**Association of Massachusetts Educators of Students
with Visual Impairments (AMESVI)**

School Reopening Guidelines for Students with Visual Impairments
August 2020

About This Document

This document has been created to assist school districts in **pre-planning** for the needs of students with visual impairments for the upcoming school year.

It is intended as a springboard for additional discussion and planning. While every attempt has been made to be thorough and accurate, specific guidelines may not apply to every student. In all cases, discussion and planning must include consultation with Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (TVI) and Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists (COMS) who are specifically trained to work with students who are blind or have low vision including students with multiple disabilities. Additional resources can be found at the end of this document.

Meeting Unique Educational Needs

Students with visual impairments learn in unique ways that are directly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Some unique learning needs that require specific **pre-planning** attention include:

1. The need to interact with the environment through touch for the following reasons:
   a. Exploration and examination of curriculum materials
   b. Independent orientation and navigation in the environment
2. The need for close visual observation of curriculum materials for prolonged time periods for full access
3. The increased level of multitasking required to participate in live remote classes
4. The need for accessible/assistive technology for access to instruction during in-person as well as remote learning

These unique learning needs should be considered when planning classroom configurations, use of outdoor/community settings, curriculum choices, PPE use, and safety protocols for instructors and students.

About AMESVI

The Association of Massachusetts Educators of Students with Visual Impairments is a 501(3)(c) non-profit organization now in its 23rd year. The association was founded by vision professionals from across the state and continues to be a member driven organization.

AMESVI's mission is to improve and enrich the lives of students with visual impairments through advocacy, professional development, and the education of others regarding the unique educational needs of students with visual impairments. For additional information go to: www.amesvi.org

Curriculum Materials and Instruction

- ❑ All curricular materials must be accessible (e.g. PDFs, websites, apps, communication platforms, etc.) Students who are blind or have low vision require adaptations such as:
    - ❑ Accessible PDFs (properly tagged and structured) created from web pages or text sources, not scanned
    - ❑ Online programs with ability to resize text without losing content or function
    - ❑ Alt-text for images, bitmoji classrooms, graphs, and charts
    - ❑ Accessible websites that accommodate screen reader software
    - ❑ Apps that have full auditory access and/or work with assistive technology
- ❑ Hard copy materials available in large print, braille, and/or audio for students who are unable to fully access online curriculum due to visual fatigue. More than one option may be needed
- ❑ Tangible aids and tactile materials should be supplied for home use during remote learning
- ❑ Accessibility features such as magnification, adjustable font size and color contrast, audio description, and closed captioning available for all online curricula
- ❑ In the event of a technology failure, hard copy braille, large print, and/or audio materials need to be available on short notice
- ❑ in-person instruction should be prioritized for a student who is primarily a tactile learner. Some examples include:
    - ❑ Pre-readers for whom touch is a primary or secondary learning medium according to Learning Media Assessment
    - ❑ Students who are learning braille
    - ❑ Students who receive Orientation and Mobility instruction in the use of a long cane
- ❑ Asynchronous options that are fully accessible (such as pre-recorded audio or video) should be provided for online or remote instruction to reduce visual fatigue and allow students to work at a their own pace
- ❑ The opportunity to examine physical materials up close prior to *in-person* class demonstrations to allow for close viewing of important details
- ❑ Students may require a duplicate copy of materials used during *online* demonstrations to enable close examination

Environmental Considerations

- ☐ Students may require extra workspace (e.g. 2 desks, bookcase, etc.) for materials and assistive technology in the physical classroom. Space may also be needed for a one-to-one paraprofessional. **These factors will impact classroom spacing requirements.**
- ☐ An environmental assessment will need to be completed by a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist before finalizing room configurations/ travel flow/ location of work areas in order to:
  - ☐ make recommendations to reduce risk of injury and to promote physical distancing, safety, and independence
  - ☐ determine student desk placement and lighting requirements to maximize student independence
  - ☐ determine need for student instruction before schools open, to familiarize them with changes in environment, traffic flow, physical distancing, etc.
- ☐ If using floor directional or social/physical distancing markings, must use high-contrast, tactile markers which can be felt under foot or with cane
- ☐ Create an unobstructed, direct path from student desk to classroom exit
- ☐ Preferential seating within the first two rows of the school bus
- ☐ Outdoor/community "classrooms" may present challenges for students with photophobia/light sensitivity. Additional shade and anti-glare provisions may be needed
- ☐ To minimize physical contact, individual hand sanitizer should be provided to the student
- ☐ Students with visual impairments should NOT be required to use gloves when reading or interacting with their own accessible/assistive technology

Accessible/Assistive Technology and Specialized Equipment

In order to succeed with in-school, remote, and hybrid learning programs, it is critical that students with visual impairments have access to the following *at home and in school*:

- ☐ Appropriate assistive technology tools, based on student need *and* the learning platforms used in the school, such as:
  - ☐ iPads with Bluetooth keyboards
  - ☐ Full-size laptops with larger display area and/or num pad
  - ☐ Large external monitor
  - ☐ Refreshable braille displays for digital braille input and/or output.
  - ☐ Screen reader software (ex. JAWS, NVDA, Voiceover, Chromevox, Talkback)
  - ☐ Braille notetaker with Wi-Fi access
  - ☐ Audiobook players
  - ☐ Audio-description for videos (ex. Described & Captioned Media Project)

- Training/instruction in the use of accessible/assistive technology to ensure that students have full access to the general curriculum
- Accessible alternatives to digital learning in the event of a technology failure (ex. braille and large print materials)
- Learning Management Systems (LMS) and Course Management Systems (CMS) which interface with screen reader technology and incorporate the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Orientation and Mobility

Orientation and Mobility instruction should take place during in-school, hybrid, and remote models. In any scenario except a "stay at home" order, in-person instruction indicated in the IEP should take place. The type of model need not impact person-to-person instruction, with proper PPEs and procedures.
- In-person instruction should be prioritized for students with the following urgent needs:
  - Seniors or students within 2 years of finishing their instructional programming
  - Any student who needs critical, immediate skills, including:
    - Transitioning to a new school
    - Students new to the district, including those coming from Early Intervention
    - Students working on outdoor cane training, street crossings, public transit, and/or community travel skills
    - Students requiring training to travel safely and independently in their familiar environment
- Cane length may need to be readjusted to help maintain physical distance. Proper cane size should be re-evaluated by a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS) and purchased by the school system if needed
- Students who do not usually use canes may need to use an ID cane or other tool due to physical distancing needs. Canes should be purchased by the district at the recommendation of the Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS)
- Looped arm harness, disposable plastic shirt sleeve cover, etc. may be needed for physical guiding
- Clear face masks and face shields should be available
- Provide portable hand sanitizer, disposable gloves, and disinfectant wipes for students and the Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist
- Provide audio-link or similar reliable technology (e.g. bone conduction earphones, Bluetooth device to give verbal feedback during in-person Orientation and Mobility Instruction) to allow for greater physical distancing
- Training of teachers, students, and staff to ensure they understand the need to maintain proper physical distancing around students who might not be able to see them and may unintentionally come within close proximity. Training to include physical guiding techniques (may include use of a looped arm harness, shirt sleeve cover, or change of clothing)

Vision Services

   In order to succeed with in-school, hybrid, and remote learning models, Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (TVI) must be given the opportunity to collaborate with general education, special education, and other support staff prior to instruction, so that curricula will be accessible at time of class instruction.

- ❑ The TVI must have the opportunity to preview curricular materials/technology/ classroom configurations, and educational environments in advance to vet them for accessibility and instructional equity
- ❑ All curricular materials must be available to the TVI at least one week in advance to modify for students' needs
- ❑ The TVI may need additional technology equipment for remote instruction in the school and/or home setting, to enable observation of student's posture, hand position, head position, interaction with the environment/materials, etc.
- ❑ The district may need to hire a technology specialist competent in the use of JAWS, NVDA, refreshable braille displays, braille notetakers, screen readers, and other technologies specific to blindness and low vision to support the student, paraprofessional, parents, and TVI
- ❑ Screen sharing technology (e.g. TeamViewer, Join.Me, Screenleap) may be needed to allow TVI to remotely perform a task on the student's behalf due to limited visual acuity (e.g. adjusting accessibility options)
- ❑ Hard copy braille production and delivery procedures for remote instruction must be in place by the start of the school year.

   Pre-planning is the key to success in ensuring full, equitable access for students who are blind or have low vision during remote, hybrid, and in-person schooling. Simply following prescribed COVID-19 pandemic health and safety precautions is not enough, as students with visual impairments are impacted in ways that fully sighted students are not. Touch and/or close visual examination are essential to learn about and interact with curricular materials and the environment.

   These guidelines have been created to be used collaboratively by administrators, school principals, classroom teachers, specialists, vision professionals, and parents. With thoughtful planning and the assistance of a Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (TVI) and a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS), students who are blind or have low vision can continue to safely participate at the same level as their peers. For further assistance or information, please contact president@amesvi.org

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Resources

General Guidelines

American Foundation for the Blind - [Coronavirus (COVID 19) Resources](#)
American Printing House for the Blind - [#AtHomeWithAPH Resources](#)
Carroll Center for the Blind - [Coronavirus Resources](#)
Massachusetts Commission for the Blind - [COVID-19 Resources for the MCB Community](#)
Massachusetts Commission for the Blind/Department of Developmental Disabilities Services Partnership –
[Focus on Vision and Vision Loss](#)
Project for Orientation and Mobility/Low Vision Services - [Covid 19 Resources](#)
Michigan Department of Education, Low Incidence Outreach – [Resources for Educators and Families](#)
National Federation of the Blind - [COVID-19 Resources](#)
Paths to Literacy for students who are blind or visually impaired - [Coping with School Closures During CoVID 19](#)

Accessibility

National Center on Accessible Educational Materials
This resource provides guidance on how to design materials for accessibility.
http://aem.cast.org/creating/designing-for-accessibility-pour.html

San Francisco State University
[Accessibility Tip Sheets](#) Dr. Yue-Ting Siu guidelines to make materials and activities accessible. Includes Classroom Best Practices; Documents Accessibility; Multimedia Accessibility; Universal Design, and more.

[Virginia Department of Education - VDOE](#) has created some checklists for educators to make sure educational materials are accessible:
Word: http://www.doe.virginia.gov/home/a11y/word/index.shtml
PowerPoint: http://www.doe.virginia.gov/home/a11y/ppt/index.shtml
Excel: http://www.doe.virginia.gov/home/a11y/excel/index.shtml
PDF: http://www.doe.virginia.gov/home/a11y/pdf/index.shtml

Suggestions for creating accessible videos are also available.

Orientation and Mobility

Chris Tabb's Live Binder Shelf – [Remote and "Virtual" O&M Services](#)
Coronavirus (COVID -19): Habilitation & Mobility Risk Assessment Guidance.
Outlines considerations for reopening under COVID-19 guidelines in specific Orientation and Mobility skill areas.
https://habilitationviuk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Habilitation-Mobility-Risk-Assessment-COVID-19-procedures-May20.pdf

Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP) issues guidance letter for remote Orientation and Mobility remote instruction
https://www.acvrep.org/resource/docs/Letter%20to%20the%20Profession.docx