

Schools for All Children

Fall 2016

The Los Angeles Unified School District's Position Paper Blind/Partially Sighted Services

Blind/Partially Sighted services are provided to students with visual impairments whose vision loss meets the legal standard as either legally blind or partially sighted and negatively impacts their ability to access core curriculum and/or acquire the skills necessary to participate in fundamental life activities.

STUDENTS WITH LOW INCIDENCE DISABILITIES

A visual impairment is a low incidence disability.

The California Education Code Section 56026.5 defines a low incidence disability as "...a severe disabling condition with an expected incidence rate of less than one percent of the total statewide enrollment in kindergarten through grade 12. For purposes of this definition, severe disabling conditions are hearing impairments, vision impairments, and severe orthopedic impairments, or any combination thereof." A low incidence disability is further defined to state "...vision impairments do not include disabilities within the function of vision specified in Section 56338." Additionally, Section 56000.5(a) (2) finds and declares that "Pupils with low- incidence disabilities require highly specialized services, equipment, and materials."

BACKGROUND

Visual impairments affect the way a student accesses his/her environment. The principal way typically developing, sighted students acquire knowledge and skills is through incidental learning, the process of observing others, and the environment that occurs naturally at home, at school, and in the community. A visual impairment significantly affects a student's ability to learn by observing the behaviors and the actions of others. This inhibits and delays the acquisition of vital information needed to construct meaning and understanding about basic and complex concepts about things, people, space, and relationships. Consequently, students with visual impairments often exhibit delays in core academics and social development.

In addition to instruction in core academics such as English language arts, math, science, social studies, and physical education, students with visual impairments must also receive instruction in the social and life skills necessary for them to access and participate in school and community activities. The California Department of Education's "*Guidelines for Programs Serving Students*

With Visual Impairments (2014 Revised Edition),” dictates that these non-academic skills be taught using the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC), a comprehensive array of specialized instruction and services maximizing the capacity of students with visual impairments to learn effectively and live independently. The ECC addresses instruction in nine integral and complementary skill areas: compensatory access (braille instruction, listening skills, and study & organization skills), sensory efficacy, assistive technology, orientation and mobility, independent living, social interaction, recreation and leisure, career education, and self-determination. Instruction in the ECC skills is taught in alignment with instruction in core curriculum as a part of the student’s individualized educational program.

For students with visual impairments, information and instruction in core academic areas is provided as part of their participation in the general or special education program. Blind/Partially Sighted (BPS) services address the unique and differentiated needs visually impaired students may require to access core academic areas, to function independently, and to participate meaningfully in all educational and life activities. BPS services are provided by credentialed Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVI) who align and integrate core academic content with direct ECC instruction.

BPS service delivery options include instruction from an itinerant TVI in the following settings: the general education classroom, the special education classroom, a specially-equipped low incidence learning center (LILC) or resource room. The TVI instructs students with visual impairments in the use of the specialized materials and equipment necessary to access the curriculum including, but not limited to, specialized books, materials, braille and accompanying devices, large type, audio recordings, tactual diagrams and technological aids.

To be eligible for BPS services, a student must have a medically diagnosed visual impairment that meets the legal standard for either legally blind or partially sighted. In addition, their vision loss must adversely affect their academic performance [CCR, Title V, § 3030 (d)]. For educational purposes, the term *visually impaired* includes: (a) students who are functionally blind and rely primarily on senses other than vision as their major channel for learning; and (b) students with some remaining or low vision who use vision as a major learning channel. A visual impairment does not include visual perceptual or visual motor dysfunction resulting solely from a learning disability.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this position paper is to identify guidelines for BPS services available to students with visual impairments within the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). The continuum of service delivery options for BPS service support aligns with the District’s three-tiered model of prevention and intervention and will be described in the following order:

- Section I: Pre-referral Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtI²)
- Section II: Referral and Functional Vision Assessment
- Section III: BSP Intervention Strategies within Special Education
- Section IV: BSP Service Completion Guidelines

POSITION

The District believes that in an effort to ensure a successful school experience for all children:

1. Students will be able to access their educational environment;
2. Students will take an active role in their educational program;
3. Students with visual impairments will learn the necessary skills that will enable them to perform fundamental learning processes and interactions, access information, form ideas, communicate effectively, and become literate;
4. Students with disabilities will develop functional/academic skills, and participate in meaningful daily school activities;
5. Students eligible for BPS services will be provided with purposeful, targeted interventions designed to help mitigate obstacles that may impede learning or active participation in school or society;
6. Students receiving BPS services have the opportunity to participate in integrated, educational environments with non-disabled, same aged peers.

SECTION I

PRE-REFERRAL AND RESPONSE TO INSTRUCTION AND INTERVENTION (RTI²)

Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtI²) is a systemic multi-tiered framework that guides the development of a well-integrated and seamless system of instruction (e.g. literacy, numeracy, language development, and positive behavior support across content areas) and intervention that is matched to student need and directed by student outcome data from multiple measures. (BUL-4827.1: Multi-Tiered Framework for Instruction, Intervention, and Support)

The RtI² framework establishes a process for providing increasing levels of instructional time and intensity whereby the needs of all learners are identified, supported early and effectively, and high performing students have access to acceleration in learning. The RtI² framework is based on the provision of good, quality, first instruction and the use of data to identify students for appropriate acceleration and interventions. RtI² implementation is everyone's responsibility and advances academic achievement through frequent progress monitoring, ongoing data collection and analysis, as well as the provision of immediate, evidence-based intervention for students who need it.

There are five essential components of RtI² :

1. Multi-tiered framework to instruction and intervention
2. Problem-solving process
3. Data-based decision making
4. Academic engagement time
5. Professional development

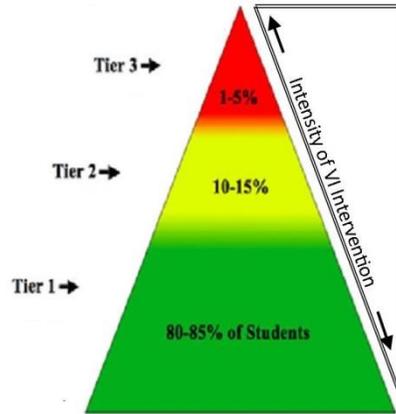
At each tier of service in a multi-tiered approach to instruction and intervention, teachers provide instruction that is differentiated, culturally responsive, data based, and aligned to the Common Core Standards. All students should have universal access to high-quality instruction. Universal access refers to the right of all students to equal opportunity and access to high quality, grade level instruction, and behavioral support. The TVI is an important part of the RtI² process in the general education setting. By participating in this intervention approach, the TVI contributes

expertise to the problem solving process and provides strategies for any student who may evidence challenges with their vision and vision function. The problem solving process requires a step-by-step focus to define the problem, analyze the problem, implement intervention strategies, and evaluate the response to the instruction and intervention.

Tier 3: Intensive Instruction and Intervention
 “Intensive Intervention,” is for an estimated 1-5% of students that need individualized and/or very small-group instruction that is highly focused, in addition to Tiers 1 & 2, and designed to accelerate student progress.

Tier 2: Strategic or Supplemental Instruction
 It is expected that 10-15% of students will need additional time and type of instruction to learn successfully.

Tier 1: Core Instruction
 It is expected that of all of the students receiving core instruction, 80-85% of students will be proficient when good first instruction is delivered.



A Problem Solving Cycle in General Education

Identification

TVIs may be called upon to assist in determining how well a student uses vision to access and participate in his/her instructional setting.

Problem Analysis

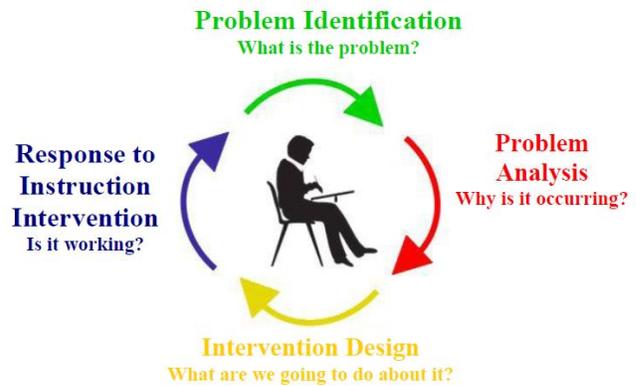
TVIs may be called upon to evaluate how and when a vision loss or limitation might interfere with, limit, or prevent learning or academic performance.

Intervention Design

TVIs may be called upon to assist the educational team with strategies, accommodations, adaptations, or the determination of appropriate learning media for a student with suspected vision loss or deficit.

Response to Instruction and Intervention

TVIs may be called upon to assist the educational team with progress monitoring, ongoing data collection, and evaluation to determine the success or failure of a vision related intervention. Results are utilized throughout the school year to determine the nature of the service, and the level of intensity and/or support necessary for individual students with vision loss or deficits.



Intervention Strategies

Tier 1: Core Instruction

Within the Tier 1 level of universal access to core curriculum and instruction for all students, the TVI acts as a consultant to educational teams regarding issues related to vision. Consultation may be formal or informal and focuses on increasing the general knowledge base of administrators, teachers, school staff, and parents regarding the needs of students with vision loss or limitations. The consultations may include:

- Distribution of literature, provision of resources, in-services for staff and parents regarding the detection of eye and vision problems
- Suggestions for efficient arrangement and staging of visual information in the classroom
- Suggestions for student seating and positioning to maximize access to visual information

Tier 2: Strategic or Supplemental Instruction and Intervention

Within the Tier 2 level of intervention serving students who are not making adequate progress, the TVI is qualified to screen a student for possible functional vision problems. A TVI screening includes an observation of the student conducted in a natural environment to elicit a representative sample of his/her functional vision use. Screening observations do not involve any activity that removes the student from his/her regular school program or singles-out him/her from peers.

The TVI acts as a member of the educational team and may engage in one or more of the following activities:

- Observation of the student in the classroom and/or other school environments
- Consultation with parents, teachers, and other school staff regarding concerns about the student's vision-related behaviors
- Review data and provide feedback regarding classroom strategies and/or adaptations implemented based on Tier 1 universal access guidelines

The TVI's observation and evaluation of the student's vision use may result in the following outcomes:

- Provision of information to the teacher, school staff, or parent to support the determination that the student's use of their functional vision is adequate to access their educational instruction and environment
- Provision of recommendations for targeted interventions or program adaptations to be implemented and documented by the classroom teacher and/or parents
- Recommendation to schedule a Student Support and Progress Team (SSPT) meeting to address student's vision needs, review the program adaptations and their effect on the student's progress, and next steps.

For the benefit of the student's health and to prevent any further delays, it may be recommended that the student be referred for a vision test.

Tier 3: Intensive Instruction and Intervention

If the student's visual loss or deficit does not meet the legal standard as either legally blind or partially sighted, the Tier 3 support of the TVI can be follow-up consultation and monitoring to

the educational staff and parents to support the SSPT targeted vision needs. The focus of the intensive support is on specific functional vision skills required for the student to access the educational program.

It is the responsibility of the classroom teacher to implement and document progress for the recommended targeted interventions. It is the role of the TVI to consult with the classroom teacher and parent on a regular basis to monitor the recommended supports and/or adaptations as well as to make adjustments to those vision-related recommendations as needed.

At the Tier 3 level of instruction and intervention, a 504 plan may be considered to ensure the student has the appropriate, vision-related recommendations and/or adaptations necessary to continue accessing and making progress in his curriculum.

If a student continues to struggle with the use of their functional vision despite the consistent, documented implementation and use of targeted interventions and adaptations, a referral for a special education evaluation in all areas of suspected disability, including a Functional Vision Assessment (FVA), should be made. Within the Tier 3 level of services, the TVI may utilize the results of any screening observations as factors in determining if an FVA is appropriate to evaluate the student's vision-related needs.

SECTION II

Referral and Functional Vision Assessment

The mission of the Division of Special Education is to provide leadership, guidance, and support to the school community in order to maximize learning for all students within an inclusive environment so that each student will contribute to and benefit from our diverse society.

The purpose of an initial special education eligibility evaluation is to determine whether a child has a disability and the nature and extent of the special education and related services that the child needs (34 CFR §300.15). An assessment to determine eligibility for BPS services for a student with a suspected vision loss or deficit that may be adversely impacting his/her ability to learn and/or access the curriculum should include an eye medical report to determine the extent and nature of the student's vision loss and/or deficit.

As part of the referral process, the parent or school should provide the VI program nurse with a current (within one year) medical report from an optometrist or ophthalmologist indicating that the student has a diagnosis of loss of visual acuity or visual field, which meets the legal standard as either legally blind or partially sighted. Those standards are:

1. Legal blindness: Visual acuity of 20/200 or worse in the better eye, with the best correction, or a visual field of 20 degrees or less in both eyes.
2. Partially Sighted (or Low Vision): Visual acuity of 20/70 – 20/200 in the best eye with the use of correction (CFR 20 404.1581).

The eye medical report information establishes a vision diagnosis that the school site team can use as part of a Functional Vision Assessment (FVA). The FVA is performed by a qualified TVI

in the student's current educational setting (EC, Sec. 56320). As part of the FVA, the assessor may also elicit functional vision information from the student's classroom teacher, parent, or school nurse, as appropriate. The purpose of the FVA is to:

1. Determine how and how well a student uses vision to access and participate in his/her present instructional setting, including apparent vision-related capabilities and limitations;
2. Evaluate how or when the visual impairment might adversely affect the student educationally;
3. Provide one criterion for the determination of the student's appropriate reading medium (the reading modality, visual or tactile, that most efficiently and consistently provides the student direct access to print) based on the results of a Reading Medium Assessment (RMA). The RMA determines the reading medium or media which "...is most efficient in terms of comprehension, speed and stamina commensurate with the pupil's ability to read at grade level." (EC Sec 56352). It may also include an assessment of Braille readiness for students who are determined to be functionally blind;
4. Provide information to assist in the determination of necessary and appropriate learning media (the reading format, including aural media, visual, tactile options);
5. Identify and indicate vision-related needs;
6. Provide information to the educational team about the nature and extent of the need for specialized services related to the visual impairment.

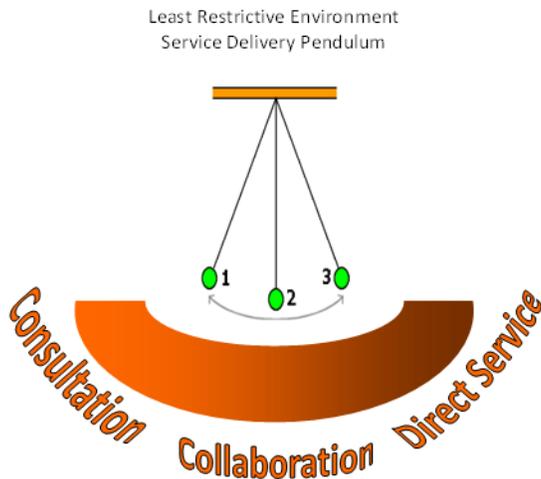
If the FVA identifies significant vision-related needs in accessing and progressing in the curriculum, Blind /Partially Sighted (BPS) services may be recommended as a related service. The Individualized Education Program (IEP) team will consider those areas that require the specialized skills of the TVI to assist the student in the acquisition and maintenance of those skills, including the intensity of the recommended BPS services. BSP services may include instruction in vision-specific technology, adapted literacy strategies, sensory efficiency, and direct instruction in Expanded Core Curriculum areas of identified need. The IEP team will also determine the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) in which the student's supports, services, adaptations, accommodations and/or modifications can be implemented to provide educational benefit.

A student who has a visual diagnosis indicating a loss of visual acuity or visual field may be determined not eligible for BPS services from a TVI. In these instances the student's visual needs can be met through a combination of the student's instructional program in the classroom and reasonable classroom accommodations and/or adaptations.

SECTION III

BPS INTERVENTION STRATEGIES WITHIN SPECIAL EDUCATION

The District supports a variety of strategies for the delivery of Blind/Partially Sighted (BPS) services. Services may fall into any of these three categories and, like a pendulum, service delivery may swing between more intense and less intense depending on the level of support required to meet the student's core academic program needs:



- **Consultation** is a service provided indirectly to the student consisting of regular review of student progress, student observation, accommodations and adaptations to core material, developing and modeling of instructional practices through communication between the general education teacher, the special education teacher, parent and/or related service provider.

- **Collaboration** is a service by which general education teachers, special education teachers and/or related service providers work together in the classroom and school community to teach and support students with vision loss and/or deficits to meet their goals and objectives and to access the curriculum and participate in all educational activities.

- **Direct (Collaboration)** is a service by which general education teachers, special education teachers, and/or related service providers work together to teach and support students with and without disabilities in the classroom. All are responsible for direct instruction, planning and delivery of instruction, student achievement, progress monitoring and discipline to support student goals and objectives, and to access the curriculum and participate in all educational activities.
- **Direct (Single Special Education Provider)** is instruction or service by a single special education provider designed to teach, support, strengthen, and bridge student skills. It is an opportunity to provide specific skill instruction, re-teach, pre-teach, and scaffold instruction to support student goals and objectives and to access the curriculum and participate in all educational activities.

All providers are expected to report progress of the students with disabilities on their caseload toward meeting their IEP goals and objectives. Providers should coordinate with the school site to ensure they are following the school site procedures for reporting.

SECTION IV BLIND/PARTIALLY SIGHTED SERVICE COMPLETION GUIDELINES

Best practices require that expected outcomes and service completion criteria are discussed with the IEP team upon the initiation of BPS services and upon change in services. There are several factors the IEP teams should consider when making decisions regarding BPS service completion:

1. The student's vision-related needs addressed by BPS services no longer negatively affect his/her educational performance in the regular or special education program.
2. The student no longer requires BPS service in order to benefit from his/her special education program.
3. BPS service is medically advised against because of a change in the student's medical or physical status.
4. The student/parent refuses BPS service.
5. The student graduates from high school.
6. The student reaches the age of 22 years.

RELATED RESOURCES

American Printing House for the Blind (<http://www.aph.org/>) - This website provides materials and information for the blind and visually impaired

American Foundation for the Blind (<http://www.afb.org/default.aspx>) - This website provides information about education for students with a visual impairment

California Legislative Information (<http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes.xhtml>) - This website provides information on California Education Law

Code of Federal Regulations, amended 1983

ECC Essentials: Teaching the Expanded Core Curriculum to Students with Visual Impairments (2014), Carol B. Allman and Sandra Lewis, Editors

Los Angeles Unified School District Website (<http://achieve.lausd.net/Page/2162>)

Program Guidelines for Students Who Are Visually Impaired (CDE: 2014 Revised Edition)
California Education Code

REF-4984.1: Implementing a Multi-Tiered Framework for Instruction, Intervention, and Support, dated March 19, 2010, issued by Los Angeles Unified School District Office of Curriculum, Instruction and School Support

REF-5527.0: Visually Impaired Program: Referral, Assessment and Scope of Service, dated June 28, 2011, issued by Los Angeles Unified School District Division of Special Education

Special Education Policies and Procedures Manual. Los Angeles Unified School District, Division of Special Education. 2007