has or has not learned to accommodate for visual impairment, and/or the compensatory skills the student needs in order to participate as effectively as possible across all learning situations.

A Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS) can also use a Functional Vision Assessment (FVA) to analyze how a student uses vision for orienting and moving through space in familiar and unfamiliar areas.

As a result of a FVA, specialized instruction may be recommended for the student with visual impairment. The FVA results may also recommend consultation with the family and educational

team regarding effective strategies to enhance the student's learning and ensures access to the curriculum.

5.2 Completing the Assessment

A qualified individual, such as a Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments conducts a Functional Vision Assessment as a recommended assessment under the "Assessment in All Areas Related To Suspected Disability(ies)" section of the [Evaluation Consent Form \(N1A\)](#).

6. Learning Media Assessment (see [Appendix B, Section H](#))

6.1 Purpose

A Learning Media Assessment (LMA) determines the most efficient and meaningful reading and learning media. The term media includes Braille, regular print, and regular print with magnification, large print, digital text, and audio materials. After the initial medium for reading and writing has been established, technology, electronic books, graphs, maps, and pictures should all be incorporated into the media assessment.

A LMA is an ongoing process comprised of a variety of instruments, several testing sessions, and observations over time, including systematic monitoring of established goals, and discussions and input from a variety of individuals involved in the day-to-day activities of the student. Determination of a student's literacy medium/media is not an "either/or" decision. Nor is it a final one. Students change, as do their needs for accessing and processing different types of information.

IDEA 2004 includes a specific provision about Braille instruction for students with vision impairments: The IEP Team shall—

- (iii) in the case of a child who is blind or visually impaired, provide for instruction in Braille and the use of Braille unless the IEP Team determines, after an evaluation of the child's reading and writing skills, needs, and appropriate reading and writing media (including an evaluation of the child's future needs for instruction in Braille or the use of Braille), that instruction in Braille or the use of Braille is not appropriate for the child. Section 614 (d)(3)(B)(iii)

This provision applies to every student with a visual impairment who has an IEP. This means that a student with a visual impairment who might have sufficient vision to read enlarged print or regular print with magnification shall also be provided with Braille instruction and the opportunity to use Braille, unless an evaluation that takes into consideration the child's future need for Braille literacy demonstrates that Braille is not appropriate.

Learning Media Assessment continues throughout the student's academic career. Many factors are taken into consideration, such as the student's primary approach to tasks (tactile, auditory, or visual, or some combination thereof), reading speed compared with the student's age peers, reading comprehension, note-taking ability, access to information, print or picture size, use of technology, fatigue, and the ability of the student to keep up with the pace and/or complexity of the curriculum.

Some students who have visual impairments realize the benefits of using both print and Braille, and many supplement their reading with auditory information. All students need access to a variety of literacy tools.

6.2 Completing the Assessment

A qualified individual, such as a Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments, conducts a Learning Media Assessment (LMA) as a recommended assessment under the “Assessment of All Areas Related to Suspected Disability(ies)” section of the [Evaluation Consent Form \(N1A\)](#).

7. Assistive Technology Assessment (see [Appendix B, Section I](#))

7.1 Purpose

The principal reason for providing assistive technology is to enable students to meet the instructional and non-academic goals set forth for them.

IDEA 2004 requires IEP teams to consider whether a student with a disability needs assistive technology devices and services in developing the IEP. 20 USC 1414(d)(3)(B)(v);34 CFR 300.324(a)(5).

Under the IDEA, assistive technology is defined as:

“...any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of a child with a disability.” 20 U.S.C. 1401(1);34 CFR 300.5.

Many school districts have written procedures that outline specific steps to follow to evaluate and obtain assistive technology for a student with disabilities. Generally, when an assistive technology assessment is deemed necessary, the procedure is to:

- assess the student’s abilities and needs in all areas of functioning
- determine goals
- identify assistive technology devices
- obtain loaned equipment
- document the effectiveness of the trial use

There are many factors that need to be examined when assistive technology devices and services are being considered for a student, including educational goals, personal preferences, social needs, environmental realities, and practical concerns.

As a result of this assessment, assistive technology may be recommended for the student with visual impairment.

The National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS)

The IDEA 2004 requires school districts to provide instructional materials to students with visual impairments including blindness, and other print disabilities, such as dyslexia, in a timely manner. This means that districts must take all reasonable steps to provide print instructional materials in accessible formats to children with disabilities at the same time as other children receive those materials.

The National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS) is a technical standard that curriculum publishers began using in 2006 to help increase the availability and timely delivery of print instructional materials in accessible formats for students with print disabilities in elementary and secondary schools. The NIMAS is designed to make it easier and faster to obtain accessible instructional materials. The NIMAS files can be used to produce alternate formats, including Braille, large print, digital text, and audio books for students with disabilities.

7.2 Completing the Assessment

An assistive technology assessment should be conducted as an extension of the [Learning Media Assessment](#) (LMA). Basic reading and writing functioning (print and/or Braille) found in the LMA is needed to determine and evaluate appropriate assistive technology requirements. If conducted separately, a qualified individual knowledgeable of assistive technology should conduct an Assistive Technology Assessment as a recommended assessment under the “Assessment of All Areas Related to Suspected Disability(ies)” section of the [Evaluation Consent Form \(N1A\)](#).

8. Orientation and Mobility Assessment (O & M) (see [Appendix B, Section J](#))

8.1 Purpose

An O & M assessment evaluates how safely and independently students with visual impairments are able to navigate in a variety of environments. An orientation and mobility assessment evaluates the student's body image, motor coordination skills, visual and listening abilities, understanding of environmental concepts, analysis of traffic controls, street crossing skills, use of public transportation, use of low vision devices, and/or the potential need for an adaptive mobility device or a long cane. An orientation and mobility assessment is conducted in the school, home, and community, and in both familiar and unfamiliar environments.

An O & M assessment is recommended for all students with visual impairments. Vision loss can have a significant impact on an individual's ability to navigate safely and independently.

8.2 Completing the Assessment

A Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS) conducts an orientation and mobility evaluation as a recommended assessment under the “Assessment of All Areas Related to Suspected Disability(ies)” section of the [Evaluation Consent Form \(N1A\)](#).

Expanded Core Curriculum for Students with Visual Impairments (ECC) (see [Appendix C](#))

The National Agenda for the Education of Children and Youths with Visual Impairments, Including Those with Multiple Disabilities states that there are two essential “parts” to a curriculum designed to meet the needs of students with visual impairments. The first part is the general education curriculum to which all students, with or without disabilities, must have access.

The second part of the curriculum includes skills directly related to the nature and extent of the student's visual impairment. The American Foundation for the Blind has worked with stakeholders to develop this curriculum, which is called the **Expanded Core Curriculum**.

The ECC is the body of knowledge and skills that are needed by students with visual impairments due to their unique disability-specific needs. These include:

- compensatory skill, such as communication modes;
- orientation and mobility;
- social interaction skills;
- independent living skills;
- recreation and leisure skills;
- career education;
- use of assistive technology;
- visual efficiency skill;
- self-determination.

The ECC should be used as a framework for assessing students, planning individual goals and providing instruction.

Appendices

Appendix A: Definitions

For purposes of federal and state special education law:

Vision Impairment or Blind - The capacity to see, after correction, is limited, impaired, or absent and results in one or more of the following: reduced performance in visual acuity tasks; difficulty with written communication; and/or difficulty with understanding information presented visually in the education environment. The term includes students who are blind and students with limited vision. CMR 28.02 (7)(d)(2)

legal blindness

Is a level of vision loss that has been legally defined to determine eligibility for benefits. The clinical diagnosis refers to a central visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with the best possible correction, and/or a visual field of 20 degrees or less. Often, people who are diagnosed with legal blindness still have some useable vision.

low vision

Low vision refers to a vision loss that may be severe enough to impede a person's ability to carry out everyday activities, but still allows some functionally useful sight. Low vision may range from moderate impairment to near-total blindness. Low vision cannot be fully corrected by eyeglasses, contact lenses, or surgery. However, a person with low vision may benefit from any of a variety of available optical devices, such as electronic magnifying glasses, eyeglass-mounted telescopes, etc. In addition, special software developed for computer users with low vision can display type in large size or read text aloud.

low vision examination

An examination performed by an ophthalmologist or optometrist who specializes in low vision to determine whether special low vision devices, better lighting, or other types of training can help with utilizing functional vision more effectively.

low vision therapists

Low vision therapists conduct functional vision assessments (after clinical low vision examinations) and teach the use of functional vision and low vision devices.

ophthalmologist

A physician (MD) specializing in the diagnosis and treatment of refractive, medical and surgical problems related to eye diseases and disorders.

optician

A professional who makes and adjusts optical aids, such as eyeglass lenses, from prescriptions supplied by an ophthalmologist or optometrist.

optometrist

A doctor of optometry (OD) specializing in vision problems, treating vision conditions with spectacles, contact lenses, low vision aids and vision therapy, and prescribing medications for certain eye diseases.

orientation and mobility specialists

Orientation and mobility (O&M) specialists conduct evaluations and teach skills for safe and independent travel, including the use of sighted guides, canes and electronic devices.

sensory impairment (Vision)

The capacity to see, after correction, is limited, impaired, or absent and results in one or more of the following: reduced performance in visual acuity tasks; difficulty with written communication; and/or difficulty with understanding information presented visually in the environment. The term includes students who are blind and students with limited vision.

Snellen Chart

This is a standard eye chart that is used to evaluate people's visual acuity. It has a series of letters or letters and numbers, with the largest at the top gradually becoming smaller as one reads down the chart. The Snellen fractions, 20/20, 20/30, etc., are measures of a person's ability to identify small letters at specified distances. They give no information about seeing larger objects and objects with poor contrast (such as steps and curbs).

TVI (see Appendix D, p. 46)

A TVI is a Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments. They are educators who are specially trained to work with students with visual impairments.

20/20, twenty-twenty

Normal visual acuity. The Upper number is the standard distance (20 feet) between an eye being tested and the eye chart; and the lower number indicates that a tested eye can see the same small standard-sized letters or symbols as a normal eye at 20 feet.

vision rehabilitation therapists (see Appendix D, p. 37)

Vision rehabilitation therapists teach adaptive independent living skills, enabling people with vision loss, to confidently carry out daily activities.

visual acuity

The clinical measure of the eye's ability to distinguish details. This measurement is usually given in a fraction and is based upon visible print size. Typical vision is 20/20. If an individual sees 20/200, the smallest letter that this individual can see at 20 feet could be seen by someone with typical vision at 200 feet.

visual field

This refers to the scope of what the eye sees; includes central and peripheral vision and is sometimes called tunnel vision. The normal visual field means the person can see details that are approximately 60 degrees inward, toward the nose in each eye, to 100 degrees outwards, away from the nose, and approximately 60 degrees above and 75 below the horizontal meridian.

Definitions adapted from: the American Foundation for the Blind, and the American Academy of Ophthalmology

Appendix B: Sample Assessment Forms

Sample Assessment Forms:

Form A:	Parent Guardian Authorization Form
Form B:	School Request for Medical Information
Form C:	Sample medical form
Form D:	Parent/Guardian Interview
Form E:	Classroom Teacher/Related Service Provider Interview
Form F:	Student Interview

The following assessment forms are provided for your use as samples/guidelines and are not intended to be exclusive of other assessment tools.

Note: In order to complete an assessment of a student with visual impairments, written consent must be obtained from the parent/guardian. [Evaluation Consent Form \(N1A\)](#).

Ross, K.S. (1987) *Family Consultation Competencies for Educators of the Visually Impaired: A Qualitative Study of Teacher Perceptions in the Greater Northeastern United States* (Doctoral dissertation). Boston College, Chestnut Hill MA

School District/Agency Letterhead
Form A – SAMPLE Parent/Guardian Authorization Form

1. I hereby authorize (*name of hospital, health organization, or educational provider*) _____ to disclose and/or use the following protected confidential information from the medical/educational records of the patient/student listed below. I understand that information used or disclosed pursuant to this authorization may be subject to federal or state law protecting its confidentiality.

Address: _____ Phone #: _____

2. Patient's/Student's Name: _____ DOB: _____

Address: _____ Phone #: _____

3. Please send the following information for the time period from _____ to _____

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Ophthalmologic Reports | ☐ Reports by Teachers/Therapists |
| ☐ Optometric Reports | ☐ IEP/504 Plan |
| ☐ Developmental History | ☐ Genetics Reports |
| ☐ Individual Family Service Plan | ☐ Neurological Reports |
| ☐ NICU Summary | ☐ Pediatric Reports |
| ☐ Primary Care Summary | ☐ ENT Reports |
| ☐ Audiology Reports | ☐ Other: _____ |

5. The above information is disclosed for the following purposes:

☐ Medical Care ☐ Educational ☐ Other

6. I understand that I may revoke this authorization at any time by requesting in writing the above referenced provider to do so, unless action has already been taken in reliance upon it, or during a contestability period under applicable law.

7. This authorization expires on: _____
 (Insert applicable date or event)

 Signature

 Date

 Relationship to patient or authority to act for patient

Important: This authorization shall be deemed invalid unless all numbered entries are completed. In certain situations an additional authorization to release sensitive, legally protected information may be required.

School District/Agency Letterhead
Form B – SAMPLE Letter from the School/Agency
Requesting Visual Medical Information

Date: _____

Dear Dr. _____,

Your patient, _____ DOB: _____ has been referred for a special education evaluation. In order to provide an appropriate evaluation, we need accurate, up-to-date information on this student's visual status. Please complete Form C accompanying this letter and return it to the address listed on the form no later than _____.

If you prefer to write a narrative report rather than using Form C, please make sure to include the information requested on the form. The information you are providing is a crucial first step in determining the educational needs of (student name). You are providing important information for the Team. We look forward to receiving the completed form..

A signed Parent/Guardian Authorization Form (Form A) is included with this letter.

Thank you very much for taking the time to provide this vital information about your patient.

Sincerely,

Signature

Date

Title

School District/Agency Letterhead
Form C – *SAMPLE* Eye Report for Students with Visual Impairments

To be completed by an ophthalmologist or optometrist

Student Name: _____ **Date of Birth:** _____

Name of Doctor: _____ Ophthalmologist ☐ Optometrist ☐

Doctor's Address: _____

Doctor's Email: _____ **Phone:** _____ **FAX:** _____

Date Form Sent to Doctor: _____

Visual Diagnosis: _____

Age of Onset: _____ **Prognosis:** _____

Acuities, best corrected for near and distance. Please indicate the type of acuity test used.

Distance: OD _____ OS _____ OU _____ Test used _____

Near: OD _____ OS _____ OU _____ Test used _____

Note: FDB (Functions at the Definition of Blindness) may be used if no ocular pathology is diagnosed but child functions as blind.

Does the student meet this criterion? Yes ☐ No ☐

Alternate Acuity Testing? Yes ☐ No ☐ Please describe: _____

Glasses Prescribed? Yes ☐ No ☐ If so, please indicate purpose(s): _____

Full-time wear ☐ Near viewing only ☐ Distance only ☐ Bifocal ☐ Protective ☐

Prescription for Glasses:

OD _____ OS _____

Visual Field: Describe any field constrictions or preferences. Please indicate test used, and describe testing procedure. Attach any visual field charting.

Low Vision Devices Recommended? Yes ☐ No ☐

If so, list non-optical and optical, power, type, and purpose. _____

Is follow-up recommended? Yes ☐ No ☐

Alignment/Binocularity/Motility Concerns? Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, please describe _____

Eye Patching Program Recommended? Yes ☐ No ☐

If so, please describe: _____

Treatment Plan (i.e., medication, surgery, patching, referral for additional testing): Yes ☐ No ☐

Other Medical Diagnoses, Relevant Medical Information, or Comments in General (i.e., other systemic conditions, medication prescribed): _____

Is the student registered with the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Do you have any questions or additional comments for the evaluation team? If so, please elaborate.

Signature of Eye Doctor

Date: _____

Please return this form to:

Name/Title: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ FAX: _____ E-mail: _____

School/District/Agency Letterhead
Form D – *SAMPLE* Interview Guide: Parent/Guardian of a Student with Visual Impairments

It is recommended that a licensed teacher of students with visual impairments conduct the interview. This interview guide should be used to elicit purposeful information from the parent or guardian in five main categories: medical background, visual functioning, social/emotional development, social/educational milestones, and general life.

Student Name: _____

Parent/Guardian Name(s): _____

Date of Interview: _____ Location: _____ Time: _____

MEDICAL BACKGROUND

1) Please tell me what you know about your child's vision (diagnosis, acuity, fields, etc.):

2) Name of eye care professional(s):

Date of most recent exam:

3) Describe your child's general health:

4) Is your child taking any medications?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Name and dose: _____

5) Has your child been diagnosed with any other medical conditions? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If so, please describe:

VISUAL FUNCTIONING

- 1) What does your child understand about his/her vision? Please explain.
- 2) Does your child's vision limit his/her physical movements/activities at home or at school? Please explain:
- 3) What responsibilities does your child have within the family? Please explain.
- 4) What, if any, adaptive aids or devices are used by your child to compensate for the vision loss (e.g., communication board, white cane, CCTV, Braille note-taker)?
- 5) Do you have any specific concerns about your child's visual behaviors (e.g., head tilt, squinting, poking)? Please explain.

SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 1) What are your child's favorite things to do when not in school?
- 2) What kinds of activities does your child enjoy most at home and at school (e.g., sports, games, hobbies, or clubs)? Please describe.
- 3) Who are your child's favorite people (e.g., friends, teachers, family members)? Please explain.
- 4) How would you describe your child's personality?

- 5) How would you describe your child's greatest strengths?
- 6) To what extent does your child accomplish activities of daily living (e.g., self-care skills such as eating, dressing, grooming)?

SOCIAL/EDUCATIONAL MILESTONES

- 1) Briefly describe your child's educational experiences (e.g., school placements, favorite teachers, most challenging activities).
- 2) Can you tell me about any previous assessments which your child has had (e.g., developmental/psychological /educational)?
- 3) What developmental and/or educational goal has your child achieved in the past that you feel has been particularly noteworthy (e.g., feeding self, learning to crawl or tie shoes, mastering Nemeth Code)?
- 4) What kinds of activities does your child pursue/initiate independently (e.g., brushing teeth, locating a favorite toy, reading for pleasure, pressing a switch to turn on music)?
- 5) What goals would you like to see your child accomplish in the next year?
- 6) What is your vision for your child in the next three to five years?

- 7) Do you have any questions or concerns that you would like to share with me or with the educational team?

Signature of interviewer: _____ Date: _____

School/District/Agency Letterhead
Form E – SAMPLE Interview Guide: Teacher/Related Service Provider/Staff
of Students with Visual Impairments

It is recommended that a licensed teacher of students with visual impairments conduct the interview. This interview guide includes questions in three categories: communication/learning style, visual behaviors, and social/emotional behaviors. It allows the teacher to describe his/her observations about the student's in-school interests, abilities, social relationships, and successful or unsuccessful teaching methods.

Student Name: _____	Date of Birth: _____	Date of Interview: _____
School: _____ Grade: _____ Teacher: _____		
Name of Interviewer: _____ Position: _____		
Subject Area: _____		

COMMUNICATION/ LEARNING STYLE

- 1) (a) How does the student communicate (e.g., verbal, sign language, communication board)?

 (b) How do others communicate with the student?
- 2) How would you compare the student's current functional level to students of the same age (below, average or above)?
- 3) Does this student have any known disabilities other than the vision loss? ☐ Yes ☐ No
 Please explain.
- 4) Do you have any other concerns about the student's learning that you believe should be observed or evaluated further?

5) In which of the following settings does the student work best?

- ☐ independently, on his/her own
- ☐ in small cooperative workgroups
- ☐ in larger groups, e.g., with the entire class
- ☐ with one-to-one assistance

6) How does the student use unstructured time in the classroom?

7) (a) What tasks/subjects are easiest for the student, and why do you think they are easy?

(b) What tasks/subjects are most difficult for the student, and why do you think they are difficult?

8) What have you observed to be the most and least effective methods of reinforcement for this student?

VISUAL BEHAVIORS

1) (a) Check any of the following behaviors the student has demonstrated:

- ☐ rubbing eyes ☐ tilting head ☐ squinting ☐ holding objects/books close to face
- ☐ sensitivity to light ☐ visual fatigue, headaches

Please describe any other behaviors, related to a possible visual impairment, that you have observed.

(b) Are there times in the day or situations during which these behaviors are more evident? Please explain.

2) Where does the student sit in the classroom in relation to the teacher, the chalkboard, and the windows?

- 3) Does the student wear eyeglasses or use any magnifiers or visual aids?
- 4) If the student is a reader, does she/he function at or near grade level in age-appropriate reading skills? Please explain.
- 5) Does the student have more difficulty looking at objects/people up close or far away? Please give examples.
- 6) How do you think the student's ability to take in information is limited by his/her visual functioning, if at all?
- 7) How do you think the student's information output is limited by his/her visual functioning, if at all?

SOCIAL/ EMOTIONAL BEHAVIORS

- 1) How does the student interact with peers?
- 2) How would you describe the student's social strengths and/or weaknesses?
- 3) Does the student function better on independent tasks or in groups?
- 4) How would you describe the student's confidence? Motivation?
- 5) Does the student make his/her needs known in socially appropriate ways?

Signature of interviewer: _____ Date: _____

School/District/Agency Letterhead
Form F – SAMPLE Interview Guide: Students with Visual Impairments

It is recommended that a licensed teacher of students with visual impairments conduct the interview. This interview guide provides questions to promote dialogue with students in a non-threatening and meaningful way in order to gain information and encourage a trusting and open relationship. While some questions include possible responses and examples to help frame the interview, it is appropriate to add anecdotal comments that the student may offer beyond the original scope of the question.

Student Name: _____ Date of Birth: _____ Date of Interview: _____
School: _____ Grade: _____ Teacher: _____
Name of Interviewer: _____ Position: _____
Communication supports used: _____

GENERAL INFORMATION

- 1) Tell me something about yourself (e.g., birthday, hobbies, favorite book) or your school (e.g., principal's name, school colors, who the school is named after).

- 2) What do you like best about school? Why?

- 3) What do you like least about school? Why?

- 4) If you could change anything about school, what would it be? (e.g., have a shorter day, ride a different bus, do more reading or math) Why?

ACADEMICS (if age-appropriate)

- 1) What subjects are easiest for you? Please explain (e.g., comes naturally, good teacher/tutor, mom/dad helps).

- 2) What subjects are hardest for you? Please explain (e.g., print too small, class too large).

- 3) How do you take notes in school?

- 4) Do you do most of your schoolwork by yourself? If not, who helps you?

- 5) What is your favorite book/story that you've ever read/listened to, and what makes this story so special?

SOCIAL SKILLS

- 1) Tell me about some of your friends and classmates.
- 2) What do you like to do for fun?
- 3) What do you like to do with your free time when you're alone?
- 4) What do you imagine yourself doing when you finish high school (e.g., go to college, get a job, live on your own, travel, get married)?
- 5) When you spend time with your sisters, brothers, cousins, or neighbors, what do you like to do (e.g., ride bikes, play games, watch TV, listen to or play music, go to the playground)?

VISUAL BEHAVIORS

1) What can you tell me about your eyes and how they work (diagnosis, acuity)?

2) Can you show me or describe to me any problems you experience with your eyes?

- (a) headaches ☐ (b) blurry vision ☐ (c) eye fatigue ☐ (d) eye pain ☐
 (e) tearing ☐ (f) color discrimination ☐ (g) other symptoms ☐

For any of the items checked, the student should specify when and where these symptoms most often occur. The interviewer may reference the lettered items in making notes below.

- All or some of the time?
- At certain times of day?
- At home or at school?
- During certain subjects or activities?
- Usually indoors or outdoors?
- In bright light or low light?

3) Is it easier for you to see things up close or far away? Please give me an example.

4) Do you have any difficulty seeing any of the following?

- letters ☐ numbers ☐ pictures ☐ colors ☐ games ☐ maps ☐
 math problems ☐ charts and graphs ☐ Punctuation marks ☐ chalkboard ☐
 other ☐ - explain: _____

5) Do you watch television? ☐ Play computer games? ☐ Send and read e-mail? ☐

6) Where do you like to sit when reading, writing, or playing a game?

- near a window ☐ near a lamp ☐ outside in the sun ☐
 inside with the lights off ☐ other ☐ - explain: _____

7) Do you use anything special to make your schoolwork easier?

- eyeglasses ☐ felt tip markers ☐ dark-lined paper ☐ large print books ☐
 magnifier ☐ extra light ☐ other ☐ - explain: _____

8) If you had your choice of looking at or reading any book, which would you prefer?

- print ☐ large print ☐ Braille ☐ audio text ☐ being read to ☐

CCTV ☐ other ☐ - explain: _____

Signature of Interviewer: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C: Job Descriptions for Specialized Professionals

The following job descriptions are for professionals who are specially trained to work with students with visual impairments. These professionals may provide specialized assessments; direct teaching; consultation to school staff, students, and families; materials with or without adaptations. They serve as liaisons between school and community organizations and resources. These services are necessary to assist students to access the general education curriculum, participate in all areas of school life, and to prepare for the future.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts licenses Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments and Teachers of Students with Severe Special Needs. Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapists (CVRT) and Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists (COMS) are certified on a national level by the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP). These professionals may be independent contractors, work for private agencies that contract with the schools, or be employed directly by a public or private school or education collaborative.

Massachusetts Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments

Roles and Responsibilities

(The following is an adaptation of a paper created and endorsed by the Association of Massachusetts Educators of Students with Visual Impairments (AMESVI) in June 2005.)
<http://amesvi.org>.

Introduction:

Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (TVI) are educators who have been specially trained to work with students with low vision or blindness and hold teaching licenses issued in their special field by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. They provide services to students from birth through age 21 with uncorrectable vision pathologies and/or to students who function as blind, including students with multiple disabilities.

TVs' roles are multifaceted, and cross many disciplines. They know how to read, write, and teach Braille, and are knowledgeable about medical conditions and diseases of the eye. TVIs typically are familiar with various types of magnification devices and assistive technology. They are also familiar with state and federal laws regarding the education of their students, and are knowledgeable about local agencies and resources. In addition to direct teaching, TVIs conduct assessments and consult with other teachers and service providers regarding ways to make school programs and materials accessible to students with visual impairments. The following information from AMESVI lists and describes their comprehensive roles and responsibilities in delivering high quality services to students in Massachusetts schools.

Direct teaching:

- Specialized communication modes, including Braille reading and writing
- Emergent Braille literacy skills
- Sensory stimulation
- The use of low vision aids, such as magnifiers and CCTVs
- Tactual skills
- Keyboarding
- Use of slate, stylus, and abacus.
- Use of computers and other assistive technology devices
- Visual efficiency skills
- Listening skills
- Academic areas requiring adaptation and reinforcement as a direct result of visual impairment – in particular preschool concepts/skills and beginning reading/writing/math
- Pre-teaching new skills to provide access to the curriculum
- Previewing the content of lessons to be taught in class
- Organization and study skills
- Daily living/independent living skills
- Leisure and recreation skills
- Social skills
- Self-advocacy
- Signature writing
- Career education

Consultation with school staff:

- Help teachers become familiar with the unique educational needs and learning characteristics of students with visual impairment.
- Provide information to classroom teachers, Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists (COMS), and related service providers (occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech therapists, etc.) regarding strategies for working with students with visual impairments.
- Suggest ways to adapt materials and present lessons that are most meaningful to the students.
- Interpret medical eye reports and functional vision assessments to help school personnel, including teachers of special subjects (gym, music, art, etc.), understand the student's eye condition and its implications for learning.
- Make recommendations regarding the physical environment: lighting conditions, seating, positioning of materials, glare reduction, safe/efficient movement around the classroom, equipment use and storage, etc.
- Train paraprofessional to work effectively with students, to utilize adapted materials and specialized equipment appropriately.

- When the student is a Braille reader or pre-Braille reader, help school staff to acquire basic Braille reading/writing skills and to use computerized Braille translation systems.
- Observe classes and meet regularly with classroom teachers, parents, and other specialists/therapists to evaluate and coordinate the student's program and services.
- Provide information to staff, students, and parents regarding the Vision Resources Library (VRL) and state laws, policies and procedures for borrowing books and educational materials from this resource. Provide information regarding additional sources of materials for students with visual impairments.
- Provide in-service training to school staff and to classmates.
- Plan with/confer with staff and other providers in all areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum: orientation and mobility, social interaction skills, independent living skills, recreation and leisure skills, career education, use of assistive technology, and visual efficiency skills (in addition to the compensatory skills and communication modes listed under "direct teaching"). Note: Consultation in these areas may sometimes involve personnel outside of the school.
- In all cases, serve as an active member of the student's educational Team, helping to develop the IEP, and monitor the students' progress.

Consultation with parents:

- Provide information about visual impairment and blindness, including links to regional, state, and national resources and parent organizations.
- Help parents understand their child's eye condition and its educational implications.
- Help parents understand the unique educational needs of learners with visual impairments.
- Help parents acquire skills in Braille.
- Help parents adapt equipment, arrange safe spaces, and promote their child's independence at home.
- Communicate regularly via conferences, phone, and/or e-mail regarding progress, concerns, resources, information-sharing, and future goals.

Consultation with students:

- Help students understand their visual condition and its implications for education, social and recreational experiences, and career planning.
- Help with transitions from one level of education to the next: from an early intervention program to preschool; from elementary to middle school, and then to high school; from high school to college, vocational program, or work.
- Promote independence by providing information about agencies and resources and by teaching the student how to access them.

Preparing/acquiring/adapting materials:

- Order Braille, large print, devices and aids, and other specialized educational materials from the Vision Resources Library and other sources.

Guidelines: For the Specialized Assessment of Students with Visual Impairments

- Arrange for storage of these materials for students' use at each school.
- Package and return loaned VRL materials; complete forms for returned materials.
- Order and return recorded books.
- Obtain materials needing adaptation from the student's teacher in advance of daily lessons.
- Prepare instructional Braille lessons.
- Transcribe print to Braille and Braille to print.
- Create books, worksheets, maps, charts, and graphs with adaptations for tactile learning.
- Tape-record certain lessons, tests, or instructions.
- Teach the paraprofessional methods of implementing adapted instructional materials for tactile learners or for students with low vision.
- Coordinate services from outside readers or Braille transcribers.

Assessment:

- Conduct and interpret Functional Vision Assessments (FVA).
- Conduct and interpret Learning Media Assessments (LMA).
- Provide assistance with assessments done by other school personnel; suggest any necessary accommodations or modifications to test protocols or testing environments.
- Assist with the administration of MCAS and other statewide or district-wide assessments, as needed.
- Assist with conducting alternative MCAS and other assessments as appropriate.
- Conduct ongoing assessment of skills and maintain a continuous record of student progress in the general curriculum and the Expanded Core Curriculum.
- Obtain and interpret medical eye reports and any functional assessments done by outside eye specialists or agencies.
- Recommend specialized evaluations, as necessary, such as technology, low vision, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and/or evaluations by a rehabilitation therapist or an orientation and mobility specialist.

Administrative and record-keeping tasks:

- Register students with the Massachusetts Accessible Instructional Materials Library and maintain up-to-date registration information.
- Complete the annual federal quota report to the Massachusetts Accessible Instructional Materials Library for access to the American Printing House for the Blind (APH) materials.
- Write evaluation and progress reports.
- Maintain a file of information related to a student's vision, including medical reports from ophthalmologists, optometrists, and low vision clinics; provide copies of these documents to the special education office.
- Register students for services from the National Library Service (Talking Books) and Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic.

- Identify sources for obtaining Braille books, adaptive technology, and other specialized equipment; communicate with sources and complete order forms.
- Arrange for/receive training in the use of new technology products to be used in the school.
- Maintain contact with counselors and rehabilitation workers from the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind and other agencies as appropriate.
- Maintain contact with medical eye care professionals.
- Interact with agencies that provide summer and weekend recreational programs geared to students with visual impairments.
- Interact with agencies that provide specialized evaluation and/or training programs in such areas as technology, independent living skills, social skills, and transition to school and work.

Serving as a liaison between the school and community organizations and resources:

- Interact with local clubs and organizations that provide social or recreational opportunities.
- Identify community service organizations that can help with the purchase of specialized equipment.
- Provide ongoing support for developing positive attitudes within the community for inclusion of students with visual impairments. This often includes making presentations or speaking with community groups.

Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists

Roles and Responsibilities

Introduction:

Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists (COMS) are professionals who have been trained to work with students with vision loss. They are not therapists, but rather hold certification in Orientation and Mobility (O&M) in addition to either a bachelors and/or masters degree. They are specialists trained to provide services to students from birth through adulthood with uncorrectable vision pathologies and/or to those who function as blind or visually impaired, including students with multiple disabilities. Orientation and mobility skills are the ability to travel safely through the environment and develop an understanding of how an environment is configured and to correctly interpret this information with or without vision. O&M training usually focuses on navigating familiar environments first, such as the classroom or home setting. Depending upon an individual's needs and abilities, this training may extend beyond the school campus to the community, including public agencies such as libraries, public transportation systems, and independent living environments.

The COMS's role is multifaceted and crosses many disciplines. O&M Specialists are knowledgeable about medical conditions and diseases of the eye, and how these may impact functional travel skills and functional travel vision. A COMS is familiar with various types of magnification devices for long distance use as well as assistive travel devices and technology. Certified O&M Specialists are also familiar with state and federal laws regarding the education of their students and are knowledgeable about local agencies and resources for this population.

In addition to direct teaching, a COMS conducts assessments and consults with other teachers and service providers regarding ways to make school and community programs accessible and welcoming to students with visual impairments. The comprehensive roles and responsibilities of a COMS in delivering high quality services to students with visual impairments in Massachusetts schools include:

Direct teaching:

- Use of low vision devices.
- Motor skills needed for balance, posture and gait
- Use of adaptive devices and techniques to assist those with multiple disabilities
- Orientation skills
- Tactile skills
- Use of computers and other assistive technology devices that support traveling or route planning skills
- Visual efficiency skills
- Listening skills
- Protective techniques
- Sighted guide techniques
- Pre-cane skills

- Long cane training
- Use of adaptive mobility devices
- Daily living and independent living skills
- Leisure and recreation skills
- Map skills and route planning including techniques for traveling in indoor and outdoor environments
- Pedestrian travel skills
- Analysis and identification of intersections and traffic patterns
- Use of traffic control devices
- Techniques for crossing streets
- Use of public transportation, taxis, and/or specialized transit services
- Social skills
- Self-advocacy
- Communication (e.g., using the telephone, soliciting assistance)
- Personal safety awareness skills when traveling

Consultation with school staff:

- Help teachers become familiar with the unique educational needs and learning characteristics of students with visual impairments.
- Provide information to all school personnel including classroom teachers, physical education teachers, bus drivers/monitors, cafeteria staff, playground staff, maintenance staff, Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments, paraprofessionals, and related service providers regarding travel strategies for students with visual impairments.
- Provide in-service training to school staff regarding:
 - Sighted guide assistance,
 - How the student travels (e.g., use of long cane, use of vision),
 - Emergency evacuation such as fire drills,
 - The physical arrangement of the classroom/school environment,
 - Effective communication (e.g., direction giving, offering assistance).
- Interpret medical eye reports and functional vision assessments to help school personnel, including teachers of special subjects (physical education, dance, drama, etc.) understand the student's eye condition and its implications for safe travel and movement.
- Make recommendations for the physical environment (classrooms, hallways, gym, cafeteria, playground areas) regarding lighting conditions, seating, glare reduction, safe/efficient movement around the environment, and equipment use and storage.
- Train staff when to reinforce and/or to assist the level of support a student needs.
- Observe classes and meet regularly with classroom teachers, parents, and other specialists/therapists to evaluate and coordinate the student's program and services.
- Plan/confer with staff and other providers in all areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum: orientation and mobility, social interaction skills, independent living skills, recreation and leisure skills, career education, use of assistive technology, and

visual efficiency skills (in addition to the compensatory skills and communication modes listed under "direct teaching"). In all cases, serve as an active member of the student's educational Team, helping to develop the IEP and monitor student progress.

Note: Consultation in these areas may sometimes involve personnel outside of the school.

Consultation with parents:

- Provide information about visual impairment and blindness, and links to parent organizations, regional, state, and national resources.
- Help parents understand their child's eye condition and its implications for travel.
- Help parents understand the unique orientation and mobility needs of pedestrians/travelers with visual impairments.
- Help parents to acquire skills in adapting equipment, arranging safe spaces, and promoting their child's independence at home.
- Communicate regularly via conferences, phone, and/or e-mail regarding progress, concerns, resources, information-sharing, and future goals.

Consultation with students:

- Help the student understand his/her visual condition and its implications for travel, social and recreational experiences, and career planning.
- Help the student effectively communicate the implications of the vision loss to peers, teachers, and others.
- Assist with transitions from one level of education to the next: from an early intervention program to preschool; from elementary to middle school, and then to high school; from high school to college, work, or a vocational program.
- Promote independence by providing information about agencies and resources and by teaching the student how to access them.
- Work effectively with the student regarding safe travel skills and how the student may use specialized equipment.

Consultation with classmates:

- Communicate with the student's classmates concerning the following:
 - Sighted guide assistance,
 - The student's methods of travel (e.g., use of long cane, use of vision),
 - Classroom/school environment set-up,
 - When and how to offer assistance to the student with visual impairment.

Preparing/acquiring/adapting materials:

- May assist in the development of tactile and/or large print maps of the classroom, the school, the neighborhood, and the community.

Assessment

- Conduct and interpret Functional Vision Assessments (FVA) relating to orientation and mobility skills.
- Conduct ongoing assessment of skills and maintain a continuous record of student progress in pertinent areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC).
- Obtain and interpret medical eye reports and any functional assessments done by outside eye specialists or agencies.
- Recommend specialized evaluations, as necessary, such as technology, low vision, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and/or evaluations by a rehabilitation therapist or a Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments.

Note: O&M evaluations will take place in classrooms, on and around campus, within the student's home and/or in community environments.

Administrative and record-keeping tasks:

- Write assessment and progress reports.
- Maintain a file of information related to a student's vision, including medical reports from ophthalmologists, optometrists, and low vision clinics; provide copies of these documents to the special education office.
- Maintain contact with counselors and rehabilitation workers from the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind and other agencies as appropriate.
- Maintain contact with medical eye care professionals.
- Interact with agencies that provide summer and weekend recreational programs geared to students with visual impairments.
- Consult with the Team in working with agencies that provide specialized evaluation and/or training in such areas as technology, independent living skills, social skills, and transition.

Serve as a liaison between the school and community organizations and resources:

- Interact with local clubs and organizations that provide social or recreational opportunities.
- Identify community service organizations that can help with the purchase of specialized equipment.
- Provide ongoing support for developing positive attitudes within the community for inclusion of students with visual impairments. This often includes making presentations or speaking with community groups.

Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapists

Roles and Responsibilities

Introduction

Certified vision rehabilitation therapists (CVRT,) previously certified as rehabilitation teachers, are professionals who have been trained to work with individuals of all ages who are blind or have low vision. They hold certification from the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP), in addition to a bachelor's and/or master's degree. Their job titles may vary from agency to agency (e.g., rehabilitation teacher or rehabilitation specialist).

CVRTs instruct individuals with visual impairments in the use of compensatory skills and devices that will enable them to live safe, productive, and independent lives. Vision rehabilitation therapists work in areas that enhance vocational opportunities, independent living, and the educational development of persons with vision loss, and may include work in schools, homes, and center-based or itinerant settings.

CVRTs support the work of the other professionals teaching the student, often by integrating new skills within the home and community environment. CVRTs most often provide the primary instruction in the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) that is needed for every student with visual impairments in the following areas:

- Independent living skills,
- Recreation and leisure skills,
- Social interaction skills.

The provision of these services usually extends beyond the school environment, school day, and academic school year in order to meet the student's goals.

Specific CVRT responsibilities include assessment of the person's needs in his/her home, school, work, and community environments; development and implementation of instructional programs; case management and record keeping; identification and utilization of local and national resources; and facilitation of the person's psychosocial adjustment to vision loss. The comprehensive roles and responsibilities of a CVRT in delivering high quality services to students in Massachusetts schools include:

Direct teaching of:

Independent living skills / personal management:

- Personal hygiene skills and techniques
- Grooming techniques
- Dressing skills
- Selection and care of clothing (e.g., laundry, labeling, sewing, ironing)
- Eating techniques (e.g., cutting , pouring, serving)
- Medical management
- Organization and labeling techniques

- Identification of resources for personal management
- Time management skills
- Communication skills, including:
 - Use of low vision aids to enhance functional vision,
 - Record keeping and note-taking systems,
 - Braille,
 - Handwriting techniques,
 - Typing and use of technology and adaptive equipment

Note: In the area of communication skills therapists, are reinforcing skills learned in school or at special programs, for use at home, at after-school or summer job placements, and in the community.

Home management:

- Meal planning
- Food shopping
- Meal preparation
- Efficient and safe use of kitchen appliances and equipment (e.g., stove/oven, microwave, toaster, etc.)
- Housekeeping techniques (e.g., systematic patterns, dusting, mopping)
- Efficient and safe use of household products and equipment
- Money identification, management and budgeting techniques
- Adaptive home mechanics techniques
- Organization and labeling techniques for the home (e.g., food products, appliance dials, cleaning products)
- Identification of home management resources

Recreation and leisure skills:

- Crafts, hobbies, and adapted games
- Cultural and educational pursuits
- Sports and physical activities
- Participation in group or team activities
- Participation in community recreation opportunities
- Use of the telephone, cell phone, messaging, and phone cards
- Organization and labeling techniques
- Identification of resources and referrals for additional recreation and leisure pursuits

Social interaction skills:

- Self-advocacy skills
- Personal safety awareness and techniques
- Use of appropriate facial expressions and other nonverbal communication techniques
- Friendship/interpersonal skills

- Conversation techniques
- Manners
- Identification of resources and referrals for social skill intervention

Consultation with school staff:

- Help teachers become familiar with the unique independent living, recreational and social needs of students with visual impairment.
- Provide in-service training to school staff and to classmates in the following areas:
 - Daily living skills and techniques
 - Home management skills and techniques
 - Recreation and leisure skills and techniques
 - Social interactions
 - Organization and labeling techniques
- Interpret medical eye reports and functional vision assessments to help school personnel understand the student's eye condition and its implications for organization of work and play environments.
- Make recommendations regarding the organization of space and materials for successful integration of a student in the work and play areas of the school (e.g., kitchen set-up for a home economic class).
- Train the paraprofessional to work effectively with the student in regard to daily living, recreation and social skills, and the student's use of specialized equipment.
- Observe the student in specific environments, as requested, and meet regularly with the parents and other specialists/therapists to evaluate and coordinate the student's program and services.
- Plan with/confer with staff and other providers in all areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum.
- In all cases, serve as an active member of both the student's educational Team, helping to develop the IEP, and the vocational rehabilitation Team, helping to develop the Individual Written Rehabilitation Plan (IWRP).

Note: Consultation in these areas may sometimes involve personnel outside of the school.

Consultation with parents:

- Provide information about visual impairment and blindness, providing links to regional, state, and national resources and parent organizations.
- Help parents understand their child's eye condition and its implications for independent living, recreation, and social situations.
- Help parents acquire skills in adapting equipment, arranging safe spaces, and promoting their child's independence at home.
- Write scheduled progress reports.
- Communicate regularly via conferences, phone, and/or e-mail regarding progress, concerns, resources, information sharing, and future goals.
- Accompany a student and his or her parents to appointments with other professionals working with the student as appropriate.

Consultation with students:

- Help the student understand his/her visual condition and its implications for independent living, social, and recreational experiences, at any time during the school years and as the student transitions out of the education system.
- Help the student gain independence in non-academic areas.
- Encourage the use of low vision devices and adaptive equipment for non-academic uses as appropriate.
- Help the student use his/her other senses to learn about surroundings.
- Reinforce skills being learned in academic settings and during orientation and mobility service.
- Assist with access to recreational, shopping, and entertainment activities within the community.
- Promote independence by providing information about agencies and resources and by teaching the student how to access them.

Prepare/acquire/adapt materials:

- Assist in accessing adaptive equipment, labels, etc. for items used for daily living skills, home management, travel and/or recreation.

Assessment:

- Conduct ongoing assessment of skills and maintain a continuous record of student progress in pertinent areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum included in the IEP.
- Interpret medical reports, eye reports and any functional assessments done by outside specialists or agencies regarding their impact on pertinent ECC areas.
- Recommend specialized evaluations, as necessary that may reinforce skill acquisition in areas of the ECC. (e.g., technology, physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech, orientation and mobility, low vision, and/or an evaluation by a TVI).

Note: Evaluation and training by a CVRT may take place in classrooms, but more often will occur within the home and/or community environments.

Administrative and record-keeping tasks:

- Write assessment and progress reports.
- Maintain a file of information related to the student's vision, IEP, IWRP, etc.
- Maintain contact with the parents, teachers, and other professionals involved with the student in the education and rehabilitation systems, including state agencies.
- Interact with agencies that provide after-school, weekend, and summer recreational programs geared to students with visual impairments.
- Consult with the Team in working with agencies that provide specialized evaluation and/or training programs.

Serve as a liaison between the school and community organizations and resources:

- Interact with local clubs and organizations that provide social or recreational opportunities.
- Identify community service organizations that can help with the purchase of specialized equipment for independent living or recreation.
- Provide ongoing support for developing positive attitudes and accessible environments within the community for inclusion of students with visual impairments. This often includes making presentations or speaking with community groups.

Appendix D: Resources

Massachusetts Organizations/Resources/Educational Programs

Carroll Center for the Blind*

The Carroll Center for the Blind provides direct and consultative services to children and adults throughout the state. The Center also serves as an information resource.

The Massachusetts Accessible Instructional Materials Library -AIM Library

The Massachusetts Accessible Instructional Materials Library (AIM Library), formerly called the Vision Resource Library (VRL), acquires, maintains and distributes specialized instructional materials, as well as coordinates textbooks in Braille and large print, to assist school districts and educators in Massachusetts to provide students with visual impairments an appropriate education and equal access to the general curriculum.

Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB)

The MCB is primarily an adult vocational rehabilitation agency, but some technical assistance is available to high school students and consultation to families and schools. No direct services are provided, but MCB can be an information resource.

New England Center for Deafblind (NEC)

The NEC provides technical assistance to children and families in Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts and New Hampshire. No direct services are provided, but consultation, training and referral services are available.

Northeast Regional Center for Vision Education (NERCVE)

Northeast Regional Center for Vision Education (NERCVE) is an established center within the Institute for Community Inclusion that is academically affiliated with the University of Massachusetts Boston, Graduate College of Education. UMass Boston is New England's only academic center for preparing Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments and Orientation and Mobility Specialists, two key specialties that assist people with visual impairments achieve their goals of high quality education, employment, and independent travel.

Perkins School for the Blind*

Direct and consultative services to children from birth through age 22 throughout the state. The Perkins School for the Blind also serves as an information resource.

***Educational Program**

National Organizations/Resources

Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP)

A national professional organization which administers testing and awards national certification to certified orientation and mobility specialists, certified vision rehabilitation therapists and certified low vision therapists.

American Foundation for the Blind (AFB)

The American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) is a national nonprofit agency that expands possibilities for people with vision loss.

The National Braille Press (NBP)

The National Braille Press is a nonprofit Braille printing and publishing house. NBP has an extensive catalog of books and a children's book club.

National Center to Improve Practice in Special Education Through Technology, Media and Materials (NCIP)

This website provides a list of resources, general information, practices, products, organizations and publications that support users with visual impairments. These resources were compiled during NCIP's period of funding, 1992-1998. If you have any questions about a resource, please use the contact information listed for the resource. NCIP encourages the reproduction and distribution of these materials as long as the contents are not altered in any way, and credit is given to NCIP.

The National Federation of the Blind

With more than 50,000 members, the National Federation of the Blind is the largest and most influential membership organization of blind people in the United States. The NFB improves blind people's lives through advocacy, education, research, technology, and programs encouraging independence and self-confidence.

National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS)

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA) is the main federal program authorizing state and local aid for special education and related services for children with disabilities. One significant improvement in the 2004 legislation was the addition of sections defining the provision of textbooks and instructional materials in accessible formats for students with vision impairments or print disabilities. NIMAS will guide the production and electronic distribution of curricular materials in accessible, student-ready versions, including Braille and digital talking books.

National Organization of Parents of Blind Children (NOPBC)

The National Organization of Parents of Blind Children (NOPBC) is a national membership organization of parents and friends of children with blindness reaching out to each other to give vital support, encouragement, and information.

Functional Vision Assessment Resources

Assessment and Instructional Resources provided by Texas School for Blind and Visually Impaired: http://www.tsbvi.edu/Education/IAER-ASS.html#_1_16

Ross, Karen S. (1987) *Family Consultation Competencies for Educators of the Visually Impaired*. Dissertation.

Sanford L. & Nurnett, R. (n.d.). *Functional vision assessment for preschool or students with multiple impairments*. Unpublished Protocol. Hermitage, TN: Consultants for the Visually Impaired.

A searchable data base from Perkins: These online resources related to Functional Vision Assessments have been carefully evaluated.

<http://www.perkins.org/resources/scout/vision-and-blindness/functional-vision-assessmen.html>

Learning Media Assessment Resources

Learning Media Assessment of Students with Visual Impairments: A Resource Guide for Teachers, Alan J. Koenig and M. Cay Holbrook (1995)

Perkins School for the Blind webpage on The Learning Media Assessment with links to additional resources: <http://www.perkins.org/clearinghouse/literacy/lma.html>

Braille/Print Literacy Issues and the Learning Media Assessment
By Eva Lavigne and Ann Adkins, TSBVI Outreach.
<http://www.tsbvi.edu/Outreach/seehear/spring03/literacy.htm>

Assistive Technology Assessment Resources

Additional information on Assistive Technology and the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS) can be found on the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website at: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/edtech/assistive/>

Principles of Assistive Technology for Students with Visual Impairments:
<http://www.tsbvi.edu/technology/principles.htm>

Technology Assessment Checklist for Students with Visual Impairments:
<http://www.tsbvi.edu/technology/tech-assess-checklist.htm>

Association of Massachusetts Educators of Students with Visually Impairments:
<http://www.amesvi.org/id7.html>

Guidelines: For the Specialized Assessment of Students with Visual Impairments

Orientation and Mobility Assessment Resources

A list of (links to) orientation and mobility assessment tools:

<http://www.tsbvi.edu/recc/om.htm>

A searchable data base from Perkins: These online resources related to orientation and mobility have been carefully evaluated.

<http://www.perkins.org/resources/scout/orientation-and-mobility/resources-for-specialists.html>

Resources for Orientation & Mobility Specialists:

<http://orientationandmobility.org/index.html>

Association of Massachusetts Educators of Students with Visually Impairments:

<http://www.amesvi.org/id6.html>

Expanded Core Curriculum Resources

American Foundation for the Blind (AFB):

<http://www.afb.org/Section.asp?SectionID=44&TopicID=189&SubTopicID=4>

National Agenda for the Education of Children and Youth with Visual Impairments, Including those with Multiple Disabilities. (Hosted by Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired):

<http://www.tsbvi.edu/agenda/wi-ecc.htm>

Iowa Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) Resource Guide, Iowa Department of Education:

http://www.iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=576:blindness-and-visual-impairment&catid=539:programs-a-services&Itemid=1610