

# **GUIDELINES AND POLICIES FOR STUDENTS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS**

**For Students with Visual Impairments in Glenn County Schools**

## **Glenn Co. SELPA**

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# Mission Statement

To provide and implement policies and procedures that will meet the educational needs of students with visual impairments in a uniform and consistent manner throughout Glenn County in compliance with federal regulations, state laws, and professional standards of practice. Collaboration among all professional education staff in providing coordinated, comprehensive services is critical in achieving the greatest success for students with visual impairment.

## 1. DEFINITION OF VISION IMPAIRMENT IN THE EDUCATIONAL SETTING

### FEDERAL DEFINITION

The federal definition of visual impairment is as follows: 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

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 services by a teacher for the visually impaired unless the student also has a visual impairment. (Program Guidelines for Students Who Are Visually Impaired, California Department of Education, pages 14-15.)

## 2. VI SERVICES IN CALIFORNIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

### **A. Eligibility for Vision Impairment 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. A student may meet the eligibility criteria for visual impairment, for example, but does not automatically have a need for special education.

In order to receive VI services, the child must be determined to be an “Individual with Exceptional Needs” as defined by the Education Code and local SELPA guidelines. All the requirements for eligibility for special education must be met. The objective of the Teacher for the Visually Impaired is to have his or her student participate and function as independently as possible in the school and classroom setting. Public schools are not required to provide a service to a disabled child just because the child will benefit from the service or even if the child requires the service for **other than** educational reasons. According to CA Ed Code and IDEA 2004, the IEP team is addressing the question, “Are VI 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

The Eligibility Criteria for VI Services is as follows:

- ☑ Student has a visual impairment, and per California State guidelines, a report from an eye specialist documenting the vision loss is required.
  - (a) Student is partially sighted, and the visual acuity, after the best possible correction, falls between 20/70 to 20/200 in the best eye.
  - (b) Student is legally blind, and the visual acuity, after the best possible correction, is 20/200 in the best eye.
  - (c) Student has visual field loss of 20 degrees or less
- ☑ Even with correction, condition results in either one or both of the following:
  - (a) The handicapping condition markedly reduces the ability of the student to learn academic material presented in a modified educational setting
  - (b) The handicapping condition markedly reduces the student’s ability to function in the non-academic areas of a modified general education setting
- ☑ Children from birth to age 22 may receive services.

The terms partially sighted, low vision, legally blind, and totally blind are used in the educational context to describe students with visual impairments. They are defined as follows:

- ☑ “**Partially sighted**” indicates some type of visual problem has resulted in a need for special education;
- ☑ “**Low vision**” generally refers to a severe visual impairment, not necessarily limited to distance vision. Low vision applies to all individuals with sight who are unable to read the newspaper at a normal viewing distance, even with the aid of eyeglasses or contact lenses. They use a combination of vision and other senses to learn, although they may require adaptations in lighting, classroom seating or the size of print, and, sometimes, Braille;
- ☑ “**Legally blind**” indicates that a person has less than 20/200 vision in the better eye or a very limited field of vision (20 degrees at its widest point); and
- ☑ **Totally blind** (no light perception and advanced acuity loss), students learn via Braille or other non-visual means.

## **B. Accessing Vision Impairment Instruction and Services**

If the SST or IEP team deems a referral to the VI Teacher is appropriate, a request for an observation by the VI Teacher is made (*not a referral via an Assessment Plan*). To schedule an observation by the VI Teacher, a signed **Consent for Observation** from the parent or guardian, along with a medical report documenting evidence of a visual impairment, must be provided. The VI Teacher then has 30 instructional days to perform the observation and hold an SST or IEP to discuss the need for further assessment. If a formal VI assessment is not warranted, and the student's needs can be met with accommodations in the general education setting, the VI Teacher 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 or guardian and a 60 day timeline for evaluation begins. An IEP is held after the evaluation is completed to determine the level of VI services appropriate.

(A flowchart showing the VI referral process and Request for Observation form are in Appendix A)

In the event a parent presents a medical doctor's prescription for VI services, it must be remembered that **an IEP team is the only legal body that determines special education services for a child.** Any relevant input from a medical practitioner would be considered by an IEP team along with other health information but there is no educational requirement or authority to fill a physician's prescription for VI services.

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

In the educational setting, the VI Teacher may include **observation, assessment, direct instruction**, and several types of **consultation/ collaboration**. These intervention activities are not mutually exclusive and may occur at the same time. It is important to remember that service delivery by a Teacher for the Visually Impaired is dictated by the current and ongoing needs of the student and should be flexible, using various options across the continuum of service delivery.

**Observation-** A request is made when the above criteria are met and an observation is deemed appropriate. The VI Teacher makes a visit(s) to the school site to observe the student's skills and behaviors in the academic setting. Interviews with teaching staff and parent/guardians are also conducted. This is the first step in determining the need for VI services.

**Assessment-** When a formal referral for assessment is made for a student with a suspected visual disability, a functional vision evaluation is required. This evaluation must include medical information, including documentation by an eye specialist of a visual impairment, formal/informal testing of vision functioning, and determination of implications of the visual impairment on the educational and curricular needs of the student. The VI Teacher may also interview the student, parent, and school staff to gather impressions and information about how vision issues affect day to day functioning. The VI Teacher must evaluate the most appropriate learning media, i.e., large print or Braille for the student. The VI teacher makes a referral to an Orientation and Mobility Specialist who then determines O&M service eligibility. Additionally, the VI teacher may need to try other activities, such as writing, cutting, sorting, or other specific tasks based on the concerns presented by the parent, school staff, or student. When reviewing existing data, the IEP team may determine a previous functional evaluation is sufficient and no further testing is needed. The IEP team is required to provide documentation of each component of the functional vision evaluation in

determining eligibility for VI services. For the purposes of determining eligibility, the functional vision evaluation is not solely a description of what the child sees, but includes all three areas listed here.

**Direct Instruction-** The VI teacher provides direct instruction, services, and supports for the student in the classroom setting, in order to address vision issues that are: 1) identified through the assessment process, 2) adversely affect educational performance, 3) are required to meet educational goals and 4) are based on program objectives developed by the multidisciplinary team.

Direct services may be delivered individually, in a “pull out” or “push in” model or may be done in small groups with other students with similar needs and goals.

Direct services are provided for those students whose needs cannot be met by collaboration/ consultation with the VI Teacher and class staff.

**Consultation/ Collaboration-** is the collaboration among therapists, educational staff, parents and/or child to plan and implement modifications and interventions, to meet the child’s needs. It can also include monitoring or periodic rechecking of the child’s progress.

Consultation services have proven as equally effective as direct services for some students as the interventions 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 collaboration and skill building among team members along with practice opportunities for the child.

The nature of the consultation should be defined on the comments page of the IEP. All consultation should have a written report delineating what the consultation encompasses and the results.

### **3. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE VI TEACHER**

The VI teacher works as a part of a team, and this team may include general education and special education teachers, and an Orientation and Mobility Specialist.

The VI Teacher has the following roles and responsibilities:

- ☑ Has primary responsibility for specialized instruction and services required to meet the unique educational needs of the visually impaired student.
- ☑ Confers 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 assistance.
- ☑ Has responsibility for selecting and obtaining large type, recorded, or Braille textbooks, supplementary materials, educational aids, and equipment needed by

the visually impaired student and the classroom teacher to insure maximum participation in all classroom activities.

- ☑ 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.
- ☑ Shares responsibility for and assistance with initial and ongoing assessments and program planning. (Current VI Guidelines, California Department of Education)

#### **4. EXIT CRITERIA FOR VI SERVICES**

Any or a combination of the following criteria may justify the dismissal of VI services:

1. Strategies can be effectively implemented by current educational team and no longer require the training and expertise of the VI Teacher. The child has learned appropriate strategies to compensate for deficits. Equipment and environmental modifications are in place and are effective.
2. Formal reassessment indicates the child no longer requires the previous level of service and IEP team concurs. The student continues to make progress in the areas addressed by VI services in a way that is consistent with developmental progress in other educational areas.

#### **5. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

##### **What does it mean to have central vision acuity of 20/70 or less in the better eye after conventional correction?**

Visual acuity is the measurement of sharpness of vision in respect to the ability to discriminate detail. Visual acuity should not be used solely to predict one's visual function or educational performance. We often regard "typical" visual acuity to be 20/20. A visual acuity measurement of 20/70 means that when looking at a target from a distance of 20 feet, the child is able to see it with the same degree of clarity as a child of "typical" or 20/20 vision would see the same target from a distance of 70 feet.

##### **What is the nationally recognized standard for legal blindness?**

The nationally recognized standard for legal blindness is 20/200 in the better eye or a visual field of 20 degrees or less. A student does not have to be legally blind to meet the eligibility criteria. "Conventional correction" relates to the use of ordinary glasses or contact lenses.

##### **What does it mean to have a reduced visual field of 50 degrees or less in the better eye?**

A field of 50 degrees refers to the widest point of the field of vision as obtained by the eye care professional. A 20 degree field or less is considered legal blindness. A field of 50 degrees refers to the widest point of the field of vision as obtained by the eye care professional.

### **What is included in other ocular pathologies that are permanent and irremediable?**

A majority of visual impairments will exhibit one of the previous indicators. A few conditions, such as homonymous hemianopia, in which a person is only able to see out of half of each eye, may not exhibit the prescribed acuity reduction or field restriction as noted above. A student with this condition, or conditions like this, still would have a visual impairment that was permanent and irremediable. Children with other visual anomalies that are not permanent or irremediable and can be improved with medical or therapeutic intervention should not be considered visually impaired.

### **What is a cortical visual impairment?**

A cortical visual impairment results from damage within the brain, often within the visual cortex of the brain. This damage prevents the child from adequately receiving or interpreting messages from the eyes, even though the eyes might be quite capable of gathering visual information. Cortical visual impairment is often a diagnosis made by an ophthalmologist or neurologist.

### **What does it mean to have a degenerative condition that is likely to result in a significant loss of vision in the future?**

Conditions such as Retinitis Pigmentosa, Cone/Rod Dystrophy, and Stargard's Disease may result in a significant visual impairment in the future. Although a child with a certain diagnosis may not exhibit significantly reduced levels of vision, it is important not to wait to consider potential needs these students may have and how to address them.

## APPENDIX A



**Glenn County Office of Education  
Student Services Department  
676 East Walker  
Orland, CA. 95963**

**Permission to Observe**

Child's Name:

Date of Birth:

Age:

School:

Teacher:

Parent's Name:

Address:

Phone:

Primary Language: Parent:

Child:

I give permission for my child to be observed by Glenn County Office of Education Student Services Teacher for the Visually Impaired  
Carolyn Singleton 865-1267 Ext. 2046

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

I understand that the observation will be completed during my child's school day. My child's days and hours of attendance are \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Date:

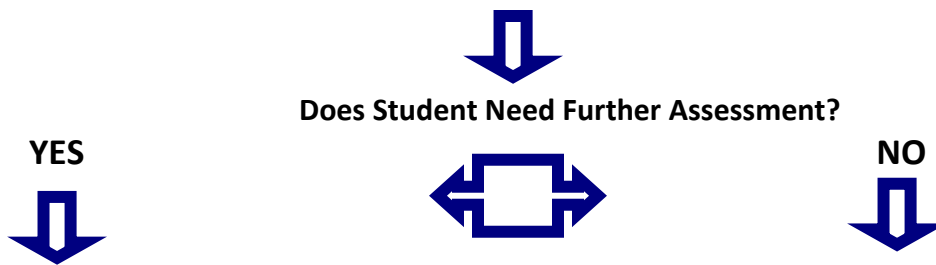
## PROTOCOL for VISUAL IMPAIRMENT REFERRAL

### A Request For An Observation By the VI Teacher Can Be Made By:

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

### Step 1. VI TEACHER OBSERVATION

1. *VI Teacher Observation Parent Consent Form*- must be signed by parent
2. VI Teacher reviewed medical records and vision assessment by ophthalmologist
3. *30 Day Timeline begins*
4. *Hold IEP or SST to discuss the need for further assessment*



### Step 2. VI ASSESSMENT

1. *Signed Assessment Plan*
2. *60 Day Timeline begins*

#### Assessment Tools May Include:

- Professional Clinical Observations
- Parent and Teaching Staff Interview
- Functional Vision Assessment

### SST Meeting to discuss findings

1. *Classroom/Parent Activity Suggestions*



### Step 3. IEP/ IFSP

#### Determination of Educationally Necessary VI Services

## Resources and Reference Material

*Federal Register* Part IV

U.S Department of Education

Educating Blind and Visually Impaired Students; Policy Guidance; Notice

June 8, 2000

<http://www.ed.gov/legislation/FedRegister/other/2000-2/060800a.pdf>

Compendium of Instruments for Assessing the Skills and Interests of Individuals with Visual Impairments or Multiple Disabilities (Benoff, Lang, & Beck-Viisola, 2001)

[www.wcbvi.edu](http://www.wcbvi.edu)

**Program Guidelines for Students Who Are Visually Impaired, California State Department of Education, 1997 Revised Edition  
(916) 445-1260**

Blind and Visually Impaired Students, Educational Service Guidelines

National Association of State Directors of Special Education

Hilton/Perkins Program

Pugh, G.S., & Erin, J (Eds) 1999

Information on following resources can be found at:

Clearinghouse Depository for Specialized Media and Translations

John Paris- Salb, Education Administrator I

1430 N Street, Room 3207

Sacramento, CA 95814

Phone: 916-323-2202

FAX 916-323-9732

[iparissalb@cde.ca.gov](mailto:iparissalb@cde.ca.gov)

California School for the Blind,

Assessment Center

Low Vision Clinic

Technology Clinic

Liz Barclay, Director, Assessment Center

500 Walnut Avenue

Fremont, CA 94536

Main 510-794-3800

California State ListServe for VI Professionals,

[braille-n-teach@mlist.cde.ca.gov](mailto:braille-n-teach@mlist.cde.ca.gov)

UC Berkeley Vision Clinic

300 Minor Hall

Berkeley, CA 94720-2020

Dr. Deborah Orel-Bixler

[dob@berkeley.edu](mailto:dob@berkeley.edu)

Messages 510-642-2402  
Appointments 510-642-2026  
Fax: 510-643-5109

<http://www.afb.org/publications.asp>

The National Agenda for the Education of Children and Youths with Visual Impairments, Including Those with Multiple Disabilities  
AFB Press 1995

Looking to Learn Promoting Literacy for Students With Low Vision  
Frances Mary Andrea and Carol Farrenkopf, Eds  
AFB, New York 2000

Foundations of Low Vision: Clinical and Functional Perspectives  
Anne L Corn and Alan J Koenig, Eds  
AFB, New York 1996

Program Planning and Evaluation for Blind and Visually Impaired Students  
National Guidelines for Educational Excellence  
Jack Hazekamp and Kathleen Mary Huebner  
AFB, New York 1996 36