

INSTRUCTIONAL SERVICES

**Policy 6251
(Regulation 6251)**

Instruction

Blind Students Independence, Training and Education

Each blind or visually impaired student will receive instruction in Braille reading and writing as part of the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP) unless the IEP or IFSP team determines, based on the student's skills, needs and whether the student requires Braille instruction. If a student who is deaf or hard of hearing does not demonstrate progress in expressive and receptive language skills, as measured by one of the education tools or assessments selected by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) or by the existing instrument used to assess the development of students with disabilities under federal law, the student's IEP or IFSP team will explain to the student's parents/guardians the reasons the student is not progressing toward or meeting the language developmental milestones and will recommend strategies, services and programs that will be provided to assist with the student's success toward English literacy.

No student will be denied instruction in Braille reading and writing solely because the student has some vision. During the evaluation process, consideration shall be given regarding appropriate Braille instruction based on a potential vision loss due to a degenerative medical diagnosis.

For purposes of this Policy/Regulation, the following terms and definitions are applicable:

1. "Accessible assistive technology device," an assistive technology device, as defined in 20 U.S.C. Section 55 1401, as amended, that provides blind or visually impaired students the benefits of an educational program in an equally effective and integrated manner as that provided to nondisabled students.
2. "Adequate instruction," the quality teaching of blind or visually impaired students, as it pertains to general education and necessary blindness skills, in alignment with the U.S. Department of Education's definition of free appropriate public education, as defined in 20 U.S.C. Section 1401, as amended.
3. "Blind or visually impaired student":
 - a) A student who:
 - i. Has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), as such terms are defined in 20 U.S.C. Section 1401, as amended, or a 504-plan created under Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. Section 794, as amended; and
 - ii. Is identified as having the disability of "visual impairment (including blindness)" within the definition of "child with a disability" in 20 U.S.C. Section 1401, as amended; or

- b) An individual who is deaf-blind under the Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as amended, or other federal law.
4. “Braille”, the system of reading and writing through touch.
 5. “Expanded core curriculum,” a disability-specific curriculum that compensates for vision loss, is foundational to all other learning, and that covers the nine essential areas of compensatory access, sensory efficiency, assistive technology, orientation and mobility, social interaction, recreation and leisure, independent living, self-determination, and career education.
 6. “Grade level instruction,” instruction that aligns with state-designated content standards and curricula for students of the same age or level of maturity, based on the development of intellectual, emotional, physical, and behavioral capacity that is typical for the student's age or age group.
 7. “Local educational agency” or “LEA,” the same definition as in 20 U.S.C. Section 1401, as amended.
 8. “Nonvisual access,” the ability of a blind or visually impaired student to use all functions of a device, without using the student's vision, in an equally effective, equally integrated manner and with equivalent ease of use as the student's sighted peers.
 9. “Nonvisual skills,” skills that are taught in such a way that the student does not need to use any vision.
 10. “State educational agency,” the same definition as in 20 U.S.C. Section 1401, as amended.

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IEP and IFSP Plans

Instruction in Braille reading and writing will be offered to enable each blind or visually impaired student to communicate effectively and efficiently at a level commensurate with the student's age and with the student's nondisabled peers of comparable intellectual ability.

The affected student's IEP or IFSP shall specify:

1. Results obtained from evaluation of the student's reading and writing skills, needs and appropriate reading and writing media including appropriateness of Braille instruction based on vision loss due to a degenerative medical diagnosis.
2. How Braille will be implemented.
3. Length of period of instruction and frequency and duration of each instructional session as determined by the IEP team.
4. Level of competency in Braille reading and writing to be achieved.
5. How accessible assistive technology will be implemented through integration with other activities.
6. Level of mastery of the accessible assistive technology to be achieved by the end of the period.
7. Acknowledgement that the assistive technology may be only transported without need for payment or other cost.
8. Provision of duplicative assistive technology at home without cost to the family.
9. Level of mastery of orientation and mobility skills.

Use and provision of Braille materials for reading and writing shall be addressed in appropriate §504 Plans to support programs in the general education curriculum. Use and provision of assistive technology will be addressed in the student's §504 plan as will orientation and mobility equipment.

Assistive Technology

Each blind or visually impaired student will receive instruction in assistive technology as part of their IEP or IFSP plan unless determined to be inappropriate by the IEP or IFSP team. Instruction will include grade-level instruction with appropriate technology mediated learning environment and skills to perform at the same level as comparable peers.

Orientation and Mobility

Each blind or visually impaired student will receive instruction in orientation and mobility as part of their IEP unless determined not to be appropriate. No student will be denied such instruction because the student has some vision. Affected students shall receive orientation and mobility training to equip the student with age-appropriate tools, techniques and non-visual skills to navigate in or around their home, schools, communities and other applicable environments. The District will not impose any preclusions or limitations on a student to receive orientation and mobility services. An orientation and mobility evaluation will be made by an individual appropriately certified by the National Blindness Professional Certification Board (NBPCB) or through the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP) or who holds a nationally recognized certification. Such evaluation will occur in familiar and unfamiliar environments, daytime, nighttime, and around home, school and community.

Braille Teachers

Educators hired to teach Braille shall be certified teachers of students with visual impairments, hold a current and valid National Certification in Unified English Braille working under the supervision of a reading specialist.

Educators hired to teach accessible assistive technology will be certified teachers of student with visual impairments, hold a valid and current Certified Assistive Technology Instructional Specialist for people with visual impairments or hold a current National Certification in Access Technology for the Blind or other nationally recognized certificates.

Specialists hired to teach orientation and mobility will hold current National Orientation and Mobility Certificates or hold current Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist Certificates or other nationally recognized certificates.

The District will obtain proof of currently available certified professionals from any company, agency, or individual with whom the District intends to contract for services.

Program Facilitation

The District may require annual written parental consent to conduct instruction when services are provided before or after school hours or when services are provided away from the student's school or residence.

The District may approve the mode of transportation utilized by the instructor to transport affected students or may provide an equally effective transportation alternative. If transportation is provided by the student's parent, the District will reimburse the appropriate expense.

To the extent possible, the District will eliminate common barriers experienced by blind or visually impaired students, parents, educators and staff.

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