

**Information UPDATE**

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction/John T. Benson, State Superintendent/125 S. Webster St./P.O. Box 7841/ Madison, WI 53707-7841

**BULLETIN NO. 98.04**

**May, 1998**

**TO:** District Administrators, CESA Administrators, CCDEB (County Children with Disabilities Education Board) Administrators, Directors of Special Education and Pupil Services, and Other Interested Parties

**FROM:** Juanita S. Pawlisch, Ph.D., Assistant Superintendent  
Division for Learning Support: Equity and Advocacy

**SUBJECT:** U.S. Department of Education Notice of Policy Guidance Regarding the Provision of Appropriate Education Services to children who are Blind or Visually Impaired and National Agenda for the Education of Children and Youth with Visual Impairment, Including those with Multiple Disabilities

On January 14, State Superintendent John Benson wrote to you about issues related to the Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped (WSVH) and our shared responsibility to provide appropriate special education and related services to children with visual disabilities. In his memo Superintendent Benson said that within several months the department would disseminate a copy of *The National Agenda for the Education of Children and Youths with Visual Impairments, Including Those with Multiple Disabilities* and the department would publish a brochure that describes the services available through WSVH. Copies of both documents are enclosed with this memo.

We are also taking this opportunity to share a copy of a November, 1995 memo from the United States Department of Education that provides excellent reference material for everyone who is involved in the education of children with visual disabilities. This memo, entitled *Policy Guidance on Educating Blind and Visually Impaired Students* was addressed to Chief State School Officers and along with the *National Agenda* has guided the department's review of statewide vision programming. The Department of Education memo was prompted by a concern that "...services for some blind and visually impaired students are not appropriately addressing their unique educational and learning needs, particularly their needs for instruction in literacy, self-help skills, and orientation and mobility." It was this same concern that prompted State Superintendent Benson to charge a task force last fall with making recommendation "on how school districts, cooperative educational service agencies, and the Department of Public Instruction can strengthen and expand services to children with visual disabilities."

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction directs particular attention to the following excerpts from the Notice of Policy Guidance:

"...for blind or visually impaired students, an individual with knowledge of blindness and visual impairment would be an essential participant on an Individualized Education Program (IEP) team." (IDEA'97 refers to "team of qualified professionals").

[In Wisconsin, assessments and direct vision-related instructional services for students who are blind or visually impaired are to be provided by appropriately licensed teachers Vision (code 825) and Orientation and Mobility (code 826).]

“To ensure that IEPs for blind and visually impaired students address their specific needs effectively, the following unique needs should be considered as IEPs for these students are developed:

- \* Skills necessary to attain literacy in reading and writing, including appropriate instructional methods;
- \* Skills for acquiring information, including appropriate use of technological devices and services;
- \* Orientation and mobility instruction;
- \* Social Interaction skills;
- \* Transition service needs;
- \* Recreation; and
- \* Career education.”

“This list is not intended to be exhaustive...IEP teams must consider the full range of skills necessary to enable these students to learn effectively.”

“In order to receive an appropriate education under Part B, unless a student who is blind or visually impaired has other disabilities that would inhibit his or her ability to read, we believe that instruction in reading must be provided for blind and visually impaired students in the medium that is appropriate for their individual abilities and needs to enable them to learn to read effectively.”

“IEP teams may not fail to consider Braille instruction for students for whom it may be appropriate. This consideration must occur despite factors such as shortages or unavailability of trained personnel to provide Braille instruction...or the amount of time needed to provide a student with sufficient and regular instruction to attain proficiency in Braille.” (1997 IDEA states: “The IEP team shall ... in the case of a child who is visually impaired, provide instruction in Braille and the use of Braille unless the IEP team determines, after an evaluation of the child’s reading and writing skills, needs, and appropriate reading and writing media, including an evaluation of the child’s future needs for instruction in Braille or the use of Braille, that instruction in Braille or the use of Braille is not appropriate for the child.”)

[Since the 1995-96 school year Wisconsin law Act 164 has mandated that “...no child with exceptional educational needs as a result of a visual handicap may be denied the opportunity to receive instruction in reading and writing Braille.”]

“The intent of Part B cannot be achieved fully if a blind or visually impaired student who needs instruction in orientation and mobility does not receive that instruction before completing his or her education.”

“In making placement determinations, it is essential that placement teams consider the full range of placement options for blind and visually impaired students.”

Questions regarding this bulletin and the attached Notice of Policy Guidance may be directed to Andrew Papineau, Division for Learning Support: Equity and Advocacy, 125 South Webster Street, Madison, WI 53707-7841, at (608) 266-3522.

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Attachments

This information update can also be accessed through the Internet:  
**<http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dlsea/een/bulindex.html>**