

What is the Expanded Core Curriculum for Students with Visual Impairments?

For new Special Education Directors or those unfamiliar with the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) for students with visual impairments, the following information is provided.

What is the ECC?

In addition to all the core curricular areas included in the general educational curriculum, students with a visual impairment need to be evaluated and receive instruction in very specific skills that have been demonstrated to be potential problem areas for persons with a visual impairment. These nine specific skill areas comprise the Expanded Core Curriculum.

The Expanded Core Curriculum contains “Real Life” skills that students with visual impairments may need extra assistance with in learning such as:

- Compensatory Skills (ie: Braille, large print, access to general curriculum)
- Orientation & Mobility
- Social Interaction Skills
- Independent Living Skills & Personal Management
- Recreation & Leisure
- Career & Vocational Education
- Assistive Technology
- Visual Efficiency Skills
- Self-Determination (Self-advocacy)

Why is extra assistance needed?

Most children learn these skills incidentally by visually observing and imitating others. However, children who are blind or with low vision do not always learn these skills unless they are formally addressed. It is critical that the visually impaired child not only hears about things within the world, but also has hands on experience to gain complete understanding of many basic concepts. For instance, children with a visual impairment who cannot observe social behaviors such as facial expressions and body language cues must be taught to make “eye contact.” Otherwise they may be perceived as being uninterested and are left out of conversations. The student with a visual impairment must learn to converse, interact and relate; skills facilitated by sharing of common experiences.

How are students affected who do not learn these basic concepts and skills?

Basic concepts are a foundation for understanding content in core curriculum areas such as science, social studies and literature. Without these basic experiential concepts, students will have difficulty in the academic setting. For example, if a student with a visual impairment learned about an airplane by being

shown a toy or model version, then their experience and knowledge is based only on that limited contact. They would have no concept of the actual size of an aircraft, or that the pilot sits in a different place than the passengers, or where luggage is stored. Other children can learn these simple concepts by looking at pictures in books or watching TV and movies.

In addition, many of these skills and concepts learned as part of the ECC are necessary for successful transition into post-secondary education and the workforce. To become independent, contributing members of society, the student needs to be able to negotiate the environment without assistance and to have the social skills required in the competitive world of work. Without each of these very important life skills, even the academically successful student fails in post-secondary education ventures.

Who is responsible for teaching these skills to students with visual impairments?

Texas State Law indicates that:

(30.002(e)(4) each eligible blind or visually impaired student is entitled to receive educational programs according to an individualized education program that provides a detailed description of the arrangements made to provide the students with orientation and mobility training, instruction in braille, or use of large print, other training to compensate for serious visual loss....

and

(30.002(c)(4) The comprehensive statewide plan for the education of children with visual impairments must include methods to ensure that children with visual impairments receiving special education services in school districts receive, before being placed in a classroom setting or within a reasonable time after placement, the training in compensatory skills, communicative skills, orientation and mobility, and social adjustment skills, and the vocational or career counseling required for those students to succeed in classroom settings and to derive lasting, practical benefits from the education in the school district;...

Thus, TEA requires that the skills listed on the "ARD/IEP or IFSP Supplement for a Student with a Visual Impairment" must be evaluated and addressed by the IEP team.

How can school district personnel address these skills?

- Some skills can be addressed in regular education classes such as homemaking class with modification/accommodation assistance from VI teachers.
- Some skills can be addressed in special education classes such as PPCD and life skills classes.
- VI teachers and O&M specialists can provide direct service in these skill areas during the school day, after school hours or in the summer.
- Parents can assist with developing these skills at home.
- Students can attend summer sessions or weekend sessions at the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired.
- **Students can participate in the Region 10 “Real Life” Addressing the ECC Program.**

The importance of the Expanded Core Curriculum cannot be over emphasized if students with visual impairments are to be empowered with the scope of cognitive, motor, social, and organizational tools necessary for success in post-secondary endeavors.

It is the policy of Region 10 Education Service Center not to discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender or handicap in its vocational programs, services or activities as required by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended; Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972; and Section 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. Region 10 Education Service Center will take steps to ensure that lack of English language skills will not be a barrier to admission and participation in all educational programs and services.