

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

Goal 6 Assessment

Students with visual impairments will be assessed in all areas of a suspected disability and evaluated using appropriate assessment accommodations. Such assessments will be administered by or in partnership with personnel having expertise in the education of students with visual impairments.

Assessments serve a multitude of purposes and are fundamental tools for educational program planning. Students receiving special education services need to be evaluated in all areas of a suspected disability using assessments that provide relevant information about their strengths, needs, and abilities. Without the essential assessments

data, the educational team will not have the information necessary to make effective decisions regarding appropriate programs, supports, and services. Data from assessments should inform and guide day-to-day instruction, check progress relevant to the standards, provide guidance with benchmarks, and determine educational needs.

Essential Assessments

For students with visual impairments, assessment should include, at a minimum, a functional vision assessment, a learning media assessment, and assessment in the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) for students with visual impairments. These assessments need to be completed when a student is first referred for services and should continue to be updated at least yearly.

Functional Vision Assessment (FVA)

FVAs gather accurate, current information about a student's functional use of vision and help determine the visual needs of the learner. An FVA consists of observations, direct assessment of functional visual skills, and interviews with the student, parent, and other educational staff. This assessment provides essential information for the educational team regarding lighting, access and accommodations to materials, optimal visual

distances, and environmental and positional considerations for the student. A report from an eye care professional provides information about cause, treatments, and prognosis of visual impairment, but this is not sufficient to address a student's visual needs in the educational setting as well as home and community. A teacher of the visually impaired (TVI), or in some cases orientation and mobility (O&M) specialist, will complete the FVA.

Learning Media Assessment (LMA)

LMAs identify the student's primary and secondary learning and literacy media for reading and other activities. Accessible media can be visual, tactual, auditory, or a combination of all three. The LMA includes observations of the student completing a variety of literacy tasks. This evaluation of the student's use of sensory channels reveals the student's primary and secondary

ways of accessing information. The LMA involves an assessment of the student's ability to read and write using a variety of media including regular print, enlarged print, braille, and auditory materials. It should also assess the student's ability to access distance information, such as classroom screens and boards. The LMA process guides the educational team in making deliberate and informed decisions on the total range of instructional media needed to facilitate learning for each assessed student. The LMA is completed by a TVI.

Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) Needs Assessment

In addition to receiving instruction in general education curriculum, also called the core curriculum, students with visual impairments need specific instruction and training in the ECC in order to gain skills and knowledge that

typically-developing learners gather incidentally through vision. The ECC needs assessment is a screening tool that collects strength-based information on the student's compensatory access skills, social interaction skills, orientation and mobility skills, independent living skills, recreation and leisure skills, career education, assistive technology and other technology skills, self-determination, and sensory efficiency skills.

The ECC needs assessment tool collects information from teachers, families, students, and other service providers. Based on these findings, the team selects two or three priority areas to focus on during the upcoming school year. This tool and process begin the conversation about the student's instruction in the ECC and facilitate common terminology and understanding. This tool and procedure do not replace an age-level or grade-level assessment, but rather they supplement them.

Individualized Education Program (IEP) Development Based on Assessment

Following a complete and comprehensive set of assessments, an IEP is developed for the student. The results of the assessments are used as the basis for determining the student's strengths and needs. The needs are prioritized with input from all team members, including the family and student. The IEP team members prioritize the student's need without regard to the availability of services, but rather on the needs that are identified in the evaluation.

Goals and objectives are written based on the team's priorities and are related to the areas of the ECC and the general curriculum. Each of the goals should be directly tied to an area of need identified in the assessments.

After the goals and objectives are written, the team decides how much time is needed from each specialist for the student to achieve these goals. The time determined is based solely on the time needed to achieve the goals and not on the availability of service providers. Data are regularly collected over time to chart the progress of each goal. Comparison of the data is used to determine the effectiveness of the instruction provided.

Objectives from the IEP are always provided in the least restrictive environment and are embedded into routines and lessons in the natural environment whenever possible. Instruction of braille must be addressed in the IEP, indicating why it will be or will not be used.

Assessment Accommodations

Students with visual impairments may require accommodations to participate in certain types of instructional or standardized assessments. Recommendations for specific types of accommodations must be based on the results of the

FVA, LMA, and ECC needs assessments and are made by the IEP team, which includes the TVI. The recommendations need to be identified in the specially-designed instruction section and the state assessment sections of the student's IEP.

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).