

*Teaching Students With
Visual Impairments*

A TECHNICAL
ASSISTANCE DOCUMENT
FOR EDUCATORS AND
ADMINISTRATORS

Requirements
And
Best Practice

Training
Session
For Document

THE UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION 2008

Training Session

Purpose/Introduction

- The Utah State Office of Education recognizes the unique needs of students with visual impairments
- For students with a vision loss or blindness, the need for accommodations and supplemental services is critical
- Early identification and interventions are important for preventing academic delays and improving results for students with visual impairments

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- There are numerous definitions of “visual impairment” and “blindness”, for the purposes of this manual the definition in IDEA 2004 will be used
- This manual addresses students with visual impairments that are eligible for special education services

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- Significant progress has been made in including students with visual impairments in state wide assessments
- It will continue to be an evolving process with a focus on the equitable and fair assessment of all students

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Legal Authority

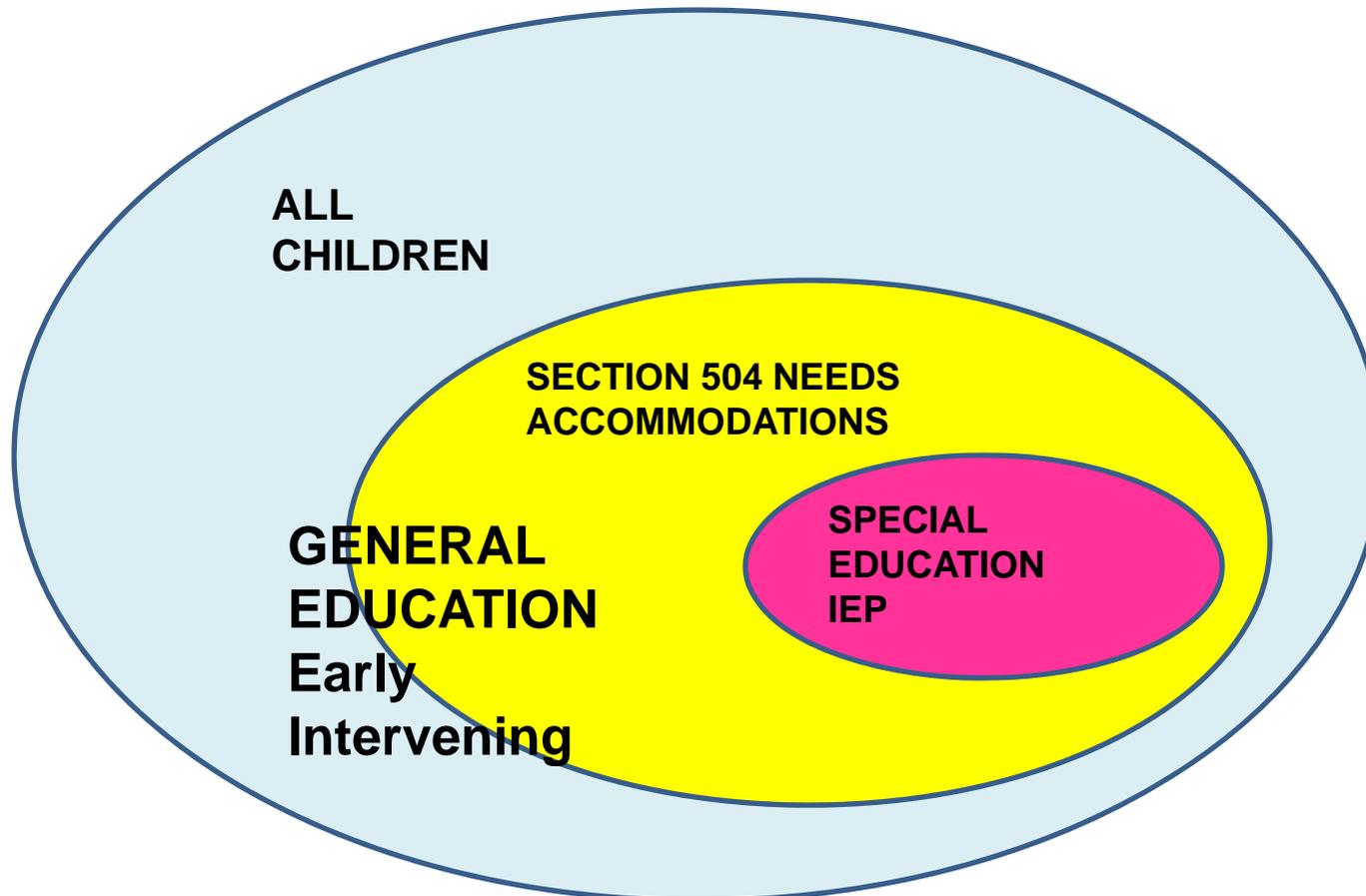
Once identified as a student with a disability pursuant to IDEA, the student is entitled to a free appropriate public education designed to meet the student's unique learning needs

- The IDEA requires that an Individualized Education Program (IEP) be developed by the school district to address the child's unique needs

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- The IEP must also include a statement of the special education and related services and supplementary aids and services to be provided to the child
- In addition to the IDEA, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a civil rights act that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities
- Section 504 mandates that public schools provide reasonable accommodations or modifications to permit access to an education for a child with a disability

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THE UNIVERSE OF ALL CHILDREN

This includes those children entitled to accommodations through Section 504 and those entitled to Special Education under the IDEA

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- Some students need individual accommodations to access an educational program, but do not need specialized instruction
- This student would be entitled to the protections of Section 504 but would not require an IEP or be identified as a Special Education student pursuant to the IDEA

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Eligibility and Service Options

- Early identification and intervention are important because of the critical learning that takes place between birth and four years of age
- Vision loss can lead to delays in cognitive development, motor skill acquisition, social and emotional problems, and functional academic skills

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Evaluation

- A student must be examined by an optometrist or ophthalmologist as soon as a vision loss is suspected
- Many infants and toddlers with visual and/or hearing impairments receive early intervention services through the Parent Infant Program (PIP) at the Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind

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- Areas of the evaluation may include:
 - Visual Acuity
 - Vision Loss/Blindness
 - Functional Visual Assessment
 - Learning Media Assessment
 - Impact on Education
 - Early Intervening
 - Psychoeducational Assessment
 - Other Evaluation Issues

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Eligibility

- While the student's vision history from a qualified eye care professional must be on record, a team of qualified professionals and the student's parents determine eligibility
- When classifying a student as Visually Impaired, the IEP team must consider whether other impairments interfere with the comprehension of visual and/or auditory stimuli

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The IEP Team

- The team should include at least one person with knowledge in the areas of suspected disability; in this case, a vision specialist
- IEP teams must consider the full range of skills necessary to enable the student with a visual impairment to learn effectively

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Special Factors to Consider

- IDEA includes a list of special factors that must be considered by every student's IEP team
- For student's with visual impairments focus on the two following special factors:
 - Instruction and use of Braille
 - Assistive technology devices and services

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Assistive Technology

- Assistive technology is not a luxury but a necessity for a student with a visual impairment
- Technology increases independence and freedom of choice for students with visual impairment
- Technology skills provide students with increased control over their school, home, or work environments

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- Using assistive technology , Braille-reading students can access the appropriate material at the right time
- Students with low vision now have a variety of assistive technology tools that allow them to access the instructional information that is needed to be successful in school

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Expanded Core Curriculum

- The Core Curriculum is comprised of the academic subjects a student is required to complete prior to high school graduation. In addition to the Core Curriculum, sighted students learn a large amount of valuable information through casual observation of their environment.

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- Students with a visual impairment must be provided direct training through an Expanded Core Curriculum to receive these same experiences
- The Expanded Core Curriculum must be systematically and sequentially taught by professionals with specialized skills

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Related Services

- The types of related services needed by a student with a visual impairment will vary with each student
- Possible related services include, but are not limited to:
 - Reader assistance
 - Braille transcription
 - Orientation and mobility

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Transition Services

- Transition services are defined in IDEA as a coordinated set of activities designed with a school to post-secondary process
- The IEP team shall consider the academic, developmental, and functional needs of the student
- The focus is on helping each person find a program, training, and/or skills that will help him/her succeed in his/her adult life

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Statewide Assessments

- The IEP team determines whether a student with disabilities will participate without accommodations, with accommodations, or through Utah's Alternate Assessment (UAA)

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Least Restrictive Environment

- The determination of the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) for a student with a visual impairment is made only after an IEP has been written that addresses the full range of the student's unique needs

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- Teachers of the visually impaired provide services in a variety of settings.
- Typical service delivery models include:
 - Consultative services
 - Itinerant services
 - Resource room services
 - Self-contained classrooms
 - Specialized schools

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Extended School Year

- The student's IEP team has the responsibility to consider the need for extended school year services (ESY) annually
- It is possible for a student to receive a related service only to be included in the extended school year program

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Educational Considerations

- Specialized classroom instructional strategies for the general education teacher with a student who has vision impairment in the general education classroom
- Two main functional categories of visual impairments”
 - Low vision – usually print users
 - Blind – legally blind covers a broad spectrum of visual impairments

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Environmental Considerations

- As you start planning environmental considerations for the blind and visually impaired, it is best to determine the extent of the vision loss
- Examples of environmental considerations are:
 - Use of light in the classroom
 - Concentrate on touch, smell, vibration

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Teacher of the Visually Impaired

- Each school district will have its unique policies and procedures regarding teachers and paraeducators
- Basically has the primary responsibility for special instruction and services required to meet the unique educational needs of the visually impaired student

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Using Paraprofessionals

- Paraprofessionals can play an important role in helping students with visual impairments succeed in inclusive classroom settings
- The paraprofessional's job is to do as little for the visually impaired student as possible, so that the student becomes just one more member of the class

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- Completing the manual are the areas of:
 - Glossary
 - Resources
 - References
- An accompanying manual is available for parents entitled: *Children with Visual Impairments: Information for Parents*
www.usoe@schools.utah.gov
www.utahparentcenter.org

For more information regarding this topic and manual, please contact:

Education Specialist for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Utah State Office of Education
250 E. 500 So. P.O. Box 114200
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114