

**Pennsylvania's
Approach to the
National Agenda
for the Education of
Children and Youths
with Visual Impairments,
Deafblindness, and Visual
and Multiple Disabilities
(PANA)**

The National Agenda: A Brief History and Summary

The *National Agenda for the Education of Children and Youths with Visual Impairments, Including Those with Multiple Disabilities* is a grass-roots reform movement aimed at improving the education of students with visual impairments as well as students whose multiple disabilities include visual impairment. The movement centers on a document by the same name, which outlines a set of priorities that are stated as goals (Corn, Hatlen, Huebner, Ryan, & Siller, 1995; Huebner, Merk-Adam, Stryker, & Wolffe, 2004).

As affirmed in the movement's 1998 Report to the Nation, "The National Agenda came about because of an acknowledgement that children and youths with visual impairments are not consistently or universally receiving the quantity or quality of educational services appropriate for their special learning needs" (Corn & Huebner, 1998, p. 3).

Stakeholders such as parents, professionals, organizations, and individuals with visual impairments participated in the development of the National Agenda and continue to work on achieving its goals. Its structure consists of a Steering Committee with parents and professionals serving as co-chairs, National Goal Leaders (NGLs), State Coordinators, and working groups.

The efforts of the movement are organized around several priorities related to the education of children and youths with visual impairments, and these priorities are stated as goals. They include those components of education for students with visual impairments that were identified in 1994 as most in need of improvement. Through a collaborative process that began at that time, hundreds of stakeholders in the field of blindness and visual impairment provided input on goals they believed had the highest likelihood of being achieved as well as the greatest potential for positive impact (Corn & Huebner, 1998). The number of goals identified and selected at that time totaled eight (Corn et al., 1995). Today there are ten (Huebner, et al., 2004):

- Goal 1:** Students and their families will be referred to an appropriate education program within 30 days of identification of a suspected visual impairment. Teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs) and orientation and mobility (O&M) specialists will provide appropriate quality services.
- Goal 2:** Policies and procedures will be implemented to ensure the right of all parents to full participation and equal partnership in the education process.
- Goal 3:** Universities with a minimum of one full-time faculty member in the area of visual impairment will prepare a sufficient number of teachers and orientation and mobility (O&M) specialists for students with visual impairments to meet personnel needs throughout the country.
- Goal 4:** Caseloads will be determined based on the assessed needs of students.
- Goal 5:** Local education programs will ensure that all students have access to a full array of service delivery options.
- Goal 6:** All assessments and evaluations of students will be conducted by or in partnership with personnel having expertise in the education of students with visual impairments.

- Goal 7:** Access to developmental and educational services will include an assurance that textbooks and instructional materials are available to students in the appropriate media and at the same time as their sighted peers.
- Goal 8:** All educational goals and instruction will address the academic and Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) based on the assessed needs of each student with a visual impairment.
- Goal 9:** Transition services will address developmental and educational needs (birth through high school) to assist students and their families in setting goals and implementing strategies through the life continuum commensurate with students' aptitudes, interests, and abilities.
- Goal 10:** To improve students' learning, service providers will engage in ongoing local, state, and national professional development.

While all ten goals are critical to the success of children and youths with visual impairments, deafblindness, and visual and multiple disabilities, Goal 8, which addresses the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC), has been identified as a priority goal to teach the total set of disability-specific skills needed to lead full, independent lives. The need for instruction in each area of the ECC is determined through assessment of individual students. The nine ECC areas include:

- Compensatory/Access Skills
- Orientation and Mobility (O&M)
- Social Interaction Skills
- Independent Living Skills
- Recreation and Leisure Skills
- Career Education
- Assistive Technology/Technology
- Sensory Efficiency
- Self-Determination

Introduction to Pennsylvania's Approach to the National Agenda (PANA)

Pennsylvania, like other states, has responded to the National Agenda and tailored it to meet its particular strengths and challenges. Pennsylvania's Approach to the National Agenda (PANA) is the customization of the National Agenda to meet the educational needs and priorities of children and youths with visual impairments, deafblindness, and visual and multiple disabilities in the Commonwealth.

PANA contains a set of goals and actions designed to ensure positive educational outcomes and are also related to state performance plan indicators. It is divided into ten major areas: Referral, Parent Participation, Personnel Preparation, Provision of Educational Services, Array of Services, Assessment, Access to Instructional Materials, Curricular Needs, Transition Services, and Professional Development.

Each area is divided into 1) a set of goals, 2) actions to be performed to attain each goal, and 3) desired outcomes based on those actions. Some of the goals may require legislative action, some may need formal authorization from the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) through guidelines or Basic Education Circulars (BECs), and some may be implemented at the school district or intermediate unit level. From goals to actions to outcomes, the Pennsylvania Agenda functions as a roadmap to improve outcomes for children and youths with visual impairments, deafblindness, and visual and multiple disabilities (sometimes referred to as "students" in this document).

For additional information about the National Agenda, go to <http://www.tsbvi.edu/agenda/>.
For information regarding PANA, go to www.panationalagenda.com.

The Pennsylvania Agenda: Goals, Actions, and Outcomes

Goal 1. Referral

National Goal: Students with visual impairments, deafblindness, and visual and multiple disabilities and their families will be referred to an appropriate education program within 30 days of identification of a suspected visual impairment. Teachers of students with visual impairments and orientation and mobility (O&M) specialists will provide appropriate quality services.

State Performance Plan Indicators: 6, 7, 11

Background: The developmental and educational services for students with visual impairments, deafblindness, and visual and multiple disabilities are most effective when identified and provided early. Referral to appropriate programs and information for families of young children are at times hindered by the process and lack of information possessed by the medical professionals.

Goals

1. Students will be referred to an appropriate early intervention or education program within 30 days of identification of a suspected visual impairment.

Actions

- 1.1 Develop informational materials explaining the importance of referrals, details of the referral process, what early intervention and educational services are available in Pennsylvania, and recommendations for yearly vision screenings.
- 1.2 Survey stakeholders, such as early intervention coordinators and special education supervisors, to assess the current systems of referral.

Outcomes

- 1.1.1 Conduct presentations and distribute informational materials to physicians, ophthalmologists, optometrists, early childhood coordinators, early intervention supports coordinators, educational program supervisors, and parents/guardians concerning the importance of early referrals and yearly screenings.
- 1.2.1 Work with the Pennsylvania Department of Education, the Office of Child Development and Early Learning, early intervention coordinators, and special education supervisors to develop an effective and timely referral system.

Goal 2. Parent Participation

National Goal: Policies and procedures will be implemented to ensure the right of all parents to full participation and equal partnership in the education process.

State Performance Plan Indicator: 8

Background: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the federal law ensuring services to children with disabilities, guarantees the right of parents to participate in the education of their children as equal members of the educational team. Parents are most knowledgeable about their child and are an important part of the implementation, focus, and carry-through of their child's educational programming. Through partnerships with parents, an appropriate and meaningful education program can be established and implemented that offers the greatest benefits for students.

Goals

2. All parents/guardians of students with visual impairments, deafblindness, and visual and multiple disabilities will be informed of their right to full participation and equal partnership in the education process.

Actions

- 2.1 Research current materials and create, if necessary, documents and/or brochures that provide information regarding the importance of parent/guardian involvement in the education process, the supports and services needed for appropriate education, and the roles and responsibilities of professionals typically involved in the education of students with visual impairments, deafblindness, and visual and multiple disabilities.
- 2.2 Investigate opportunities regarding parent organizations, networking opportunities, and/or conferences and workshops for parents/guardians of students with visual impairments, deafblindness, and visual and multiple disabilities.

Outcomes

- 2.1.1 Provide information or links to other sources on the PANA website (www.panationalagenda.com) regarding the supports and services needed for appropriate education and the roles and responsibilities of professionals typically involved in the education of students with visual impairments, deafblindness, and visual and multiple disabilities.
- 2.1.2 Distribute informational documents and/or brochures to special education supervisors in order to disseminate to parents of children with visual impairments, deafblindness, and visual and multiple disabilities at IEP meetings.
- 2.2.1 Provide information or links to other sources on the PANA website regarding parent organizations, networking opportunities, and/or conferences and workshops for parents of children with visual impairments, deafblindness, and visual and multiple disabilities.

Goal 3. Personnel Preparation

National Goal: Universities with a minimum of one full-time faculty member in the area of visual impairment will prepare a sufficient number of teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs) and orientation and mobility (O&M) specialists to meet personnel needs throughout the country.

State Performance Plan Indicators: 11, 15

Background: A decrease in federal funding to university personnel preparation programs in the field of visual impairment and orientation and mobility has greatly affected the number of programs in existence; therefore, fewer personnel are entering into this specialized field. Creative thought and collaboration are needed to design and implement personnel preparation programs that will sufficiently prepare personnel to enter the field.

Goals

3. Personnel preparation programs in Pennsylvania will prepare a sufficient number of TVIs and O&M specialists to meet personnel needs in Pennsylvania.

Actions

- 3.1 Survey special education supervisors to determine the number of students with visual impairments, deafblindness, and visual and multiple disabilities being served in Pennsylvania and the projected need for TVIs and O&M specialists over the next 5 years.
- 3.2 Survey personnel preparation programs in Pennsylvania to determine the number of TVIs and O&M specialists that graduated annually for the last 5 years and the number of students that acquired employment in Pennsylvania.
- 3.3 Schedule a meeting with representative(s) from the Pennsylvania Department of Education once the data from the above listed surveys are obtained.

Outcomes

- 3.1.1 Develop an accurate count of the number of students with visual impairments, deafblindness, and visual and multiple disabilities served in Pennsylvania.
- 3.1.2 Develop an accurate count of the projected need for TVIs and O&M specialists in Pennsylvania.
 - 3.2.1 Determine the projected enrollment needs in personnel preparation programs for the next 5 years in order to meet the personnel needs in Pennsylvania.
- 3.3.1 Work collaboratively with representative(s) from the Pennsylvania Department of Education to develop a plan of action to address the personnel needs in the commonwealth.

Goal 4. Provision of Educational Services

National Goal: Caseloads will be determined based on the assessed needs of students.

State Performance Plan Indicators: 5, 6

Background: Changes in the allocations of special education funds affected the provision of educational services to students with visual impairments, deafblindness, and visual and multiple disabilities. Across the nation local service providers moved to merging programs, increasing caseloads, decreasing service, and increasing the geographical service area of providers. These actions impact the appropriateness of supports and services provided to students.

Goals

- 4.1 Students with visual impairments, deafblindness, and visual and multiple disabilities will receive the appropriate amount of services from a certified TVI and/or O&M specialist.

Actions

- 4.1 Survey TVIs and O&M specialists to determine caseload sizes and the types and average amounts of services provided to students.
- 4.2 Research and identify tools to assist administrators and special education supervisors in determining appropriate caseload sizes.

Outcomes

- 4.1.1 Present results of the survey to representative(s) at the Pennsylvania Department of Education, administrators, special education supervisors, and service providers.
- 4.2.1 Inform administrators and special education supervisors of the tools available to assist in analyzing and determining caseload sizes.

Goal 5. Array of Services

National Goal: Local education programs will ensure that all students have access to a full array of service delivery options.

State Performance Plan Indicators: 5, 6

Background: The needs of students with visual impairments, deafblindness, and visual and multiple disabilities vary to a large degree. The type and degree of loss, the existence of additional disabilities, and the age the loss occurred greatly affects the needs of the student. An array of supplemental supports and services is required in order to meet the large differentiation and individualistic needs of the students.

Goals

5. Administrators and special education supervisors of local education programs will consider a full array of service delivery options and make placement options available based on the supplemental supports and service needs of the student.

Actions

- 5.1 Design a presentation and/or informational materials that focus on explaining the full array of service delivery options for students with visual impairments, deafblindness, and visual and multiple disabilities.
- 5.2 Survey parents to determine if the full array of service delivery options is discussed and considered at their child's Individual Education Program (IEP) meeting.

Outcomes

- 5.1.1 Conduct presentation and/or distribute informational materials to administrators and special education supervisors regarding the full array of service delivery options and the supplemental supports and services needed for students with visual impairments, deafblindness, and visual and multiple disabilities.
- 5.2.1 Present results of the survey to representative(s) at the Pennsylvania Department of Education, administrators, special education supervisors, and service providers.

Goal 6. Assessment

National Goal: All assessments and evaluations of students will be conducted by or in partnership with personnel having expertise in the education of students with visual impairments.

State Performance Plan Indicators: 3, 5

Background: Comprehensive and valid assessments are required, upon which appropriate educational programs can be built. Due to the expanded curricular elements that need to be offered to students, an assessment that addresses these elements needs to be conducted. Persons specialized in teaching students with visual impairments, deafblindness, and visual and multiple disabilities are required to conduct these assessments so particular skill elements can be focused upon, such as the child's emotional readiness, independence, communication mode, learning media, and all areas of the expanded core curriculum. Without a comprehensive assessment, the educational team will not have the necessary information required to make decisions on appropriate programs.

Goals

6. Students will be evaluated using appropriate assessment accommodations identified in their IEPs and administered by qualified professionals. Students will be assessed in areas of the general education curriculum and Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC).

Actions

- 6.1 Create informational materials listing appropriate assessment accommodations for students with visual impairments, deafblindness, and visual and multiple disabilities.
- 6.2 Create informational materials listing assessment tools and supports appropriate for assessing areas of the general education and ECC.

Outcomes

- 6.1.1 Post informational materials on PANA website (www.panationalagenda.com) listing appropriate assessment accommodations.
- 6.2.1 Post informational materials on PANA website (www.panationalagenda.com) listing appropriate assessment tools and supports for assessing areas of the general education and ECC.

Goal 7. Access to Instructional Materials

National Goal: Access to developmental and educational services will include an assurance that textbooks and instructional materials are available to students in the appropriate media and at the same time as their sighted peers.

State Performance Plan Indicators: 3, 5, 15

Background: Students with visual impairments, deafblindness, and visual and multiple disabilities often need alternate access to instructional materials which includes both textbooks and one-time use materials. Timeliness of receiving Braille formatted materials has been an ongoing national issue due to production and availability challenges. Timeliness is becoming less of an issue as a result of IDEA's National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS) and the increasing availability of digital materials. Students now have the option of having digital text, which can be produced in various formats allowing easier access, timeliness, efficiency, and reduction of costs.

Goals

7. Students will have access to quality instructional materials in the appropriate media as determined by the IEP team, at the same time as their sighted peers.

Actions

- 7.1 Survey instructional materials recipients and service providers in Pennsylvania to assess the timeliness and quality of the adapted materials received.
- 7.2 Collaborate with PaTTAN to design an online training course on adaptation of one-time use instructional materials.

Outcomes

- 7.1.1 Periodically readminister the survey to assess changes in the timeliness and quality of the adapted materials received.
- 7.1.2 Work with the Pennsylvania Department of Education, PaTTAN, and local education administrators to improve the process in which instructional materials are disseminated, if necessary.
- 7.2.1 Offer online training course to teachers of students with visual impairments, deafblindness, and visual and multiple disabilities in Pennsylvania.

Goal 8. Curricular Needs

National Goal: All educational goals and instruction will address the school district's academic curriculum and Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) based on the assessed needs of each student with visual impairment.

State Performance Plan Indicators: 5, 13, 14

Background: The educational needs of students with visual impairments, deafblindness, and visual and multiple disabilities extend far beyond academic learning. For these children to be successful and as independent as possible in postsecondary outcomes, they must be specifically and purposefully taught a body of knowledge and skills that typically-developing children gather incidentally through vision. The ECC addresses the unique, specialized needs of learners with visual impairments to achieve and maintain a healthy and active life. The ECC includes:

- Compensatory Access skills
- Orientation and Mobility
- Social Interaction skills
- Independent Living skills
- Recreation and Leisure skills
- Career Education
- Assistive Technology/Technology skills
- Sensory Efficiency
- Self-determination

Goals

8. Instruction in the ECC will be considered as part of the IEP for every child.

Actions

- 8.1 Create informational items, such as brochures and poster displays, explaining the ECC.
- 8.2 Administer surveys to service providers, special education supervisors, adult agency administration and parents to determine if students and adults with visual impairments are being instructed in the areas of the ECC and survey personnel preparation programs to determine whether all the areas of the ECC are being addressed in the personnel preparation coursework.

Outcomes

- 8.1.1 Distribute informational materials regarding the ECC to service providers such as local education agencies and approved private schools.
- 8.1.2 Display posters regarding the ECC at various professional conferences as appropriate.
- 8.2.1 Review results of surveys to determine if students with visual impairments, deafblindness, and visual and multiple disabilities are receiving instruction in the ECC areas.
- 8.2.2 Report results of surveys to appropriate personnel at the Pennsylvania Department of Education and post on the PANA website (www.panationalagenda.com).

Goal 9. Transition Services

National Goal: Transition services will address the student’s developmental and educational needs (birth through high school) to assist students and their families in setting goals and implementing strategies through the life continuum commensurate with the students’ aptitudes, interests, and abilities.

State Performance Plan Indicators: 13, 14

Background: The success of students throughout their educational career and into adulthood is improved by extensive planning and the input of a wide variety of resources. This information comes from family members, educators, medical professionals, vocational services, and adult service providers. Students and families need an expanded view of the student’s life to reach beyond the traditional K-12 education age range.

Goals

9. Students with visual impairments, deafblindness, and visual and multiple disabilities will be offered opportunities throughout their education careers to learn the skills needed to transition to identified postsecondary activities.

Actions

- 9.1 Create informational materials identifying resources related to transition and explaining the importance of transition skills and the array of options such as work experience, volunteer experience, postsecondary education and adult living opportunities that should be offered to students in order for them to learn appropriate transition skills.

Outcomes

- 9.1.1 Post informational materials related to transition on the PANA website (www.panationalagenda.com).
- 9.1.2 Disseminate informational materials related to transition to families, local education agencies, and approved private schools.
- 9.1.3 Collaborate with local education agencies, approved private schools, and state agencies to identify appropriate resources and mentors to assist in the transition of students into postsecondary activities.

Goal 10. Professional Development

National Goal: Service providers will engage in ongoing local, state, and national professional development activities to improve students' learning.

State Performance Plan Indicator: 10

Background: The field of visual impairment is a small field with high needs and high costs in which preservice programs had been federally funded in the 1970s. As funding streams changed, availability for pre-service programs and professional development declined. Professional development was voluntary until Pennsylvania legislation was imposed in 2000.

At this time, Orientation & Mobility (O&M) is not recognized by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as a certification; however, the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation & Education Professionals provides certification standards for O&M specialists.

Goals

10. All teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs) and O&M specialists will possess current and applicable state or professional certifications.

Actions

- 10.1 Survey TVIs and O&M specialists to determine professional development needs.
- 10.2 Meet with representative(s) of the Pennsylvania Department of Education to discuss the importance of requiring professional certification in the area of O&M.

Outcomes

- 10.1.1 Disseminate information from the survey(s) regarding professional development training needs to the appropriate groups and/or agencies.
- 10.2.1 Work with appropriate personnel at the Pennsylvania Department of Education to educate local education agency administrators and special education supervisors on the need for professional certification in the area of O&M.

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