

EVALUATION OF STUDENTS WITH A VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

A student with a visual impairment is one who has been determined to meet the criteria for visual impairment as stated in 34 CFR, §300.8(c)(13). In meeting the criteria a student with a visual impairment is one who has been determined by a licensed ophthalmologist or optometrist to have no vision or to have a serious visual loss after correction **or** to have a progressive medical condition that will result in no vision or a serious visual loss after correction **and** has been determined by the following evaluations to have a need for special services:

(I) a functional vision evaluation by a certified teacher of students with visual impairments or a certified orientation and mobility specialist. The evaluation must include the performance of tasks in a variety of environments requiring the use of both near and distance vision and recommendations concerning the need for a clinical low vision evaluation; and

(II) a learning media assessment by a professional certified in the education of students with visual impairments. The learning media assessment must include recommendations concerning which specific visual, tactual, and/or auditory learning media are appropriate for the student and whether or not there is a need for ongoing evaluation in this area.

A student with a visual impairment is functionally blind if, based on the preceding evaluations, the student will use tactual media (which includes braille) as a primary tool for learning to be able to communicate in both reading and writing at the same level of proficiency as other students of comparable ability.

A full individual and initial evaluation of a student suspected of having a visual impairment must include an orientation and mobility evaluation conducted by a person who is appropriately certified as an orientation and mobility specialist and must be conducted in a variety of lighting conditions and in a variety of settings, including in the student's home, school, and community and in settings unfamiliar to the student.

A person who is appropriately certified as an orientation and mobility specialist must participate, as part of a multidisciplinary team, in evaluating data used in making the determination of the student's eligibility as a student with a visual impairment. **19 Texas Administrative Code § 89.1040. (c)(12)**

When assessing students who are visually impaired, it is essential that the diagnostician consult with a teacher of students with visual impairments in order to determine appropriate evaluation instruments and/or techniques.

To meet eligibility criteria as student with a visual impairment, included in the Full Initial and Individual Evaluation:

1. Eye report from an ophthalmologist or optometrist, AND
2. Functional Vision Evaluation/Learning Media Assessment AND
3. Orientation and Mobility Assessment.

A Functional Vision Evaluation (FVE) should be done first, in order to determine what the student is able to see and how he or she is using his or her vision. The Learning Media Assessment (LMA) offers a framework for selecting appropriate literacy media for a student who is visually impaired. These two assessments should be used together to help to guide the multi-disciplinary team decision about the best evaluation tools and instructional medium for a given student, such as braille, print, dual media (both print and braille), auditory, tactile or some combination.

Facts to know from Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Texas Eye Report or Eye Medical

The visual loss should be stated in exact measures of visual field and corrected visual acuity at a distance and at close range in each eye in a report by a licensed ophthalmologist or optometrist. The report should also include prognosis whenever possible. If the acuity cannot be measured, the eye specialist indicate most appropriate estimates.

The eye report must be less than one year old for new referrals.

The eye report does not have to be on the **State of Texas Interagency Eye Examination Report** form but does have to include information related to:

- exact measures of visual fields (If the acuity cannot be measured, the eye specialist indicate most appropriate estimates.)
- corrected visual acuity at a distance and at close range in each eye
- diagnosis and prognosis whenever possible

When evaluating for a visual impairment, as with all evaluation procedures for all disability conditions, we should consider a variety of sources. When the visual acuity section is completed, it provides further information to support the assessment. It is one piece of information that must be considered. It is **not** the sole source for determining the presence *or* absence of a disability condition.

2A. Functional Vision Evaluation

Functional vision is defined as how well a student uses visual information in performing daily activities in a variety of familiar and unfamiliar settings.

The purpose of the Functional Vision Evaluation is to supplement the results of the clinical eye exam with descriptions of the student's observable behaviors that may relate to vision. A functional vision evaluation should include a student's peripheral fields, color and contrast discrimination, near and distance acuity discrimination, light sensitivity and preference, visual motility (how the eyes move) and any other visual behaviors observed. The FVE pairs the medical information to describe how each eye condition translates into real life situations impacting the individual student's functioning in the daily environment.

The results of the FVE will identify a student's visual skills with and without optical devices in a variety of environments, with a variety of levels of visual difficulty. It will recommend ways in which visual fatigue or discomfort can be alleviated or minimized if appropriate. Recommendations should include what materials and instructional adaptations are necessary, and any areas the student may need to receive instruction even when eligibility criteria is in question. **The report must address whether there is a need for a clinical low vision evaluation. The FVE may be conducted by a Teacher for Students with Visual Impairments or an Orientation and Mobility Specialist. TAC 89.1040(c)(A)(ii)(I)**

The FVE should be reviewed annually by vision professionals to ensure the student is being instructed in the proper learning mode, medium and is receiving appropriate accommodations.

Unlike a clinical eye exam, the purpose of an FVE is not to diagnose a medical condition or to prescribe a therapeutic treatment such as patching, surgery, or medication but is to determine how the student's vision impacts their education.

2B. Learning Media Assessment

A Learning Media Assessment (LMA) is an assessment for selecting the appropriate literacy media for students with visual impairments. “Literacy media” refers to the way in which the student accessed the general education curriculum and includes braille, print, auditory strategies, objects, and pictures.

The primary goals for the LMA are to examine efficiency with which a student gathers information for various sensory channels. It should also include general learning media that the student uses or will use or will use to accomplish learning tasks and the literacy media the student will use for reading and writing. The LMA should assess media used at near and far and paper and electronic. The LMA uses a systematic way of collecting information about sensory preferences, learning environments and intervention materials and methods.

The results of the Learning Media Assessment will include any recommended for assistive technology that may assist the student in having access to the curriculum as same age peers. It will also include information about reading and listening skills, font and font size needed to access reading and writing speeds, and educational implications. It should provide a decision and monitoring tool for both conventional and functional literacy for students with visual impairments to gain information.

3. Orientation and Mobility

Orientation and Mobility (O&M) skills are essential for students who are blind and visually impaired to develop in order to move safely, independently, and efficiently through their environment.

An orientation and mobility evaluation is performed by a COMS in a variety of lighting conditions and a variety of settings including in the child’s home, school, and community and in settings unfamiliar to the child. Orientation & Mobility evaluations are conducted for students of all ages and ability levels, including students who are not yet walking, those in wheelchairs, and those who may never travel unassisted.

The O&M Specialist will provide recommendations on the need for pre-cane skills and cane skills. As students with visual impairments transition to post-secondary goals, O&M Specialist evaluates their use of general independent travel skills and

use of specialized devices to recommend and safeguard an appropriate transition to life after graduation.

Red Flags for visual impairment:

Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP)	Glaucoma
Optic Nerve Hypoplasia (ONH)	Albinism
Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI)	Retinitis Pigmentosa
Diabetic Retinopathy	Stargardt's

The Evaluation Process

When assessing students who are visually impaired, it is essential that the diagnostician consult with a teacher of students with visual impairments in order to determine appropriate evaluation instruments and/or techniques.

1. Review the Records-look for level and frequency of vision instruction, regular attendance in school, adequate health to focus and access to recommend material as well as adaptive devices.
2. Collaborate with TVI while reviewing FVE/LMA-review etiology and implication, clarify specific issues of concerns such as positioning, font size, cluttering, color, mobility, lighting, etc., clarify intervention and results, determine consistency of instruction and discuss evaluation process to determine needed equipment and testing material adaptations.
3. Choose test site carefully- avoid sites with high levels of noise, watch for unobtrusive noises, avoid sites with visual clutter, be sure you are able to position material optimally for student's vision needs.
4. Allow additional time-minimum of 3X longer, continual collaboration with TVI, allow for additional observations of student. See number 6.
5. Results will be reported as an estimate without the validity and reliability of an instrument that is administered as specified by technical manual.
6. Reports should state that it is an estimate and that it is consistent with other observations done by the multidisciplinary team.
7. In reporting scores, **report ranges** of intelligence rather than specific scores. (Example: John is functioning in the average range of intelligence.)

Formal Assessments

Consider the use of multiple instrument to measure the following cognitive areas:
General intelligence, Working Memory & Executive Function

Always supplement with observations. See *Making Evaluation Meaningful*, by Marnee Loftin, Chapter III, Observations and Interviews.

Look for assessment batteries that require the least amount of accommodations, provide multiple measures of working memory, and allow guided practice with multiple demonstrations.

Given these limitations the [Full Individual Evaluation] report must employ the following procedures:

1. Test results are reported as an interval around the obtained score as well as the specific score,
2. Scores for verbal subtests and verbal scales are reported with a confidence interval that represents at least the 90% level of confidence,
3. Specific statements are included that indicate the extent to which scores appear to represent a valid estimate of abilities,
4. Specific concerns regarding validity of scores are clearly stated,
5. Adaptations to materials or methods of administration are listed,
6. Acknowledgment that instruments used have not been normed on individuals who are blind or who have visual impairments is stated, and
7. Documentation of whether accommodations were required to provide access to the materials and tasks on the test is provided.

When visual-spatial portions of tests are administered, in almost all cases the results must not be used to report numerical scores, or to compute full scale or other total scores. Research has shown that scores are artificially depressed and vary with visual acuity. Numerical reporting of these scores entails a risk of being misinterpreted and misused by others. The inclusion of such scores in the computation of a global intelligence score will artificially depress the total, and present the risk of globally lowered expectations.

<https://www.aph.org/accessible-tests/position-papers/intelligence-testing/full/#r10>

The link below from American Foundation for the Blind provides considerations on assessment for students with visual impairments. The information provides guidance to evaluators on accommodations, adaptations, and cautionary statements. It alerts the evaluators if the assessment is available in large print or braille and what portion of the assessment may be recommend for specific uses. This link includes possible cognitive assessments, norm-referenced achievement assessments, criterion-referenced assessments, adaptive behavior assessments, as well as assessments for infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

<http://www.afb.org/info/assessment-considerations-for-students-who-are-blind-and-visually-impaired/5>

When planning the evaluation, consideration must be given to the child's degree and age of vision loss, medical condition, chances for real world experiences, and history of formal instruction. All areas of the full individual evaluation must be addressed and how the child's vision loss impacts the performance in each area. For example, how does the child's vision loss impact communication, social, behavioral, cognitive, achievement, adaptive behavior and assistive technology on individual basis. Recommendations are specified based on the data collected by the multidisciplinary team. This will support the development of expanded core curriculum as required by TEC 30.002(c)(4)(B).

The Full Initial and Individual Evaluation Report must be co-signed by the teacher of the students with visual impairments, including REEDs and FIE's.

Reevaluations

LEA needs to complete a REED to plan evaluation and review at ARD. Teacher of students with visual impairments must be present at the ARD. Best practice, a minimum of two cohesive evaluations should be completed before reviewing of existing evaluation data is substituted for formal/informal assessment.

When completing a review of existing evaluation data, the group of qualified professional may see a need for specific areas of assessment to determine the child's needs in the area(s) of academics, adaptive behavior, social behavior, transitional /vocational or other needs.

The scope of a reevaluation for the child with a visual impairment must be determined by a multidisciplinary team that includes a certified orientation and mobility specialist. TAC § 89.1040(c)(12)(E)