

Vision: Special Factor Considerations

Visual impairment including blindness means an impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a learner's educational performance. The term includes both partial sight and blindness – IDEA Sec.300.8c(13). The purpose for this special factor is to determine if vision should be a consideration in the development of the learner's IEP.

The following questions may be helpful to IEP teams as they consider vision as a special factor:

Is there evidence of a vision loss?

The IEP team needs to determine if there is any data to gather and/or review that would help determine if the learner is identified as blind or visually impaired. Each building within a local school district is assigned a Teacher of the Blind and Visually Impaired who can help review existing data or new data.

Additionally, is there evidence of hearing loss?

The IEP team needs to determine if there is any additional data to gather and/or review that would help determine if the learner is identified as deaf or hard of hearing as well as blind or visually impaired. This may lead the IEP team to consider the needs of learners who have combined vision and hearing loss. Each building within a local school district is assigned an AEA Educational Audiologist who can help review existing data or new data.

Does the learner have accessibility needs due to their vision loss that will not be met by the general education environment? Has a Media Assessment been completed?

Learners with visual impairments or combined vision and hearing loss may require common accommodations in the classroom to access educational materials, including but not limited to, preferential seating, desk copies, and extended time. However, some supports cannot be met by the general education environment. Learners may need support with use of real objects, enlarging materials, assistive technology, traveling safely in a variety of environments (dark room, stairways, auditoriums, buses) or support by a human guide.

The *Learning Media Assessment* (LMA) is completed by the Teacher of the Blind and Visually Impaired and provides information regarding the current reading and writing media best suited to learners with vision impairments. The media assessed include braille, large print, dual print media, and regular print with optical devices. The IEP team should contact the Teacher of the Blind and Visually Impaired if they do not have this information or need assistance implementing the media into the learner's plan. If the learner requires materials in an accessible format, the IEP team will also need to include **Accessible Educational Materials** within the learner's IEP.

Does the learner have Expanded Core Curriculum needs that will not be met by the general education curriculum?

In addition to the Iowa Academic Standards, learners who are blind or visually impaired or have combined vision and hearing loss have specialized needs not covered in the general education curriculum. These specialized needs can be found in the areas outlined in the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC). These areas are: Compensatory or Functional Academic Skills, Assistive Technology, Career Education, Independent Living, Orientation and Mobility, Recreation and Leisure, Self-Determination, Social Interaction, Visual Efficiency. A Teacher of the Blind and Visually Impaired and Orientation and Mobility Specialist can support the IEP team in determining a learner's specialized needs.

If the IEP team would answer YES to any of the above questions, then the IEP team should identify VISION as a special factor.

Once the IEP team has determined that VISION is a special factor, the IEP team documents this decision and embeds the services, activities and supports within the IEP to address the unique needs of the learner who is blind or visually impaired.

If the IEP team answers NO, then the consideration process would stop. There would no longer be a need to consider VISION because it would NOT be a special factor.

Vision Resources

Blind and Visually Impaired Site (Iowa Department of Education)

Accessible Educational Materials (AEM) (Iowa Department of Education) – resources regarding procurement of braille, tactile graphics, and large print

Iowa Educational Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired

- ▶ **Braille and Literacy (IESBVI)**
- ▶ **Expanded Core Curriculum (IESBVI)**

Iowa Deafblind Project

National Center on Deafblindness

Hellen Keller National Center for Deafblind Youth and Adults

Further resources are available on the **i3 special education resources page**.