

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

Goal 3

Personnel Preparation

Stakeholders in the field of visual impairment need to be ambassadors of information and actively recruit individuals in order for preparation programs to prepare a sufficient number of teachers of the visually impaired (TVIs) and orientation and mobility (O&M) specialists to meet personnel needs in Pennsylvania.

Individuals interested in working with children and youths with visual impairments can enter this small field through a university preparation program. These programs provide a comprehensive and systematic sequence of instruction that teaches preservice and emergency-certified professionals the knowledge and skills to provide professional services to children and youths with visual impairments from early intervention to adulthood. There are three university programs in Pennsylvania that offer a degree and/or certification 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). The programs range from undergraduate to doctoral level. Program structure ranges from traditional on-campus experiences to hybrid models, which use online learning platforms along with periodic face-to-face instruction. Program options include both full-time and part-time study.

The following focuses on services of trained professionals typically provided in schools.

Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVIs)

TVIs are specialized teachers trained to address the diverse needs of the heterogeneous population of children with visual impairments. TVIs may work with a variety of age groups and also within a variety of instructional settings. Students' diverse needs may be addressed through individualized goals and instruction in the expanded core curriculum (ECC) areas. This curriculum is the body of knowledge and skills that are needed by children with visual impairments due to their unique disability-specific needs.

A sampling of TVIs' roles and responsibilities includes: providing direct instruction; addressing student's basic core curriculum and ECC needs; consulting with school staff, parents, and students; preparing, acquiring, and adapting materials; conducting functional vision assessments and learning media assessments; translating medical information into educational practices; and serving as liaison between the school and community organizations and resources.

Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Specialists

O&M specialists help students with visual impairments learn to travel as independently as possible. The goal of O&M instruction is to enable the individuals to move confidently and safely through familiar and unfamiliar environments whether in the school, home, or community. O&M instruction is a sequential process in which individuals with visual impairments are taught to utilize their remaining senses to determine their position in space and to use specific techniques to safely and efficiently navigate from one place to another.

O&M specialists may work with a variety of age groups and also within a variety of instructional settings. Services may include developing basic concepts such as laterality and directionality, traveling with a human guide, executing cane techniques, using maps in familiar and unfamiliar areas, using low vision devices, planning route travel, soliciting and declining assistance, and executing street crossings.

University Programs

For more information about the three universities in Pennsylvania that offer personnel preparation programs in the field of visual impairment, please contact:

- **Kutztown University**, Department of Special Education, Kutztown, PA 19530
http://www.kutztown.edu/acad/coe/spced/visprog_ugrad.htm
Dr. David Ross, email: dross@kutztown.edu;
phone: 610-683-4290

- **Salus University**, College of Education and Rehabilitation, Elkins Park, PA 19027
<http://salus.edu/cer/index.html>

Dr. Brooke Smith, email: bsmith@salus.edu;
phone: 215-780-1502

- **University of Pittsburgh**, Vision Studies Program, Pittsburgh, PA 15260
<http://www.education.pitt.edu/visionstudies>

Dr. George Zimmerman, email: gjz@pitt.edu;
phone: 412-624-7247

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).