Guidelines: For the Specialized Assessment of Students with Visual Impairments

July 2012

The Evaluation Process

Each of the thirteen disability categories listed in federal special education regulations[^2] has discrete criteria, described in the regulations, which assist the Team in determining whether a student’s learning characteristics are consistent with a specific disability. The impact of the disability, including whether or not the disability interferes with a student’s ability to make effective progress in the general curriculum, is determined by the Team through the evaluation process. Both of these criteria have to be met for the student to be found eligible for special education services: the student must have a disability and the disability must impede the student’s ability to make effective progress in the general curriculum. Depending on the needs of the student, a Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments or other specialists will help to guide and support this assessment process and assist the Team in making this determination.

The evaluation must include statements of the student’s current academic and functional performance levels, and statements of how the disability affects his/her participation in the general curriculum, or for preschool children, how the disability affects the child’s participation in appropriate activities.

Because of the low incidence of students with visual impairments, districts may not have the vision specialists within their district. Therefore, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education encourage districts to seek appropriate specialist through their collaborative or by joining other districts to utilize the vision experts in their region.

For students with known or suspected visual impairments, the following qualified, vision personnel may provide specialized assessments. (For more in-depth descriptions of the roles and responsibilities of these personnel, see Appendix D.)

- A licensed Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (TVI) conducts assessments that help determine strategies and modalities for learning and communication and the appropriate media for literacy and for access to the general education curriculum.

[^2]: 300 CFR 300.8(c).
• A licensed **eye care professional** (ophthalmologist, optometrist, etc) determines the degree and type of vision loss, and evaluates to determine the need for optical aids and low vision devices.

• A **Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS)** conducts an orientation and mobility evaluation in the areas of: body image, motor coordination skills, visual and listening abilities, understanding of environmental concepts, analysis of traffic controls, street crossing skills, use of public transportation, use of low vision devices, and/or potential need for an adaptive mobility device or a long cane.

• Personnel trained in **assistive technology (AT)** evaluate and implement assistive technology needs for students with visual impairments. AT refers to equipment, devices, and methods to provide access to the environment, materials and to print information. AT includes optical, non-optical, tactile, and auditory devices, as well as computer hardware and software and other electronic equipment.

• Either a **Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist (CVRT)** or a licensed TVI conducts an independent living skills evaluation.

Additional information on the eligibility determination process can be found in the Department documents: [Is Special Education The Right Service?](#) and [The IEP Process Guide](#).