

Educating Blind and Visually Impaired Students; Policy Guidance; Notice
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION Educating Blind and Visually Impaired Students;
Policy Guidance

AGENCY: Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S.
Department of Education. ACTION: Notice of policy guidance.

E. Orientation and Mobility Services

For some blind and visually impaired children, the inability to move around independently can be a formidable obstacle to participating in school, family, and community life. In some instances, blind and visually impaired individuals have felt discouraged from seeking employment opportunities because of their inability to get to the job or negotiate the work environment once on the job, or because of their fears that this will be the case. Still in other instances, some blind and visually impaired individuals have been denied access to employment opportunities because of employers' misperceptions that the individual will be unable to get around without sighted assistance. Therefore, acquisition of orientation and mobility skills, like the acquisition of other skills such as academic and social skills, is of great importance to the social and economic independence of blind and visually impaired persons.

Orientation and mobility services are generally recognized as encompassing distinctive strategies particular to the educational needs of blind or visually impaired students. The IDEA Amendments of 1997 amended the list of examples of "related services" contained in the statute to include "orientation and mobility services."³² The term "orientation and mobility services" is defined in the Part B regulations, at 34 CFR Sec. 300.24(b)(6), as follows:

(i) * * * services provided to blind or visually impaired students by qualified personnel to enable those students to attain systematic orientation to and safe movement within their environments in school, home, and community; and

(ii) Includes teaching students the following, as appropriate:

(A) Spatial and environmental concepts and use of information

received by the senses (such as sound, temperature and vibrations) to establish, maintain, or regain orientation and line of travel (e.g., using sound at a traffic light to cross the street);

(B) To use the long cane to supplement visual travel skills or as a tool for safely negotiating the environment for students with no available travel vision;

(C) To understand and use remaining vision and distance low vision aids; and

(D) Other concepts, techniques, and tools.

The responsible public agency must ensure that orientation and mobility services are provided by trained and knowledgeable personnel who meet appropriate State qualification standards. In some instances, these personnel will need to be qualified to work with blind and visually impaired students who, in addition to their blindness or visual impairments, have other physical, sensory, or emotional disabilities. Because the need for safe movement throughout their school, home, and community environments is of critical importance for blind and visually impaired students, and because inadequate skill in this area could have an adverse impact on the ability of some blind and visually impaired persons to obtain appropriate employment, orientation and mobility services should be considered for each blind and visually impaired child. The extent to which orientation and mobility services are necessary for an individual child and, if so, the amount and duration of those services that are necessary for a child to receive FAPE are decisions for the child's IEP team. If a blind or visually impaired child has other disabilities, such as hearing, motor, or emotional disabilities, the child's unique disability-specific needs arising from those other disabilities also must be considered in designing an appropriate program of orientation and mobility services for the child. Orientation and mobility services should be provided as early as possible in a child's education, and updated or supplemented periodically, as needed. For example, while it may not be appropriate to teach a very young child how to cross a busy street, a very young child still could be taught the skills necessary to move around inside a school building. As students mature, it might be appropriate, depending on individual factors, for the student to be taught how to cross a busy street. Therefore, IEP teams need to be aware of individual factors that would affect the nature and extent to which orientation and mobility services may be needed for a particular student.

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