

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

Goal 4

Provision of Educational Services

Students with visual impairments will receive the appropriate amount of services from a certified Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI) and/or Orientation and Mobility (O&M) specialist.

Goal 5

Array of Services

Individualized Education Program (IEP) team members will consider and special education supervisors will ensure least restrictive environment placement options and appropriate service delivery based on the identified needs of the student.

The needs of students with visual impairments, deafblindness, and visual and multiple disabilities vary widely. The type and degree of loss, the existence of additional disabilities, and age when the loss occurred greatly affect the needs of the student. Because the needs of each student change as the student progresses through school into young adulthood, the supplemental aids, supports, and

services and the environment in which those supports and services are provided may need to change over time. The overall goal is to enable each student to grow into an inspired, productive, fulfilled lifelong learner, no matter where he or she is served or supported. Therefore, a variety of service options is necessary in order to address each student's unique needs.

Addressing Educational Needs

For students, which includes students with visual impairments, to be successful, they must be taught by a qualified professional, provided instruction based on their skill level and encouraged to be engaged, active, and productive participants in their educational environment. In addition, teachers and parents need to have the same expectations of students with visual impairments as they do with same age nondisabled peers.

Students with visual impairments need to have access to an academic curriculum that is aligned with the state standards, have access to educational materials in the appropriate media at the same time as others in the class, and demonstrate continuous progress and achievement. Students with visual impairments also need systematic instruction

in compensatory or functional skills. These skills can be taught and tailored through instruction in the expanded core curriculum (i.e., accessing print and other visually-presented materials, including learning to read through braille; orientation and mobility; daily living skills; social interaction skills; appropriate accommodations; or the use of assistive technologies).

Addressing both the grade-level classroom expectations and the expanded core curriculum skills and instructional needs can be challenging due to competing needs and time constraints. The Individualized Education Program (IEP) team must prioritize each student's needs, balance short-term fixes with long-term goals, and implement services with the long-term goals in mind.

Continuums of Support

Decisions regarding educational placements are made by the IEP team. The decisions are based on the amount and type of services appropriate for the student and the identified needs of the student.

To the maximum extent appropriate, students with visual impairments should be educated alongside their nondisabled peers and expectations of them should be the same. The general education setting in the neighborhood school should be evaluated before considering a more restrictive environment. An educational placement in a special class or separate school, away from the general educational environment,

should occur only when, even with the use of supplementary aids, supports, and services, the student's education in the general education environment cannot be achieved satisfactorily.

Placement can vary along a spectrum from the general education classroom to a resource room to an approved private school. It is important for the IEP team to constantly reevaluate the decision and appropriateness of supplemental aids and supports. The placement decision should be reevaluated at least every year during the IEP meeting and possibly more frequently as dictated by student progress.

Providers of Support

Teachers of the visually impaired (TVIs) and O&M specialists fulfill a variety of roles that differ greatly from the typical roles of classroom teachers. Services provided by these professionals may include instruction, collaborative consultation, material adaptation, ordering

and production, instructional planning, assessment, case management, required meetings, and travel. Service is usually time-intensive because of the variety of student needs and the nature of "one-on-one" instruction.

Determining Provider Caseloads

Appropriate caseload size for the itinerant TVI and/or O&M specialist is based on the assessed needs of the individual students involved. Thorough assessments of each individual student's strengths and needs are used to develop an appropriate education plan. Caseloads based on these education plans will ensure that each student receives the amount of service necessary to meet his or her educational goals.

The number of hours a student is served by a TVI is based solely on the identified needs in the IEP. In determining an appropriate caseload size, the following factors must be considered: direct service hours needed to implement IEP goals, time for preparation of materials, time spent in collaboration and consultation with other team members, time spent in assessment, and driving time to reach schools. An itinerant teacher's caseload must allow enough time in the contracted workweek to complete these responsibilities for each student.

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).