

# **Orientation and Mobility Guidelines and Procedures**

## **Glenn County SELPA**

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## **ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY (O&M) IN THE EDUCATIONAL SETTING**

The ability to understand, interact with, and move within one's physical and spatial environment is a fundamental skill. This ability is one of the developmental milestones for students with and without visual impairments. Orientation and Mobility instruction in the school setting is the teaching of concepts, skills and techniques necessary for a person who is blind or has a visual impairment to travel safely, efficiently and confidently through any environment and under all environmental conditions and situations. Orientation is the process of using sensory information to establish and maintain one's position in an environment. Mobility is the process of moving within one's environment safely and efficiently. The goal of O&M instruction for persons who have visual impairments is safe travel in any environment as independently as is possible. O&M cannot be addressed as an isolated skill area, but should be imbedded in the student's overall educational and social environment. Concept development, access to educational venues, sensory skills, motor development, and community awareness are all components of O&M. O&M must be integrated with cognitive, social, perceptual, self-advocacy, and language development.

Orientation and mobility services may include:

- Movement with a sighted guide
- Indoor and outdoor cane skills
- Street crossing
- Use of public transportation
- Use of landmarks, sounds, and other clues for orientation
- Use of compass directions and electronic tools such as GPS devices
- Use of systematic search patterns to explore novel objects and environment
- Knowledge of where, when, and how to solicit help
- Protective techniques
- Building orientation and numbering systems.

Orientation and Mobility (O&M) in the school setting is considered to be a related service for students with visual impairment as defined under 34 CFR § 300.34 of The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and is provided to for students with visual impairment as defined under 34 CFR § 300.34 of The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). As such, O&M is not only limited to blind students but can be a service available to students with low vision as well if an evaluation shows that they require the service in order to access and benefit from an educational plan.

### **FEDERAL DEFINITION of VISUAL IMPAIRMENT**

Visual Impairment, including blindness, means impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes both partial sight and blindness. [Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1401(3); 1401(30)]

### **STATE DEFINITION of VISUAL IMPAIRMENT**

California Education Code defines a Visual Impairment as follows: A visual impairment means impairment in vision, including blindness that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes both partially seeing and blind children. (CFR 34 Sec. 300.7).

Visual impairments do not include “disabilities within the function of vision specified in EC 56338” (EC 56026.5). Visual perceptual and visual motor dysfunction (both referring to how the brain works) which are severe enough to interfere with learning and achievement falls within the definition of specific learning disabilities. A student who has a visual perceptual or visual motor dysfunction resulting solely from a learning disability does not meet the eligibility criteria for “visual impairment” and is therefore not eligible for vision services through special education under the eligibility category of visual impairment. Such students may be eligible for “special education and related services based on the “specific learning disability” eligibility criteria, but such a student is not provided vision or O&M services unless the student also has a visual impairment. (Program Guidelines for Students Who Are Visually Impaired, California Department of Education, pages 14-15.)

## **ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY SERVICES IN GLENN COUNTY SCHOOLS**

### **A. Eligibility for O&M Services**

A disability under federal and state special education requirements means that the student meets the eligibility criteria for at least one of the impairments **and** has a “need” for special education services. A student may meet the eligibility criteria for visual impairment, for example, but may not automatically have a need for special education. In order to receive O&M services, the child must be determined to be an “Individual with Exceptional Needs” as defined by the Education Code and local SELPA guidelines. All of the requirements for eligibility for special education must be met. The objective of the O&M Specialist is to assist his or her student participating and functioning as independently as possible in the in the school, community, and home settings. Public schools are not required to provide services to a disabled child just because the child may benefit from the service or even if the child requires the service for reasons other than education. According to CA Ed Code and IDEA 2004, the IEP team is addressing the question, “Are O&M services and instruction necessary for the child to benefit from his/her educational instruction?”

For educational purposes, the term visually impaired includes

- Functionally blind students who, because of the severity of their visual impairment, rely basically on senses other than vision as their major channels for learning
- Low vision students who use vision as a major channel for learning

### **B. Accessing O&M Services**

A referral for O&M services is made through the IEP. If the team deems a referral is appropriate, a request for an observation by the O&M Specialist is made (not a referral via an Assessment Plan). To schedule an observation by the O&M Specialist, a signed Consent for Observation form must be completed by the parent or guardian, and include a medical report documenting

evidence of a visual impairment. Prior to conducting the observation, the O&M specialist will want to review the student's medical information, vision report, and Functional Vision Evaluation if one is available. These reports will provide necessary information about the student's vision, vision skills, and low vision devices that have been prescribed. The O&M Specialist then has 30 instructional days to perform the observation and hold an IEP to discuss the need for further assessment. If a formal O&M assessment is not warranted, and the student's needs can be met with accommodations in the general education setting, the O&M Specialist can take this opportunity to share ideas and make suggestions that may help support the student in the classroom. If further assessment is indicated, then an Assessment Plan is signed by the parent/guardian and a 60-day timeline for evaluation begins. An IEP is held after the evaluation is completed to determine the level of O&M services appropriate and create IEP goals.

Orientation and mobility assessments are conducted for students of all ages and ability levels, including infants, students not yet walking, in wheelchairs, and for those who may never travel unassisted. The O&M Specialist will customize the evaluation to the student's age, ability level, and amount of remaining/usable vision.

The O&M specialist will assess the student's familiarity with the classroom and home settings including the need for pre-cane skills, cane skills, use of specialized devices, and general independent travel skills. Collaboration between the O&M Specialist and Teacher for the Visually Impaired, as well as collaboration with the Physical Therapist (if the student is receiving services in this area) and/or P.E. teacher/Adapted P.E. teacher in the assessment of gross motor skills to determine if there are implications for movement, coordination, and balance. The assessment will also include interviews with the student to obtain information about their own perception of their skills related to mobility and travel, as well as interviews with caregivers, teachers, and other specialists working with the student. Finally, the O&M Specialist will conduct observations of the student in both familiar and unfamiliar environments to obtain information about how the student moves.

### **C. Service Delivery Models**

In the educational setting, the O&M Specialist may include *assessment*, *direct instruction*, and *consultation/collaboration*. These activities are not mutually exclusive and may occur at the same time. It is important to remember that O&M services are dictated by the current and ongoing needs of the student and should be flexible, using various methods across the continuum of service delivery.

#### **ASSESSMENT:**

The O & M Specialist will assess in the areas of sensory motor skills, concept development, and independent travel skills through observation and/or informal checklists. An O&M assessment should address how the visual impairment affects the student's:

- Understanding of the physical environment and space
- Orientation to different school and community environments
- Ability to travel in school and community environments

- Opportunities for unrestricted independent movement and play

#### DIRECT INSTRUCTION:

The O&M Specialist provides direct instruction for the student in the classroom and/or home and community setting, as appropriate, in order to address mobility issues that are:

- 1) identified through the assessment process,
- 2) adversely affecting educational performance,
- 3) are required to meet educational goals and
- 4) are based on program objectives developed by the multidisciplinary IEP team. Direct services are provided for those students whose needs cannot be met by collaboration/ consultation between the O&M Specialist and staff.

An itinerant O&M Specialist may cover a wide geographical area and provide services to students in various placements and educational settings. These services may be provided in the classroom environment, school campus, home, or community setting as appropriate.

#### CONSULTATION/ COLLABORATION:

In this model, there is collaboration among therapists, educational staff, parents and/or child to plan and implement modifications and interventions, to meet the child's needs. Consultation includes monitoring and periodic checking of the child's progress. Consultation services have proven as equally effective as direct services for some students because these supports are:

- 1) set in natural environments,
- 2) embedded in class routines,
- 3) use functional life skills to increase the efficacy of intervention, and
- 4) increase the student's motivation to participate and achieve their IEP goals.

Consultation services also increase the opportunities for skill building among team members and practice opportunities for the child. The classroom staff may require ongoing information or training on how to provide individualized support. Students with disabilities in addition to visual impairments may require direct instruction to acquire specific skills, such as human guide or learning to scan for objects in the classroom, before transitioning to consultation services, where classroom teachers or para-educators follow through with direct implementation.

#### **D. Roles and Responsibilities of the O&M Specialist**

The O&M Specialist is responsible for conducting observations and assessment in order to determine and make recommendations for the nature and extent of any services required. The O&M Specialist works with the Teacher of the Visually Impaired to assess areas of concept, motor, and sensory skill development. Findings and recommendations are presented to and discussed with the IEP team in order to develop goals/objectives, timeframes, and amount of service required.

The O&M specialist serves as a team member with the Teacher of the Visually Impaired, the classroom teacher, other school personnel, and to the parents of the student. O&M training must be integrated, as much as possible, into the educational environment and curricular activities in order to be maximally effective. The O&M specialist provides parents with specific

activities to practice in the home and community setting so that skills may be applied in context of daily routine and daily living activities.

A qualified O&M specialist is one who has graduated from an accredited college or university with a degree or certificate in Orientation and Mobility that included the completion of an internship. The O&M specialist has the following roles and responsibilities:

- Primary responsibility for specialized instruction and services required to meet the unique educational needs of the student with visual impairment.
- Consults regularly with classroom teacher, other regular and special education personnel, parents, and others to coordinate programs and services for the student with a visual impairment.
- Assists the site administrator and teachers in making environmental adjustments for the student at the school site, and in the improvement of practices and procedures.
- Shares responsibility with classroom teachers in the identification of instructional areas in which the student requires further assistance.
- Provides specialized instruction to the student with a visual impairment in the development and maintenance of skills related to the visual impairment designed to meet students' unique educational needs as indicated in the IFSP or IEP.

*(Current O&M Guidelines, California Department of Education)*

#### **E. Student Needs Addressed Through O&M Services**

O&M services and instruction assist the student to develop in one or more of the following areas:

- Develop a conceptual understanding of body image (e.g., planes, parts, laterality), and directionality in relation to objects and environmental features.
- Develop an understanding of concrete environmental concepts; e.g., grass, lawn, cement, wood, carpet, tile, tree, bush, and street.
- Develop spatial and positional concepts; e.g., far, near, close, high, low, above, below, facing, in front of, behind, beside, away from, next to, forward, backward, sideways, and 90°, 180°, and 360° turns.
- Learn compass direction concepts; e.g., north, south, east, and west relationships, sides of streets, names of corners, and relationships among changes in direction.
- Learn about traffic and traffic control concepts; e.g., fast, slow, parallel, perpendicular, same direction, opposite direction, near side, and far side.
- Learn to travel independently at home and various school settings throughout one's school career.
- Learn appropriate non-cane techniques including such things as trailing, direction-taking, seating, and protective techniques and techniques for locating objects to facilitate independent orientation and mobility at home and school.
- Learn to use appropriate human guide skills in all travel situations when needed, such as traveling in normal situations; going through narrow passages; ascending and descending stairways; using escalators and elevators; switching sides; seating oneself in

chairs, in sofas, and at tables; and establishing and maintaining control of the human guide situation with familiar and unfamiliar guides.

- Learn to use remaining vision and distance low vision aids, as appropriate, to the maximum extent possible for independent, safe orientation and mobility.
- Learn to use the long cane appropriately to supplement or replace visual travel skills (Skills to be acquired include touch technique; negotiating closed doorways and stairs, congested areas and social situations; trailing techniques; and modified touch technique for location of drop-offs such as curbs or down staircases, cane storage).
- Develop an understanding of the importance, dangers, responsibilities, and behavior appropriate for independent travel in increasingly complex settings.
- Develop an understanding of the services various business establishments may provide; e.g., grocery stores, department stores, banks, post offices, and shopping malls.
- Use traffic sounds to establish, maintain, or regain orientation and line of travel.
- Travel safely and appropriately on increasingly busy business area sidewalk.
- Independently cross intersections of four lanes or more controlled by traffic light.
- Carry identification and emergency funds when traveling, and know whom to contact in case of emergency or disorientation.
- Learn to independently locate various destinations in business areas.
- Learn to travel safely in various retail and service establishments, including independent travel on escalators and elevators.
- Use transportation systems including: buses, subway, and light rail (including use of lifts, if necessary). Learn proper techniques for entering and exiting an automobile.
- Learn to independently negotiate railroad track crossings.
- If nonverbal, develop a feasible communication system for acquiring information and communicating needs.
- Learn to use adaptive mobility skills as necessary for use with ambulatory aids, such as wheelchairs, walkers, crutches, orthopedic canes and braces, and prostheses to provide for maximum independent mobility.
- Learn to problem solve and reorient oneself as needed.
- Learn to solicit assistance and to decline unwanted assistance using correct procedures.
- Learn to use technology including such things as environmental sensors, global positioning systems, mapping and information gathering systems.

## **EXIT CRITERIA FOR O&M SERVICES**

Any of the following criteria may justify the dismissal of O&M services:

1. Strategies can be effectively implemented by current educational team and no longer require the training and expertise of the O&M Specialist. The student has learned appropriate strategies to compensate for deficits. Equipment and environmental modifications are in place and are effective.



2. Formal re-evaluation indicates the student no longer requires the previous level of service and IEP team concurs. The student continues to make progress in the areas being addressed by the O&M services that is consistent with developmental progress in other educational areas.

# **APPENDIX A:**

**Glenn County SELPA**

**Parent Permission for Observation by Orientation and  
Mobility Specialist**

Child's Name:

Date of Birth:

Age:

School:

Teacher:

Parent's Name:

Address:

Primary Language:

Areas of Concern: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I give permission for my child \_\_\_\_\_ to  
be observed by the GCOE Orientation and Mobility Specialist. I  
understand that the observation will be completed during my  
child's school day.

\_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian's Signature

Date

## **APPENDIX B:**

**GLENN COUNTY SELPA  
PROTOCOL FOR O&M REFERRAL**

**Request for Observation by the O&M Specialist Can Be Made by:**

Program Specialist	Special Education Teacher	General Education Teacher
School Psychologist	D.I.S. Professional Staff	
School Nurse	Parent	

**Step 1. O&M SPECIALIST OBSERVATION**

1. O&M Specialist Observation Parent Consent form must be signed by parent
2. O&M Specialist consults with VI Teacher, reviews medical and educational records
3. 30 Day Timeline begins
4. Hold IEP or SST to discuss the need for further assessment



**Does Student Need Further Assessment?**

**YES**



**NO**



**Step 2. O&M Assessment**

1. Signed Assessment Plan
2. 60 Day Timeline begins

**Step 2. No Further Action**



**Step 3. IEP/ IFSP**

Determination of educationally necessary O&M Services