

Pennsylvania's Approach to the National Agenda for Children and Youths With Visual Impairments, Deafblindness, and Visual and Multiple Disabilities

Goal 10 Professional Development

All service providers will possess current and applicable state or professional certifications as well as engage in ongoing local, state, and national professional development activities to improve student learning.

Students with visual impairments are a heterogeneous, low incidence population, which means individual students and their needs may vary widely. Services for these students are typically provided by teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs) and orientation and mobility (O&M) specialists. In order for these service providers to address the needs of the student they serve, it is necessary for them to participate in ongoing professional development. In this way, professionals can address current needs for their students as well as themselves.

There are professional development opportunities to obtain (pre-service)

and maintain (in-service) certification for service providers in the field of visual impairments. There are three universities within the commonwealth that prepare TVIs and O&Ms for certification. Once TVIs are certified, professional development and continuing education credits are a requirement in order to maintain certification (Act 48 hours). Orientation and mobility is not currently recognized by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as a certification; however, the Academy of Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP) provides certification standards for certified O&M specialists (COMS).

Continuing Education/In-Service Opportunities

There are various professional development opportunities to maintain certification. They may consist of workshops, site-based training activities, webinars, and conferences. Programs may be one hour, several hours, single or multiple sessions, and even multiple days in the case of conferences or institutes. Act 48 professional education hours and/or ACVREP hours can be accrued through these activities.

Topics may include research-based practices in effective instruction or literacy, implementing instruction aligned with the standards, or providing assessment. Opportunities

also include planning for individualized goals and instruction in the expanded core curriculum (ECC) areas, which is the body of knowledge and skills that are needed by students with visual impairments due to their unique needs caused by vision loss.

Conferences with a focus on visual impairments are provided by professional organizations, the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN), local service agencies, and grassroots efforts. Due to the small number of service providers, training opportunities may be nationally, statewide, regionally, or locally

based. Web-based activities allow service providers to share and problem-solve through in-service training and electronic communication.

Some conference opportunities are as follows: a biennial international conference offered through the professional organization Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER); a biennial grassroots conference, *Getting in Touch with Literacy*; an annual statewide conference geared for the field of visual impairment; and, an annual Low Incidence Institute that has at least one strand focused on visual impairment and/or deafblindness.

Service providers can also provide training opportunities in schools, organizations, and community groups. Conducting an information session for colleagues during a staff meeting, holding office in local or state chapters of professional organizations, and working together with community groups are some ways that professionals can develop their talents as educators and act as ambassadors for the field in both formal and informal settings.

Pre-service/Preparation Program Opportunities

Service providers interested in working with individuals with visual impairments may enter this small field through a university preparation program. These programs provide a comprehensive and systematic sequence of instruction, which gives pre-service and emergency-certified professionals the knowledge and skills to begin providing professional services to children with visual impairments from early intervention to adulthood.

There are three preparation programs in Pennsylvania that offer a degree and/or certification programs for the field. Each program has a different focus and offers different certifications. The certification areas include Teaching the Visually Impaired (TVI), Orientation and Mobility (O&M), Vision Rehabilitation Teaching (VRT), and Low Vision Rehabilitation (LVR). They range from

undergraduate to doctoral level depending on the program. Program options include full-time and part-time study; traditional college experiences; and, hybrid or blended learning online and face-to-face learning, with coursework submitted via internet learning platforms.

University websites provide program information in detail:

Kutztown University

http://www.kutztown.edu/acad/coe/spced/visprog_ugrad.htm

Salus University

<http://salus.edu/cer/index.html>

University of Pittsburgh

<http://www.education.pitt.edu/visionstudies/>

For more information about the National Agenda, go to www.tsbvi.edu/agenda/.

For more information about PANA, go to www.panationalagenda.com or contact the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network: 200 Anderson Road, King of Prussia, PA 19046, (610-265-7231 or 800-441-3215).