



Wisconsin Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Jill K. Underly, PhD, State Superintendent

Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC):

From the "Office of Special Education Program (OSEP) Policy Guidance 2000 – Educating Blind and Visually Impaired Students"

In order to receive an appropriate education under Part B, it is generally understood that students who are blind or visually impaired must be provided appropriate instruction in a variety of subjects, including language arts, composition, and science and mathematics. However, in order to be educated in these subject areas effectively, blind and visually impaired children must be taught the necessary skills to enable them to learn to read and to use other appropriate technology to obtain access to information. It also is very important for blind and visually impaired children, including those with other disabilities, who need orientation and mobility services, to receive appropriate instruction in orientation and mobility as early as possible. Providing these children with needed orientation and mobility services at the appropriate time increases the likelihood that they can participate meaningfully in a variety of aspects of their schooling, including academic, nonacademic, and extracurricular activities.

What is the ECC?

Every student is expected to leave high school with a strong grasp of "core" subjects like math, language arts, science, and history. But in order to master these subjects, and to eventually live and work independently, students who are blind or visually impaired must learn an additional set of skills known as the "expanded core curriculum." Essential life skills including social interaction, independent living, career education, and communication modes such as braille, must be taught alongside basic academics.

For a student who is blind, learning about world geography from books is not enough. That student must also learn orientation and mobility skills and practice using a white cane for safe, independent travel. The expanded core curriculum empowers students with disabilities to access their education and make their own choices throughout life.

Compensatory Skills, Including Communication Modes:

Compensatory Skills, Including Communication Modes, involve the use of tools, adaptations, modifications and behaviors that maximize the student's opportunity to access the environment, educational activities, information, and basic human needs. "Communication needs of students with visual impairment will vary, depending on the degree of functional vision, the effects of additional disabilities, and the task to be done. Children may communicate through braille, large print, print with the use of optical aids, regular print, tactile books, a calendar system, sign language, recorded materials, or combinations of these means." Other compensatory skills may include, but are not limited to: writing adaptations, computer keyboarding, study and organizational skills, abacus, use of the tape recorder and accessing information through the auditory and tactile senses. Visual impairment and blindness may result in a need for specialized instruction in concept development, spatial awareness, and listening skills. Use of compensatory skills will minimize the effects of reduced vision and will provide access to the same learning opportunities that sighted peers have.

Orientation and Mobility:

Orientation and Mobility is a "vital area of learning, which requires delivery by teachers with specific preparation. It emphasizes the fundamental need and basic right of people who are visually impaired to travel as independently as possible, enjoying and learning to the greatest extent possible from the environment through which they are passing. Students will need to learn about themselves and the environment in which they move from basic body image to independent travel in rural areas and busy cities." Developing body concepts, spatial awareness, orientation strategies and an understanding of the world are building blocks for age-appropriate, independent travel for students who are blind or have low vision. Students need to develop problem-solving strategies necessary to travel in familiar and unfamiliar school and community settings. All students with visual impairment need an Orientation and Mobility assessment regardless of the mode of travel (foot, wheelchair, walker, or other) and whether vision is the only impairment or one of several. Optimizing the use of residual vision may require the use of low-vision aids such as telescopes and sunglasses, or strategies such as wearing hats or visors to reduce glare. The white cane is a common travel and identification tool used by many individuals who are blind or visually impaired. A certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist is qualified to provide instruction in the use of the white cane and to address the specialized assessments and needs referred to in this paragraph.

Social Interaction Skills:

Good Social Interaction Skills are essential if students are to successfully apply skills learned in other curricular areas. "Sighted children and adults have learned almost all their social skills by visually observing other people and behaving in socially appropriate ways based on that information. Individuals who are blind and visually impaired cannot learn skills of social interaction in this casual and incidental fashion. They learn them through careful, conscious, and sequential teaching." These skills enable the student to access basic human needs, such as companionship, healthy and safe social relationships, information to solve their own problems, enjoyment of recreation/leisure activities, and to advocate for themselves. Understanding the role of body language, facial expressions, gestures and vocal tones is especially important when the visual cues cannot be seen. Students need to be self advocates in a socially acceptable manner, and accept or decline help graciously. "Instruction in these skills is such a fundamental need that it can often mean the difference between social isolation and a satisfying and fulfilling life as an adult."

Independent Living Skills and Personal Management:

Independent Living Skills and Personal Management skills are an essential and often overlooked need area for students who are visually impaired. "This area encompasses all the tasks and functions people perform, according to their abilities, in order to live as independently as possible. These curricular needs are varied and include among others, skills in personal hygiene, food preparation, money, time management, home management, and organization of personal belongings." In addition, students need to learn self-advocacy skills and develop an understanding of how a society functions. "Traditional classes in home economics and family life are not enough to meet the learning needs of most students with a visual impairment because they assume a basic level of knowledge, acquired incidentally through vision. As with the skills of social interaction, blind and visually impaired students cannot learn these skills without direct, sequential instruction by knowledgeable people."

Recreation and Leisure:

Recreation and Leisure experiences and skills are important for quality of life during the school age years and beyond. With adaptations, modifications and safety supervision, students who are blind or visually impaired can participate in many of the same individual and group activities

enjoyed by sighted peers. "Sighted people usually select such activities by visually observing them and choosing those in which they wish to participate. Recreation and leisure skills must be deliberately planned and taught to blind and visually impaired students and should focus on the development of life-long skills." In addition to traditional games and activities, there are games such as goalball and beeper baseball, which were designed for playing with low or no vision. Basic motor skills, as well as cooperative play strategies, often need to be taught in a specific manner in order to maximize success. Students need exposure to a healthy balance of solitary, social, passive and physical activities. Students should be aware of state and national organizations that promote recreation, leisure and sporting activities for the visually impaired. There is high correlation between recreation experiences, satisfaction with life, and self-esteem because of the opportunity for human interaction.

Career and Vocational Education:

Career and Vocational Education focuses on skills, experiences, and adaptations necessary to understand, prepare for and access the world of work. "However, many of the knowledge and skills offered to all students through vocational education will not be sufficient to prepare students who are blind and visually impaired for adult life." Career and vocational education must be specifically designed to fit students' needs, "because here, too, general instruction assumes a basic knowledge of the world of work based on prior visual experiences. Career and vocational education in an expanded core curriculum should begin in the earliest grades." This can provide "visually impaired learners of all ages the opportunity to learn first-hand about the variety of work people do," through strategies such as role-playing, peer mentoring, and job shadowing. As the students progress, curriculum must be structured to address personal strengths and weaknesses, work habits, ethics, workplace social skills, vocational interests, personal options, and specific skills training programs. For older students needs may include, but are not limited to, such areas as:

- Media-adapted tests (SAT, ACT, vocational interest inventories, civil service exams, etc.)
 - Resources:
 - financial assistance (general and those specific to the blind and visually impaired);
 - coordination with adult service providers--vocational rehabilitation or local county support services, or specialized training programs;
 - specialized product or equipment adaptations Self-advocacy skills (understanding disclosure issues of visual impairment to potential employers, etc.)
 - Employment-seeking skills (locating job openings, completing job applications, interview skills, etc.)
 - Employment-keeping skills (developing personal on-the-job adaptations as the need arises)
- "Unemployment and underemployment continue to be leading problems facing adult visually impaired individuals in the United States, making this portion of the expanded core curriculum vital for students of all ages."

Assistive Technology:

Assistive Technology enables a person with a visual impairment to independently perform a task or job that they might otherwise be able to complete only with assistance. Assistive technology is any tool, piece of equipment or system used or adapted to fill a specific need, or to assist a person with a visual impairment in completing a task. Assistive technology can include tools made specifically for the visually impaired, such as: braille devices, closed circuit televisions, magnifiers, and monocular telescopes. It can also include large screen monitors, adapted computer system software, voice output devices and commonly used aids such as white canes, visors, and sunglasses. Training in the efficient use and maintenance of assistive technology increases the potential for maximum involvement in all areas of curriculum and in life.

Visual Efficiency Skills:

Visual Efficiency Skills refer to the manner, technique or approach a student uses to complete a visual task as effectively and efficiently as possible. "The visual acuity of children diagnosed as visually impaired varies greatly. With thorough, systematic training, most students with functional vision can learn to use their remaining vision better and more efficiently." Using the best strategies to maximize acuity levels is one component of efficient visual functioning. Interpreting visual information is another component. Efficient use of vision, aided by optical and non-optical aids and strategies, correlates highly to success in the classroom. Students learn about their eye condition and how it affects visual tasks, what aids and strategies are most useful, and how to explain their visual needs to others.

Self-Determination:

This area of the ECC highlights the importance of believing in oneself, while understanding one's abilities and limitations. Students learn from successes and failures how to achieve one's goals in life. Self-determination is the ability for people to control their lives, reach goals they have set and take part fully in the world around them.