



**LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
REFERENCE GUIDE**

TITLE: Visually Impaired Program: Referral, Assessment and Scope of Service

NUMBER: REF-5527.0

ISSUER: Gloria V. Lopez, Director
Parent Support, SELPA, Legislation
Division of Special Education

Sharyn Howell, Executive Director
Division of Special Education

DATE: June 28, 2011

PURPOSE: The purpose of this Reference Guide is to provide guidelines to administrators, certificated staff, school psychologists, and school nurses in regard to the process for referral and assessment for determining eligibility for services from the Visually Impaired (VI) Program. The scope of services offered by the VI program is also briefly described.

MAJOR CHANGES: Not applicable.

GUIDELINES: I. Referral and Assessment

A. Pre-referral Information: Prior to any referral, the parent or school should have a current (within one year) medical report from an optometrist or ophthalmologist indicating that the student has a diagnosis of a loss of 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).

B. Referral Process: Once the student has a current visual medical report, a parent or school staff member may contact the Visually Impaired (VI) Program to initiate a referral. The VI program nurse will request a copy of the current eye medical information and review the report to determine if the information meets the medical benchmark of either legal blindness or partial sight. If additional explanation is needed to clarify information in the eye medical report the nurse will follow up.

ROUTING

- All Schools
- Local District Superintendents
- Administrators of Instruction
- School Administrators
- Support Unit Administrators
- School Psychologists
- School Nurses
- Bridge Coordinators
- Special Education Teachers
- VI Itinerant Teachers



LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT REFERENCE GUIDE

GUIDELINES (cont.):

- C. **Assessment Procedure:** When it has been determined that the visual medical information indicates a diagnosis and medical impairment of vision, the VI program nurse will assist the school staff in the completion of the assessment plan.
- D. **Functional Vision Assessment (FVA):** The FVA is performed by a qualified teacher of the visually impaired, in the educational setting which the student currently attends (EC, Sec. 56320). The assessor will follow a standard protocol based on the age of the student and their current educational setting. As part of the FVA, the assessor may also elicit functional information from the student's classroom teacher, parent, or school nurse as appropriate. The purpose of the functional vision assessment is to:
1. Determine how and how well a student with a visual diagnosis uses vision to access and participate in their present instructional setting (i.e. expected educational and/or developmental activities), including apparent vision-related capabilities and limitations;
 2. Evaluate how or when the visual impairment might adversely affect the student educationally, i.e. interferes with, limits or prevents learning or performance;
 3. Provide one criterion for the determination of the appropriate reading medium;
 4. Provide information to assist in the determination of necessary and appropriate learning media;
 5. Identify and indicate vision related needs (eg .may include the type of interventions or compensations which enable or enhance efficient visual function and access to instruction);
 6. Provide information to the educational team about the nature and extent of the need for specialized services related to the visual impairment.

Note: While the Functional Vision Assessment is being conducted it is important to consider vision related functioning and needs in conjunction with the impact of known or suspected disabilities that may be interfering with learning and performance. The presence of the vision impairment may, or may not, appropriately or adequately explain educational difficulties which are observed or reported. A team approach which includes information from staff and family is recommended to fully understand behavior and performance observed. This information is important to determine correct and appropriate kinds of educational interventions or compensations which may be needed.

- E. **Reading Medium Assessment (RMA):** The RMA is performed by a qualified teacher of the visually impaired for the purposes of determining the reading medium or media for an individual pupil which "is most efficient in terms of comprehension, speed and stamina commensurate with the pupil's ability to read



LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT REFERENCE GUIDE

GUIDELINES (cont.):

at grade level” (EC Sec 56352).

- F. Braille Assessment: Included in a RMA is an assessment of Braille readiness for pupils who are determined to be functionally blind by the Functional Vision Assessment (Non-codified Sec AB 2445 Ch 998) and (EC Sec 56351).

Upon the completion of all assessments, the assessment report is completed by the teacher of the visually impaired which indicates whether the student meets the criteria as a student with a visual impairment, and whether the student may require special education and/or related services.

For students determined to have a visual impairment, the report will include recommendations for reasonable classroom accommodations, specialized low incidence materials and equipment, and may make recommendations about the level and type of VI services required to provide an adequate level of educational benefit.

The results of the FVA, along with the recommendations, are discussed at an IEP meeting to be held not later than 60 days after the assessment plan is signed by the parent.

II. Scope of Services and Support:

Services and supports for students with visual impairments may be as intensive as attending a special day program on a special school campus for the visually impaired, or as least intensive as yearly service and materials delivered by a VI itinerant teacher to a student on a general education campus. Determination of the amount of services and specialized supports and equipment are based on a combination of needs including the severity of vision loss, cognitive and instructional needs of the students, and age of the student.

Services and supports may also include orientation and mobility instruction for the Blind, Braille transcription services, specialized equipment and technology, itinerant services from a teacher of the visually impaired (TVI), or any combination of the above.

In some cases students who have a visual diagnosis indicating a loss of visual acuity may not be determined to be eligible for services from the VI program. In these cases, the VI assessor has determined that the student, because of other developmental impairments, has no unique visual needs which require specialized material and/or services from a credentialed teacher of the visually impaired. In these cases the student’s visual needs can be met through a combination of the student’s instructional program in the classroom and reasonable classroom accommodations.



LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT REFERENCE GUIDE

GUIDELINES (cont.): As with all students with special needs, specific placement, services and specialized supports are determined through the assessment and IEP processes.

III. Clarification between Functional Vision Assessments, Clinical Low Vision Assessments, and Vision Therapy Assessments

- A. **Functional Vision Assessments:** A Functional Vision Assessment is performed after the VI program nurse has determined from eye medical information that the student has a diagnosis of a medical impairment of his/her vision. A credentialed teacher of the visually impaired assesses the student in his/her current instructional setting (classroom, playground, hallways, etc).
- B. **Clinical Low Vision Assessments:** A Clinical Low Vision exam is performed by An optometrist, in a low vision clinic to determine what low vision equipment might assist in accessing visual information necessary for academic or daily living skills for a person with low vision. Clinical low vision exams are not performed by school district personnel and are not done in a students' educational environment. Because Clinical Low Vision exams are not performed in a student's instructional environment, they do not provide the same type of information concerning the impact of a student's visual diagnosis on their ability to access instruction. If the school receives the results of a clinical low vision exam from the parent, the school should forward the report to the Visually Impaired Program Nurse.
- C. **Vision Therapy Assessments:** An assessment for Vision Therapy is performed by an optometrist who is considered to be a developmental optometrist specializing in visual processing and such areas of visual development as eye teaming, saccadic eye movement, convergence etc. These students have visual acuities (with or without correction) which fall within the range of normal vision and do not meet the medical benchmark as "vision impairment".

Students who receive vision therapy generally have eligibilities of Specific Learning Disabilities and are provided vision therapy by a developmental optometrist contracted through the LAUSD. Students who receive vision therapy do not have VI eligibility; are not served by the visually impaired program, nor are eligible for low incidence funding or services.



LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT REFERENCE GUIDE

RELATED RESOURCES:

- [Program Guidelines for Students Who Are Visually Impaired, CDE, 1997 Rev.](#)
- [California Education Code, CDE](#)
- [Code of Federal Regulations, amended 1983](#)
- [Center for the Partially Sighted](#)
- [World Health Organization](#)
- [American Printing House for the Blind](#)
- [American Foundation for the Blind](#)

ASSISTANCE: For assistance or further information please contact the Visually Impaired Program at 323-962-9560.