

Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments: Roles and Responsibilities

Association of Massachusetts Educators of Students with Visual Impairments

Please see the “History and References for TVI Roles and Responsibilities” immediately following this document for historical information and acknowledgement of contributions made in developing this document.

Introduction

Teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs) are educators who have been specially trained to work with students who are blind or have low vision. They are not therapists, but rather hold teaching licenses issued in their special field by the Massachusetts Department of Education. They are teachers who are trained to provide services to students from birth through age 21 with uncorrectable vision pathologies and/or to children who function as blind, including students with multiple disabilities.

Their role is multifaceted, and it crosses 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 for this population of students. In addition to direct teaching, TVIs conduct assessments and consult with other teachers and service providers regarding ways to make school programs accessible to students with visual impairments. This document lists and describes their comprehensive roles and responsibilities in delivering quality services to students in Massachusetts’s schools.

A. Direct Teaching

- specialized communication modes, including braille reading and writing
- emergent Braille literacy skills
- sensory stimulation
- the use of low vision aides, such as magnifiers and CCTVs
- concept development
- tactual skills
- keyboarding
- slate and stylus
- 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

B. Consultation

1. to 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 therapists (O.T., P.T., Speech, etc.) regarding teaching strategies for students with visual impairments -- suggest ways to adapt materials and present lessons in ways that are most meaningful to these students
- Provide in-service training to school staff and to classmates
- 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
- Train the paraprofessional to work effectively with the student, to adapt materials appropriately, and to use specialized equipment
- When the student is a braille reader or pre-braille reader, help the paraprofessional to acquire basic braille reading/writing skills and to use computerized braille translation systems
- Observe classes and meet regularly with the classroom teacher, parents, and other specialists/therapists to evaluate and coordinate the student's program and services

- Provide staff (along with students and parents) information regarding the Accessible Instructional Materials Library (AIM): 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
- Plan with/confer with staff and other providers in all areas of the expanded core curriculum for visually impaired learners: orientation & 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 in section A) 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**

2. to parents:

- Provide information about visual impairment and blindness, providing links to regional, state, and national resources and parent organizations
- Help parents to understand their child's eye condition and its educational implications
- Help parents to understand the unique educational needs of visually impaired and blind learners
- Help parents acquire unique skills such as learning braille, adapting equipment in their home, and learning how to promote their child's independence
- Write scheduled progress reports
- Communicate regularly via conferences, phone, and/or email regarding progress, concerns, resources, information-sharing, future goals
- May accompany children and their parents to appointments with specialists such as ophthalmologists and low vision specialists

3. to students:

- Help students to 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; elementary to middle school, then high school; high school to college or a vocational program
- Promote independence by providing information about agencies and resources and by teaching the student how to access them

C. Preparing/acquiring/adapting materials

- Order braille, large print, tangible aids, and other specialized educational materials from the AIM Library and other sources
- Arrange for storage of these materials for students' use at each school
- Pack up and return loaned AIM 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 tactual learning
- Tape-record certain lessons, tests, or instructions
- Teach the paraprofessional methods of adapting instructional materials for tactual learners or for students with low vision
- Coordinate services from outside readers or braille transcribers

D. 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 tests or testing environment
- Assist the building administrator with ordering MCAS and other state-wide or district-wide assessments in appropriate media
- Assist with the administration of MCAS and other state-wide or district-wide assessments, as needed
- Assist with conducting alternative MCAS and other assessments of students with multiple disabilities
- Conduct on-going assessment of skills, monitor progress, and maintain a continuous record of student progress in academic and expanded core curriculum
- Obtain and interpret medical eye reports and any functional assessments done by outside eye specialists or agencies
- Recommend specialized assessments, as necessary, such as technology, orientation and mobility, or low vision assessments

E. Administrative and record-keeping tasks

- Register students with the Accessible Instructional Materials Library (AIM) and maintain up-to-date registration information
- Complete the annual Federal Quota report to the AIM for access to APH materials
- Write 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 Learning Ally (formerly 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
- 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

F. Liaison between the school and community organizations and resources

- Interact with local clubs and organizations that may 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 children with visual impairments – often includes making presentations or speaking with community groups

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¹History & References for TVI Roles and Responsibilities

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The Massachusetts Role Guidelines for Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments has been a work in progress since the late 1970's and is based on many years of research and observation by professionals within the Commonwealth and across the country. The original Massachusetts document, first developed in 1978 by the Mass Department of Education Low Incidence Disabilities Project, has since gone thru a number of versions, and was most recently updated by a committee of AMESVI members in 2005. It is now posted on the organization's website at www.amesvi.org.

In a document entitled PROFESSIONAL ROLES OF THE VISION TEACHER/CONSULTANT (K. Ross, January 1994) a history of the examination of teacher roles prior to 1978 is described as follows:

"In 1961, the AFB publication entitled A Teacher Education Program for Those Who Serve Blind Children and Youth alluded to the multiplicity of the role of teachers of visually handicapped children, which was defined to include knowledge of the many vision-specific compensatory skills such as braille and typing, as well as the ability to work with a wide range of age and educational levels and in a variety of educational settings. The ability to work with parents, administrators, other professionals, and various community resources was also identified as an important element of professional training. Earlier efforts to define teacher competencies had been primarily based upon the students' degree of visual impairment and reading medium (i.e. braille, large type, or ink print) or on the type of educational program attended (in particular the public school resource room and the residential school). Not until the early 1970's were there any attempts to identify 'precise and functional' teacher competencies in relation to varying organizational models in which programs existed."

In 1977 Dr. Susan Spungin published the results of a national study called the Competency Based Curriculum for Teachers of the Visually Handicapped in which she identified 12 general goal areas necessary for the professional preparation of teachers. She went on to analyze the amounts of time spent by teachers in various teaching activities and concluded, among other things, that time spent in actual student contact was far less than had been previously thought, not only by special education administrators but also by teacher educators within the field of vision."

Since the Spungin study more than 30 years ago, teacher roles have been scrutinized, expanded and modified, all in the interest of meeting the needs of a growing and more

diverse population of students. Yet, even as these roles are redefined, many of the originally identified core responsibilities remain the same, and “*can be collapsed into the following categories of DIRECT SERVICE (Student Assessment and Instruction) and INDIRECT SERVICES (Consultation with teachers, administrators, families, related service providers, community resources), Administrative Tasks (report-writing, preparation and procurement of materials, intake/referrals, and Travel).*” It was also noted by Ross that

- 1) *Not ALL teachers are expected to fill ALL of these roles ALL of the time, and*
- 2) *There is enormous variation among teachers in how their time is allocated according to the program model in which they work, geographic location, the individual needs of the students, caseload size and years of teaching experience. (K. Ross, January 1994)*

Through the years these general categories have provided a working paradigm to translate service delivery theory into meaningful teaching practices.

In more recent decades, teacher roles and responsibilities have continued to be influenced by changes in service delivery systems, university preparation and licensure standards; refinement of federal/ and state regulations governing special education; increased opportunities for parents to have a voice on educational teams; the identification of increased numbers of students with additional disabilities; and significant advances in the use of technology for both instructional and organizational purposes. The National Agenda for the Education of Children and Youth with Visual Impairments, Including Those with Multiple Disabilities, first published in 1995 and updated in 2004 (AFB Press), as well as The Expanded Core Curriculum, further clarify the needs of students for full access to educational opportunities and create a standard for teachers in determining their roles and responsibilities in providing quality services for students with blindness or visual impairment.

The 2005 Massachusetts Role Guidelines document has been recently updated with this history and a more extensive reference list. We hope it will prove to be a valuable tool for educators of students with visual impairments in the ongoing process of self-evaluation for improving individual teaching practices.

Resources and References

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