Canadian National Standards for the Education of Children and Youth Who are Blind or Visually Impaired, Including Those with Additional Disabilities

2017 Updated Edition

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Executive Summary

The following document has been developed based on the original 2003 Canadian National Standards and existing research outlining the unique learning needs of students who are blind or visually impaired. Throughout the revision of this document educators, parents/caregivers, and other professionals in the field of visual impairment and blindness were consulted.

This document provides important information about the unique learning needs of students who are blind or visually impaired in Canada. The term visually impaired is used throughout this document, but it should be noted that terms may vary by province and situation and can include terms such as partially sighted, low vision, or legally blind (see Appendix C). The essential disability-specific skills required for students who are blind or visually impaired (i.e., the Expanded Core Curriculum) are outlined in this document. The fourteen standards in this document are based on what research indicates is necessary to ensure students who are blind or visually impaired, including those with additional disabilities, receive quality and equitable educational programs.

The standards that need to be achieved address the importance of the following:

1. School-based teams that include participation from qualified professionals in the field of visual impairment and blindness
2. Parents/caregivers and students as essential team members
3. Assessment
4. The type and frequency of instruction based on assessed need
5. The development of individual program plans
6. Equal access to programs and services
7. Accessibility of alternate format materials
8. Assistive technology
9. Accessible digital information (e.g., Internet, educational software)
10. An array of programming options to support learning in areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum
11. Early intervention services
12. Comprehensive transition planning
13. Student empowerment, socio-emotional and physical development
14. Collaboration across service providers and agencies

Within this document, each of the fourteen standards are stated and then followed by indicators of effective programming. These standards are useful for parents/caregivers, schools, districts, special education administrators, and Ministries of Education when making educational decisions for students who are blind or visually impaired. The implementation of these standards will support the oversight and maintenance of essential and equitable programming and outcomes for students who are blind or visually impaired across Canada, with the indicators serving as a means to more specifically evaluate the quality of this programming.

Foreword

This document was originally written in 2003 to address important educational considerations associated with blindness and visual impairment. Many of the issues which were relevant in 2003 are still cause for concern today. These include:

- A need for more qualified teachers of students who are blind or visually impaired and orientation and mobility specialists. There is a critical shortage of available teachers and open positions to allow for quality programming and services.
- Approaches to special education service delivery for students from higher-incidence exceptional populations may not always be validly applied to services for students from lower-incidence exceptional populations such as visual impairment. The presence of visual impairment creates a set of conditions that require specialized learning tools and strategies in addition to what is available to typically sighted peers. Without adequate instruction in the use of these tools and strategies, students with visual impairments are at risk of not achieving their full learning potential.

The revision of the Canadian National Standards began with a sub-committee in British Columbia who made initial revisions and then opened up the conversation to stakeholders across Canada. Teachers of students with visual impairments, orientation and mobility specialists, special education administrators, service providers in visual impairment, parents/caregivers of children with visual impairments, and consumers from across the country provided input via a structured survey on the relevance of the standards and the indicators of effectiveness. Interested individuals also provided contact information to be part of the Shared Vision Canada committee working on the revision. Feedback from the survey was reviewed in the committee and used to make additional revisions. The full document was then shared within the stakeholder network soliciting additional comments and edits. The final draft was presented at the Seeing Beyond the Horizon 2016 national conference with an invitation for final comments. See Appendix B for additional details regarding the revision timeline.

The standards outlined in this document are a baseline of quality educational programming for Canadian students with visual impairments. The standards are intended to provide disability-specific guidance to complement existing general and special education provincial policies, guidelines, and standards in order to ensure that children, wherever they live across the country, have access to the programs and services required to meet their unique learning needs.

Introduction

In Canada, the primary mode of educational service delivery for students who are blind or visually impaired, including those with additional disabilities, is an inclusive program in a school in the student's home community (Zuvela, 2009). The loss or impairment of visual access to the environment can have a profound impact on growth and development (Warren & Hatton, 2003). These impacts are particularly complex as they relate to the student's ability to access formal and informal learning opportunities at school, home, and in the community. Given the low incidence of blindness and visual impairment among children and youth, parents/caregivers, educators, and administrators planning for early intervention and educational programs for these children seek direction in the provision of essential programs and services. This works to ensure individuals who are blind or visually impaired are provided the opportunity to reach their potential as members of the community capable of making meaningful contributions. The *Canadian National Standards for the Education of Children and Youth Who are Blind or Visually Impaired, Including Those with Additional Disabilities* are intended to provide this direction through a series of standards and indicators of effective practice.

Children and Young People who are Blind or Visually Impaired

Children and youth who are blind or visually impaired are a heterogeneous population of learners (Hatton, Ivy, & Boyer, 2013). While these individuals share a common trait of some degree of visual impairment, the individual's functioning can be determined by a broad spectrum of characteristics such as cognitive ability, level of independence, physical agility, severity of disability, and the presence of additional disabilities (Jan, Heaven, Matsuba, Langley, & Anthony, 2013). The traditional definition of visual impairment or blindness is grounded in medical terminology and refers to a deficit in visual functioning resulting from an ocular or neurological condition affecting the visual system. This does not include students with visual perceptual or visual processing difficulties unless they also have an identified visual impairment as described above.

On their own, medical definitions of visual impairment provide limited guidance for supporting effective learning. From an educational perspective, the severity of the loss of functional vision is generally used to establish that a student meets the qualification criteria as a student who is visually impaired in a given province, but in practice this is only one aspect for consideration in assessment and program planning.

More importantly, intervention for a child or young person who is blind or visually impaired is based on the degree to which that individual can access, assimilate, and respond to the wealth of sensory information encountered through daily experience (Ferrell, 2011). Any child who has limited access to visual information associated with an identified impairment of ocular functioning or the brain's visual system may experience challenges with any number of daily activities (Lueck, Chen, Kekelis, & Hartmann, 2010). Research and practice have identified

typical instructional and support services critical to mitigate the impact of visual impairment on learning and development (see Holbrook, Kamei-Hannan, & McCarthy, 2017). However, each child and young person will require individualized programs and services that consider that learner's unique constellation of strengths and areas of need.

Qualified Teachers of Students who are Blind or Visually Impaired (TSVI)

Between provinces, variability exists in the requirements for education professionals to qualify as TSVIs. In some provinces, a Masters degree from an approved university program focusing on the education of students who are blind or visually impaired is required. In other jurisdictions, a set of endorsement courses offered at the university level are required. Regardless of the route an education professional takes to become as TSVI, knowledge and skills should minimally meet the Council for Exceptional Children's *Initial Specialty Set: Blind and Visual Impairments* (CEC, 2015). Some jurisdictions have developed additional standards for the required scope of TSVI knowledge and skills (e.g., *Standards of Practice for Educators of Children and Youth who are Blind or Partially Sighted;* APSEA, 2014) in order to ensure students who are blind or visually impaired are receiving the specialized services they require. This knowledge includes understanding visual conditions and their implications, an ability to teach braille literacy, an ability to conduct specialized assessments, and an ability to teach students disability-specific content needed to access the curriculum and gain essential life skills that cannot be learned incidentally through vision. Specific CEC standards for all special educators and the initial specialty set can be accessed at: http://community.cec.sped.org/dvi/professionalstandards

Qualified Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Specialists

Orientation and mobility (O&M) is "the teaching of the concepts, skills, and techniques necessary for a person with a visual impairment to travel safely, efficiently, and gracefully through any environment and under all environmental situations and conditions (Jacobson, 2013, p. 4). This instruction is provided by qualified O&M specialists (Wall Emerson & Corn, 2006). O&M qualification requires, in general, the completion of a postsecondary program in O&M that includes a supervised internship. Specific certification requirements for O&M specialists vary between provinces in Canada. After completing an approved postsecondary program in O&M, the O&M specialist may seek certification through the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP) and are required to pass a certification exam. Once certified by ACVREP, the O&M specialist will have achieved the professional designation of a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS). Certified O&M specialists maintain their certification through the acquisition of approved continuing education units.

Why Are Standards Needed?

Education is a fundamental right of all Canadians. Equitable and inclusive education must

address the unique needs that are inherent to the experience of blindness or visual impairment as a fundamental part of a student's educational programming. Service providers, educators, and parents/caregivers need to be knowledgeable about the impacts that visual impairment may have on learning and development. These standards are intended to foster an understanding of the unique educational programming needs of students who are blind or visually impaired and of the indicators of quality programming and services targeted to address those needs. In addition, these standards highlight the roles of the essential personnel required to plan, implement, and assess the effectiveness of this programming.

Therefore, this document outlines the standards for educational programs applicable across Canada and will:

- Help to establish a common language and understanding of the terminology associated with the very specialized field of childhood visual impairment and blindness.
- Assist teachers of students who are blind or visually impaired, classroom /subject teachers, education assistants, parents/caregivers, students and other educational team members to understand their role and its implications relevant to educational programming for students.
- Provide guidelines with respect to expectations for student performance, assessment, developmental and educational needs, instructional and programming needs, and rehabilitation services.
- Support the development of parent and professional networks across Canada, which will facilitate the sharing of resources and expertise (e.g., support and mentorship, information about assistive technology, access to materials, braille literacy issues).
- Support the development of teacher education programs for teachers of students who are blind or visually impaired, consistency in the instructional content of teacher preparation programs, collaboration among these university programs, and the identification of priorities for professional development common to this group of specialists.
- Assist parents/caregivers, teachers, and administrators to identify the best program options for children who are blind or visually impaired and support their efforts in obtaining or establishing the required programs and services at school and through partnerships with community-based service providers.

Unique Educational Needs of Students who are Blind or Visually Impaired

In order to participate fully within the educational environment students who are blind or visually impaired require instruction in disability-specific knowledge and skills such as assistive technology, use of low vision devices, career and life management, social interaction, independent living and personal management, recreation and leisure, self-determination, and O&M. This disability-specific curriculum for children and youth who are blind or visually impaired is known as the Expanded Core Curriculum and allows these students to effectively access the core curriculum and reach their potential as contributing citizens (Hatlen, 1996; Koenig & Holbrook, 2000). Since access to instruction in the skills outlined in the Expanded Core Curriculum is essential, the National Standards advocates for their incorporation into all

programs for children and youth who are blind or visually impaired in Canada (Botsford, 2013; Sapp, 2010; Wolffe & Kelly, 2011).

The Expanded Core Curriculum

Children who are blind or visually impaired have the same need for intellectual stimulation, social acceptance, emotional support, physical activity, self-efficacy, and autonomy as their typically sighted peers. Therefore, the outcomes of formal education that are prescribed for all children enrolled in our schools will be appropriate for children with visual impairments. In addition to these expectations, children who are blind and visually impaired have unique learning needs associated with skills required to mitigate the impact of vision loss on learning and development. The extent to which individuals with visual impairments can achieve meaningful participation in our society is, in part, related to the effectiveness of their educational programs in meeting their unique learning needs. The Expanded Core Curriculum recognizes that, despite this high degree of programming individualization, there are several common content areas in which students who are blind or visually impaired require direct, systematic instruction from qualified professionals in order to compensate for their decreased ability to acquire these knowledge and skills independently through incidental visual experience. These content areas are outlined in the sections that follow.

Compensatory Access or functional academic skills, including communication modes refer to those skills needed to access the core curriculum presented in the general classroom (i.e., compensatory skills), skills needed by students with multiple disabilities to enhance their ability to participate in home, school and community (i.e., functional skills), and an array of communication skills. Depending on the student's amount of functional vision, additional cognitive and/or physical needs, and the task to be completed, communication needs of students with visual impairment will vary. For example, some children may use one or more of the following (to name a few): braille, enlarged print, regular print with low vision optical aids, sign language, regular print with the use of optical aids, tactile books/symbol systems, a calendar system, and recorded materials (Allman & Lewis, 2014; Hatlen,1996). Examples of other compensatory or functional academic skills include concept development, spatial awareness, keyboarding skills, listening skills, study and organizational skills, use of the abacus, and tactile discrimination skills. The acquisition of everyday concepts and practical knowledge usually acquired through incidental learning by children who are sighted requires specific instruction for students who are blind or visually impaired to ensure they are building their knowledge based on accurate information.

Sensory Efficiency skills include instruction in the use of residual vision, hearing, touch, taste, and smell in order to efficiently access and participate in the educational program. Learning how to integrate all the senses and select the appropriate tools and strategies to counter the impact of any sensory loss is also integral to this area. For example, a child's ability to interpret visual information is affected by many variables (e.g., the type and severity of vision loss, cognitive ability, experiential knowledge, environmental factors such as lighting). With instruction on how to accurately interpret visual information, use low vision devices efficiently, and scan and locate

systematically, a student with low vision can complete visual tasks as efficiently and effectively as possible. In addition, learning how to incorporate auditory and tactual information with what is seen will support efficiency and understanding of the environment. Similarly, students who are blind will benefit from many experiences to integrate and interpret tactile, auditory, and other sensory information to understand their surroundings and efficiently complete tasks.

Assistive Technology is specialized software and hardware that enables a student who is blind or visually impaired to access mainstream devices and information, participate in age-appropriate activities, access the school curriculum, and complete tasks independently or with minimal assistance. The term "assistive technology" refers to a broad range of high tech and low tech solutions such as electronic video magnifiers, low vision devices, computers with refreshable braille display, screen readers, braille embossers, software used to vary print size, large screen monitors, talking calculators, global positioning systems (GPS), optical character recognition (OCR), and specialized communication access technology for students with additional disabilities. Instruction in the use of assistive technology begins in the preschool years and evolves as the needs of the student change and as technology advances. Mastery of assistive and mainstream technologies provides access to digital content, contributes to the development of literacy and academic success, facilitates social interaction among peers, encourages independence, and is essential to future education and employment.

Orientation and Mobility (O&M) is an area of instruction focusing on students' ability to know where they are in relation to their environment (school and community) and to travel safely, efficiently, purposefully and as independently as possible throughout this environment (Wiener, Welsh & Blasch, 2010). Good orientation and mobility skills are highly correlated with the degree of independence and employment achieved by students later in life (Cmar, 2015). Developing body awareness, directionality, spatial awareness, and practical knowledge associated with the characteristics of a given environment increases the probability that the student will be actively involved in age-appropriate activities with peers. Problem-solving strategies essential to travel in both familiar and unfamiliar environments, urban and rural areas and in various kinds of weather are all essential to the development of independence and self-esteem. Students who have low vision need to learn to interpret both visual and auditory information and may use an optical device to access information. The use of a white cane or a dog guide is essential for some students who cannot rely upon the accuracy of the visual information they receive or for those who are blind. Students who are blind or visually impaired with additional disabilities need to have orientation and mobility instruction that addresses their specific needs and requirements of their daily routines. Orientation and mobility is taught by professionals who have completed certified programs in this very specialized area.

Independent Living skills and personal management skills (commonly referred to as "daily living skills") includes all the tasks and functions people perform to take care of themselves to live as independently as possible (Bardin, 2014; Hatlen, 1996). Curriculum designed to address the development of independent living skills to accommodate the lack of visual input includes instruction in areas such as personal hygiene, food preparation, money and time management, home management, organization of personal belongings and space. While similar skills may be

taught within the regular school curriculum, increased opportunities for meaningful and frequent practice is required by students who are blind or visually impaired. The content of the general curriculum is often based on the assumption of the presence of a basic level of knowledge, acquired incidentally through vision and often focuses on techniques that are visually biased. As with the skills of social interaction, students who are blind or visually impaired need direct, sequential, specialized instruction by knowledgeable people. Good independent living skills are correlated with the achievement of greater independence (Pogrund & Fazzi, 2012).

Social Interaction skills are essential if students are to develop friendships with their classmates and participate in activities typically associated with school-age children, whether educational or extracurricular. Having good interpersonal communication skills is also highly correlated with employability in adults (Gold & Shaw, 2007). For children who are sighted, social skills are primarily learned incidentally through interaction with family members and peers. Most of this learning occurs through observation, imitation and incidental experiences that are part of everyday routines. For children who are blind or visually impaired, this information must be provided through timely, insightful, and sequential instruction. Information associated with non-verbal communication (e.g., gestures, body language, facial expressions) or cultural practices (e.g., how close to stand to the person with whom you are speaking) must be made available to students who are blind or visually impaired.

Recreation and Leisure skills and experiences provide the same benefits for students who are blind or visually impaired as they do for their peers who are sighted (e.g., healthy active lifestyle, fitness and health benefits, shared peer interests, lifelong hobbies). Mastering prerequisite skills, including the development of physical literacy, is essential for students who are blind or visually impaired to be fully included in recreational activities, including physical education class. Many of the motor skills learned during the rough and tumble play of childhood activities may not develop naturally in students who are blind or visually impaired without direct opportunities and instruction. The provision of specific and timely instruction and opportunities to be introduced to and practice newly acquired skills will ensure students who are blind or visually impaired derive pleasure from participation in an array of recreational and leisure activities throughout their lifetime.

Career Education skills provide students with information about the world of work, career options, and an overview of skills necessary to be successfully employed. For students who are blind or visually impaired there are many additional program components, which need to be addressed (e.g., accommodations necessary to complete specific jobs, access to the appropriate assistive technology, self-advocacy and problem solving skills including those to deal effectively with negative attitudes toward individuals with disabilities). Frequently, students who are blind or visually impaired are unaware of the array of career options because they do not see the variety of workers in their environment or because adults around them are uninformed about the career opportunities available to those who are blind or visually impaired. Employment statistics from Canada show that individuals who are blind or visually impaired have an employment rate of only 32% and that those individuals are underemployed (CNIB, 2009). Without specific and timely intervention to address career development issues, students

who are blind or visually impaired encounter significant barriers to successful employment.

Self-Determination involves a student's knowledge of his/her own abilities and limitations as well as learning how to set one's own goals, self-evaluate, make decisions and participate fully in the world. Development of self-confidence, positive self-esteem, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills is essential to this area. Self-advocacy skills are an important part of this area. Self-determination has been highly correlated with success in daily living as well as employment (McDonnall & Crudden, 2009). If students develop strong self-determination skills, they will be better equipped to set and achieve their personal and educational goals.

National Standards for the Education of Children and Youth who are Blind or Visually Impaired Including those with Additional Disabilities

Standard One – The Educational Team

All students who are blind or visually impaired will have a school-based planning team with the mandate to assess, plan, implement, monitor and evaluate programs and services for these students. A qualified teacher of students who are blind or visually impaired (TSVI) and a qualified orientation and mobility (O&M) specialist will be members of this team.

Indicators of Effective Programming

A. Members of the school-based planning team will include parents/caregivers, the student, classroom/subject teachers, administrators, the TSVI, the O&M specialist, and other professionals involved with assessment and/or programming with the student.

B. Additional members are added to the school-based planning team as needed. These may include educational assistants (if present) and such professionals as an occupational therapist, speech and language pathologist, physiotherapist, school psychologist, behaviour specialist, nurse, social worker, or assistive technology consultant.

C. School-based planning team members have their roles and responsibilities clearly identified in a written document outlining the student's individualized program plan.

D. The school-based planning team develops goals and objectives for the student at the beginning of each school year. The student's progress is routinely monitored and evaluated. Changes to the student's individualized program plan are made in response to the student's progress during the academic year.

E. A qualified TSVI identifies programming needs through assessment, educates the team about the effect of visual impairment or blindness on learning and development. The TSVI also sets appropriate expectations for progress and performance, provides strategies to address assessed learning needs and provides direct instruction in the Expanded Core Curriculum.

F. The TSVI should be included as a key member in all individualized program planning meetings and in some cases may be the case manager for students who are blind or visually impaired.

G. An O&M specialist is an integral part of the school-based planning team and works to integrate instruction within the child's daily routines and the home, school, and community environments.

Standard Two – Parent/Caregiver and Student Participation

Parents/Caregivers and students are involved as valued and fully participating members of the school-based planning team.

Indicators of Effective Programming

A. Parents/Caregivers and students are contributing members of the school-based planning team and have regular contact and a full understanding of the role of each member. All team members including parents/caregivers and students strive to achieve mutual respect for one another.

B. Parents/Caregivers and students are involved in identifying and prioritizing goals and objectives incorporated into the individualized education plan.

C. Parents/Caregivers receive information and training to assist them to provide instruction and monitoring of disability-specific skills in the home and community (e.g., independent living skills, braille, O&M skills).

D. Parents/Caregivers and students are knowledgeable and connected to relevant community services, recreational, and extracurricular activities including those specifically adapted for participants who are blind or visually impaired.

E. The TSVI and school-based team assist the parent where necessary in scheduling and coordinating of medical and therapy appointments.

F. Parents/Caregivers are encouraged to share all ophthalmological reports with the TSVI and school based team.

G. Parents/Caregivers are consulted and updated in a timely manner and are asked to provide permission prior to any testing or major decisions.

H. Families are provided with linguistically and culturally responsive supports to ensure meaningful participation in program planning.

Standard Three - Assessment

The programming and services needed by students who are blind or visually impaired are determined through assessment conducted by a qualified teacher of students who are blind or visually impaired (TSVI), qualified orientation and mobility (O&M) specialist, and other professionals identified by the school-based planning team.

Indicators of Effective Programming

A. All students who are blind or visually impaired receive regular ophthalmological exams, and students with low vision receive periodic clinical low vision exams.

B. The TSVI and the O&M specialist routinely assess students who are blind or visually impaired in all areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum.

C. Students who are blind or visually impaired requiring psychoeducational assessment are assessed using tests designed specifically for this population of learners or that are adequately adapted. The TSVI acts as a resource to the school psychologist when determining the validity of assessment tools or individual test items.

D. Students who are blind or visually impaired as part of their educational programming are routinely evaluated using the process of learning media assessment. The initial learning media assessment should be conducted for all students who are blind or visually impaired prior to the initiation of formal literacy instruction. The school-based planning team established to design, implement and evaluate the student's individualized program plan examines and analyzes assessment results to make an informed decision of the appropriate learning media. Assessment is ongoing and learning media decisions are re-evaluated on a yearly basis or more frequently as needed.

E. Students who are visually impaired routinely receive a functional vision assessment conducted by a TSVI, which profiles the ways in which that student uses their vision in the learning environment and is used to guide program planning.

F. Students with cerebral/cortical visual impairment (CVI) have a unique range of characteristics that impact how they process visual information. These students require a comprehensive assessment conducted by a TSVI to inform targeted interventions.

G. Students who are blind or visually impaired participate in the same academic assessments as their peers with provision of adaptations for their specific requirements. This includes province-wide standardized testing. Results from assessment are interpreted with caution and consider the impact of any accommodations or adaptations.

H. In the absence of other disabilities students who are blind or visually impaired are expected to perform at a level consistent with the provincial curriculum.

I. Students who are blind or visually impaired with additional disabilities receive assessment from qualified professionals identified by the school-based planning team.

J. Assessment results and their educational implications are explained to the school based team and discussed collaboratively with input from the parents/caregivers and student.

Standard Four – Service Delivery

The type and frequency of instruction and the services provided by a qualified teacher of students with visual impairments (TSVI) and qualified orientation and mobility (O&M) specialists will be based on the regularly assessed needs of the student and the level of support required within the home, school, and community environments.

Indicators of Effective Programming

A. Students who are visually impaired (i.e., those who have low vision) have the same right as do students who are blind to equal access to the instruction and services provided by the TSVI/O&M specialist based on assessed needs.

B. Students receive instruction from a TSVI in any or all areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum as identified through initial assessment and on-going monitoring and reassessment.

C. In order to promote an inclusive school environment, the TSVI provides on-going training and strategies to address the unique learning needs of students with visual impairments to classroom teachers, educational assistants, parents/caregivers, peers, and other professionals and school staff. The content of this training is determined by the student's unique sensory profile and the impact of visual impairment on learning and social and emotional development. This training should include strategies to address the student's unique learning needs.

D. TSVIs are provided with ongoing professional development opportunities to ensure that their knowledge of new programs, strategies, and research addressing the educational programming needs of students who are blind or visually impaired remains current.

E. The workloads assigned to the TSVI and O&M specialist are determined using a formal caseload analysis tool which considers the various roles and responsibilities inherent to the TSVI or O&M workload. These are informed by the assessed needs of individual students, the direct instruction time required for each student, preparation time, travel time, related duties such as classroom teacher and parent/caregiver consultation, organizational and administrative responsibilities, and time for participation in continuing professional development.

F. Education authorities employ a sufficient number of TSVIs and O&M specialists to ensure appropriate workloads for these professionals and, in turn, service levels that match the assessed needs of students.

Standard Five – Individualized Planning

The school-based planning team will develop an individualized education plan (IEP). All

components of the Expanded Core Curriculum will be considered for inclusion in this plan. The individualized program plan becomes a working document for the school-based planning team for use throughout the year.

Indicators of Effective Programming

A. The school-based planning team gathers information pertinent to the development of the student's individualized education plan (e.g., personal information, medical information, current level of performance (including strengths and challenges), assessment information).

B. The individualized education plan is a collaborative effort involving participation from all members of the school-based team. The TSVI should always be included in this team as well as the O&M specialist for students receiving O&M instruction.

C. The goals and objectives in the IEP are specific to the unique learning needs of students who are blind or visually impaired in the areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum. The IEP also outlines the modifications or accommodations necessary to ensure access to the provincial curriculum, and/or individualized programs necessary to address other disability-specific needs.

D. Students who use braille and are learning to read receive daily braille literacy instruction from a TSVI.

E. The individualized education plan becomes a working document for the school-based planning team to monitor progress and adjust programming as necessary.

Standard Six – Access to Services

All children who are blind or visually impaired, regardless of the presence and severity of additional disabilities, will have equitable access in a timely manner to the programs and services provided by qualified teachers of students with visual impairments (TSVI) and by qualified orientation and mobility (O&M) specialists.

Indicators of Effective Programming

A. A TSVI and an O&M specialist are regular contributing members of the school-based planning team for students who are blind or visually impaired with additional disabilities.

B. Goals and objectives that address areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum are integrated into the individualized programs and daily routines of students who are blind or visually impaired with additional disabilities.

C. The TSVI provides coaching and modelling to parents/caregivers and educators of students who are blind or visually impaired with additional disabilities. In addition, the TSVI provides direct instruction in the areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum.

D. The O&M specialist collaborates with members of the school-based planning team to make adaptations to the home, school, work placement, and other community environments of students who are blind or visually impaired with additional disabilities. In addition, the O&M specialist provides direct instruction to these students in assessed areas of need according to the goals and objectives in the IEP.

Standard Seven – Learning Materials in Alternate Formats

Alternate format materials will be provided for students in the format identified through assessment, determined by a qualified teacher of students with visual impairments (TSVI) in consultation with the members of the school-based planning team. These materials must be provided at the same time as materials are made available to their sighted peers. Students will have the opportunity to request materials in the format of their choice.

Indicators of Effective Programming

A. Students who are blind or visually impaired receive materials in their required alternate format for library collections, the mandated provincial curriculum, teacher prepared materials, leisure reading and extracurricular activities, school notices/announcements and report cards. Students using braille should have access to materials produced in Unified English Braille Code (UEB) as well as access to special codes as required (e.g., music braille code).

B. Students are provided with opportunities to create their own material adaptations and to select the most appropriate tool(s) to meet task demands.

C. The production and distribution of materials in alternate format are coordinated to ensure efficient access.

D. Materials shall be of high quality, and produced according to production standards specific to the alternate format in question.

E. Students receive materials in alternate format at the same time as classmates receive their materials.

F. Provincial alternate format centres receive textbook publisher electronic files for all textbooks purchased by provincial Ministries of Education.

G. The classroom teacher and the TSVI plan and coordinate to ensure materials are

provided well in advance to give adequate time for adaptation.

H. Education authorities/school districts engage individuals certified in Unified English Braille Code (UEB) to produce materials in braille format as required.

Standard Eight – Assistive Technology

Assistive technology needs of the student are determined through comprehensive assessments completed by the teacher of students with visual impairments (TSVI) and others with experience/qualifications in this area. Assistive technology will be made available for use in the home, school, work placement, and the community. An appropriate level of instruction and technical support is necessary to ensure the student is able to efficiently use assistive technology and incorporate it into everyday activities.

Indicators of Effective Programming

A. The school-based planning team includes an individual with expertise in assistive technology to provide consultation and assessment relevant to the student's use of assistive technology.

B. A comprehensive assistive technology assessment is completed to determine the needs of the student. This assessment is routinely updated.

C. Students are provided with comparable exposure to and experiences with technology as their same-age peers.

D. The TSVI, classroom teacher, educational assistant, and parents/caregivers are provided with information/training in the use of the assigned assistive technologies to ensure the student has the support to master their use.

E. Students' devices and software are kept current to ensure the maximum level of independent access to information.

F. Students have access to their assistive technology in school, at home, and in the community. Education authorities/school districts provide necessary devices and collaborate with other specialist agencies/ministries who may provide additional or supplementary devices.

Standard Nine – Accessibility of Digital Content

Educational software and electronic and multimedia materials created following the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) are selected for use in the classroom and are made

accessible for students who are blind or visually impaired so that they have equitable access to essential learning opportunities.

Indicators of Effective Programming

A. Current accessibility standards are followed in the design of new online content, multimedia presentations, or mobile apps developed and/or hosted by education authorities/school districts.

B. Students enrolled in online courses are able to access all course materials (e.g., video clips, online discussion forums) to the same degree as their peers.

C. Students who are blind or visually impaired have access to simulated lab experiments using current assistive technology.

D. Educational materials that include video presentations should provide a described video option for students who are blind or visually impaired.

E. Students who are blind or visually impaired use the same educational software as their peers or similar accessible software to allow for independent completion of academic tasks.

F. Research sites, databases, and other electronic resources subscribed to by education authorities/school districts are accessible to students who are blind or visually impaired.

G. District/school-based IT staff work collaboratively with TSVIs, assistive technology specialists and students or other individuals with visual impairments to resolve inaccessible content or other identified accessibility barriers. In the case of persistent inaccessibility, every effort should be made to create an equitable experience for understanding the concept being taught.

Standard Ten – Programming Options

Students will have a full array of programming options including short-term intensive training opportunities to address areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum that enhance or supplement existing programming.

Indicators of Effective Programming

A. Students who are blind or visually impaired have the opportunity to access short-term intensive training options, particularly in the areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum (e.g., Internet research skills using voice access technology, O&M in an urban environment).

B. Additional programming and intensive short-term option decisions are made based on the

assessed needs of the student, input from parents/caregivers and the TSVI, and recommendations of other members of the school-based planning team. Programming placement decisions are appropriately documented in the IEP and re-evaluated as the educational needs of the student change over time.

C. Schools/districts work with other agencies to explore relevant programming opportunities within the community. This includes planning for transition to postsecondary education or employment opportunities.

Standard Eleven – Early Intervention Services

Children who are blind or visually impaired and their families will be provided with specialized early intervention services and home support to address the implications of visual impairment on learning and development. Early intervention programming and family support will be initiated at the time of diagnosis.

Indicators of Effective Programming

A. Children who are born blind or visually impaired as well as children who acquire visual impairment before the age of five receive specialized early intervention services as soon as possible after diagnosis.

B. Early intervention services are provided on a frequent and regular basis.

C. Services are provided by professionals who have formal qualifications in both early childhood education and the education of children who are blind or visually impaired. Alternatively, services may be provided collaboratively by professionals from each of these professional communities.

D. Parents/Caregivers are provided with information about local and national parent support groups for families with children who are blind or visually impaired, including contact information for such organizations.

E. The provision of services from various organizations is coordinated in conjunction with the family and various service providers.

F. Goals and objectives designed to support the achievement of developmental milestones are based on assessment by professionals with expertise in blindness and visual impairment.

G. Parents and caregivers (e.g., daycare workers) are provided with training to assist them in addressing the unique developmental needs of a child who is blind or visually impaired.

H. The TSVI, O&M specialist, and other qualified specialists are directly involved in helping

the family and child make the transition into the school system. The transition planning process begins at least one year before entering kindergarten.

Standard Twelve – Transition Planning

A comprehensive transition plan must be developed for students who are blind or visually impaired including those with additional disabilities each time they are moving to a significantly different learning environment or placement (e.g., preschool to kindergarten, school graduation to the workforce or postsecondary education, new school environments).

Indicators of Effective Programming

A. A transition planning team comprised of parents/caregivers, the TSVI, the O&M specialist, educators, relevant support staff, representatives from other organizations involved with the student, and the student, where appropriate, works collaboratively on an established timeline to plan for the student's new placement.

B. The student is actively engaged in the transition planning process and is given opportunities to provide input regarding preferences whenever possible.

C. The student's transition plan includes information pertinent to the skills and training necessary to succeed in the new environment (e.g., assistive technology, O&M, independent living skills) as well as resources available (e.g., scholarships available, supported work personnel). This transition plan is included in the IEP and is reviewed on a routine basis.

D. Transition planning goals are designed and programming is implemented on a timeline that allows for skill acquisition and supports to be in place prior to making the transition.

Standard Thirteen – Socio-Emotional and Physical Development

Students who are blind or visually impaired are provided opportunities for socio-emotional and physical development in order to feel safe, take responsibility, lead healthy and active lifestyles, and make positive contributions to their school and wider community.

Indicators of Effective Programming

A. Students are treated as individuals and feel valued, safe, and have membership in the school and wider community.

B. The school and local community are supportive environments where students are afforded opportunities to be as independent as possible and are free to take appropriate risks as they pursue their goals.

C. Students are provided opportunities to participate and to meaningfully contribute to the school and community environment.

D. Curricula promoting socio-emotional development are available and accessible to students who are blind and visually impaired to support development of a positive self-concept and to promote well-being.

E. The educational programming of students who are blind or visually impaired includes direct instruction in skills for self-determination.

F. Unnecessary physical or attitudinal barriers are removed. The physical school environment demonstrates inclusion and safety through the principles of universal design (e.g., braille signage, high contrast, clear pathways).

G. Students who are blind or visually impaired have access to mental health services that are sensitive to the unique psychosocial impacts of visual impairment. The TSVI or other qualified professional collaborates with the mental health provider to provide relevant context and information.

H. Students are given opportunities to connect with peers and adult mentors who are also blind or visually impaired to promote confidence and positive self-concept and to work on goal setting and career education. Opportunities are established to connect with mentors.

I. Students are provided opportunities to develop fundamental movement and physical literacy skills in order to participate in fun, nurturing physical activities that set them up to lead a healthy active lifestyle. The TSVI and/or O&M specialist provide information about community organizations and resources, and training on adaptive instruction to support and advocate for full participation.

Standard Fourteen – Service Collaboration

All service providers including government (education, health, etc.) and non-government agencies, consumer organizations, and advocacy groups have structures in place to ensure they are working collaboratively for the development, growth, and nurturing of students who are blind or visually impaired.

Indicators of Effective Programming

A. Partnerships between organizations exist to ensure services are comprehensive, of high quality, and are provided in a timely manner by qualified professionals regardless of location in Canada.

B. An infrastructure is in place to facilitate the efficient sharing of best practices and resources (e.g., professional expertise, new developments in assistive technology, educational materials).

C. Well-structured collaboration plans developed by service providers, consumer organizations, and advocacy groups encourage coordinated professional development opportunities.

D. Ongoing research is conducted to build an evidence base to guide program development and service delivery.

E. Teacher preparation programs and recruitment incentives are in place to address the shortage of qualified TSVI and O&M specialists.

F. Succession planning is in place to ensure uninterrupted TSVI service levels for students who are blind or visually impaired.

G. A national collaborative strategy for advocacy is in place to advocate with and for students who are blind or visually impaired, their parents/caregivers, and educators.

H. A common language is in place for use in the field of visual impairment and blindness.

I. Regional and national parent organizations for students who are blind or visually impaired are established and contribute to initiatives that promote high quality educational programming for their children.

J. Systems and assessment models are in place to support, monitor, and evaluate the effective implementation of these standards and to facilitate the collection of outcome data for students who are blind or visually impaired.

Conclusion

Educational mandates are the responsibility of each province or territory in Canada. The National Standards presented in this document are intended to apply to all students in Canada who are blind or visually impaired. It is acknowledged that implementation may be different in each province, however, the principles of these standards should be common throughout the country. Visual impairment and blindness is a low incidence disability and therefore meeting these standards for small numbers of students or for students in rural or remote areas creates special challenges which may require additional planning, collaboration and resources.

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Endorsements

Appendix A

History of Canadian National Standards Development

In 1998, a group of 125 representatives from various fields concerned with vision health, visual impairment and blindness came together in Toronto, Ontario to give consideration to an impending crisis associated with vision loss and the scarcity of essential support services. This gathering, the National Consultation on the Crisis in Vision Loss, was comprised of stakeholders representing ophthalmology, optometry, industry, research, rehabilitation, education, first nations, consumers and representatives of disease specific organizations. Out of this National Consultation, the National Coalition for Vision Health (NCVH) was formed with a Board representing all major stakeholders, including education.

The Coalition worked to address many issues associated with vision loss including the following specifically related to education:

- the need for National standards for educational service to children who are blind or visually impaired
- the need for more qualified teachers of students who are blind or visually impaired and the imminent crisis in the number of available teachers, with approximately half of the current teachers retiring in less than ten years.

The original version of this standards document was developed by the National Coalition for Vision Health Education Committee. The document was completed by 2003 and has been disseminated and used as a guide to promote quality and equitable education for students who are blind and visually impaired across provinces.

Members of the Original National Coalition for Vision Health Education Committee

Mary-Maureen Atkin, Professor
Instructor for the Blind and Visually Impaired Program
Mohawk College

Robert Fenton, Lawyer
Calgary City Police

Cay Holbrook, Associate Professor
University of British Columbia

Ann MacCuspie, Committee Co Chair
Director of Programs for Students
who are Blind or Visually Impaired
Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority, 2000

Linda Mamer, Canadian Representative
Association for the Education and Rehabilitation
of the Blind and Visually Impaired

Dianne McConnell, Committee Co Chair
Director of Educational Services
Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools

Roy McConnell, Teacher/Parent Blind Child
Parkland School Division

Charlene Muller, Executive Director
National Coalition for Vision Health

Karen Nagel, Retired Teacher of Students
who are Blind or Visually Impaired

Pam Rannelli, Program Supervisor
Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority

Debbie Sitar, Vision Consultant
Ministry of Education, Manitoba

Linda Studholme, National Director
Rehabilitation and Technology, CNIB

Endorsements of the Original Standards Document

The organizations listed below endorsed the content and principles of the "Canadian National Standards – For the Education of Children and Youth Who are Blind or Visually Impaired, Including Those with Additional Disabilities":

- The National Coalition for Vision Health
- A.E. Baker Foundation
- The Canadian National Institute for the Blind
- Canadian Ophthalmological Society
- Canadian Association Of Optometrists
- Vision Health Research Council
- The Foundation Fighting Blindness
- Association of Canadian University Professors of Ophthalmology
- BC Centre for Epidemiologic & International Ophthalmology, UBC
- Lions Eye Health Program Canada
- MEDEC – Medical Devices Canada
- School of Optometry, University of Montreal

- Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority
- Dr. Dianne Mc Connell
- Assembly of First Nations
- Opticians Association of Canada
- Canadian Institutes of Health Research
- AER – Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (Canada)
- ASVI – Alberta Society for the Visually Impaired
- CAFVI – Canadian Association for Families of Children with Visual Impairments
- VIEWS – For Blind and Visually Impaired Children
- Canadian Deaf Blind and Rubella Association

Appendix B

Timeline of the 2017 Revision of the Canadian National Standards

Fall/Spring 2015:
BC Committee met to develop a plan for the revision of the standards document

Spring/Summer 2015:
A national survey was developed and by the BC Committee to solicit initial revision input. Dissemination was through key provincial contacts and on professional and consumer listservs. Participants were asked to review the standards in the 2003 document, indicate if each were still important and propose any revisions that should be made to the standard. In addition, they were asked to provide any other feedback including other standards that should be considered. An invitation was extended at the end of the survey for anyone wishing to continue working on the process as part of the Shared Vision Canada Standards Committee

The following summarizes the demographics of the respondents:

- Seventy-two individuals completed the standard review and survey
- Nine provinces were represented by the respondents: Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, and Saskatchewan
- Respondents worked for national (5%), provincial (23%), and local organizations/education authorities (71%).
- Main roles were reported as follows:
    - Teacher of Students with Visual Impairment (59%)
    - Orientation and Mobility Specialist (2%)
    - Special Education Administrator with Visual Impairment Background (2%)
    - Special Education Administrator (1%)
    - Parent of a Child who is Blind or Visually Impaired (7%)
    - Alternate Format Resource Center Library or Production Staff (2%)
    - Transcriber (9%)
    - Other (14%)

- Service areas of the respondents were as follows:
    - Large City (42%)
    - Small Town (12%)
    - Rural (4%)
    - Combination (25%)
    - Not Applicable (4%)
    - Other (11%)

Fall 2015/Spring 2016:
Individuals expressing interest in the survey as well as other key stakeholders were extended an invitation to join the Shared Vision Canada Standards Committee. Three teleconference working

group sessions were conducted to accomplish the following:

- Review of survey results and consideration of suggestions made by the respondents
- Updating of the document based on the review and discussion of the standards
- Creation and addition of two new standards
- Review of overall document structure.

The final draft version of the standards was presented at a general session at the Seeing Beyond the Horizon Conference held in Richmond, BC in May 2016. This national conference is attended by professionals in the field of blindness and visual impairment (e.g., teachers of students with visual impairments, orientation and mobility specialists, vision rehabilitation teachers) as well as parents. A table was also set up during the poster sessions for individuals to come and ask questions or engage in a discussion about the standards. A final call for comments was announced, inviting anyone to review the standards and send suggestions, edits or comments by June 30, 2016. Additional feedback was received up until August 31, 2016.

Spring 2017:
Final comments were incorporated into the standards, the introduction and appendices were reviewed and updated and the final version of the standards was sent back to the Shared Vision Canada Standards Committee for a final review.

Date: The Shared Vision Canada Standards Committee approved the final version of the revised *Canadian National Standards for the Education of Children and Youth Who are Blind or Visually Impaired, Including Those with Additional Disabilities*

Ongoing:
Dissemination
Posting of the new document in place of the old version
Obtaining Endorsements

Appendix C

Glossary of Terminology

For consistency in the document, decisions were made about terminology. However, terminology differences and preferences do exist between provinces and territories. The following list defines some of the terms found in the document. It also includes additional terms that may also be encountered when discussing the education of students who are blind or visually impaired. This list is not exhaustive.

Students who are blind or visually impaired- Students who have a visual impairment at a level that qualifies them to receive services. This term was selected to represent the broad spectrum of visual impairment that students may have ranging from total blindness to low vision.

Other terms that indicate varying levels of visual impairment:
Students with visual impairment
Students who are partially sighted
Students who have partial sight
Students with low vision
Students who are functionally blind
Students who are legally blind
Student with vision loss

Teachers of Students who are Blind or Visually Impaired (TSVI)- The specialist teacher qualified to work with students who are blind or visually impaired. This teacher conducts assessments, teaches disability-specific content, and collaborates with the student's educational team. This term was selected to highlight the range of students with whom the teacher works. The acronym TSVI was selected as one of the common, person-first acronyms being used.

Other Terms for Teachers of Students who are Blind or Visually Impaired:
Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (TSVI)
Vision Teachers
Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVI)
Teacher of Students who are Blind
Consultant for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Vision Specialist
Qualified Teacher of the Visually Impaired (QTVI)
TSBVI (Teachers of Students who are Blind or Visually Impaired)

Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Specialist- The specialist who teaches safe and efficient travel skills in the school and community to students who are blind or visually impaired. The level of service received by an O&M specialist should be based on assessed needs.

Other Terms for Orientation and Mobility Specialists:

Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Instructor
Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS)
Note: COMS is a specific certification through the Academy for the Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP). Individuals using this term should have active certification with ACVREP in good standing. Lists of individuals holding this certification can be found at: https://www.acvrep.org/verify

NOMC- National Orientation and Mobility Certification.
Note: NOMC is a specific certification through the National Blindness Professional Certification Board. More information is found at: https://www.nbpcb.org/nomc/

Individualized Education Plan (IEP)- An annually updated special education plan created for a student that includes goals and objectives to meet the student's assessed needs. The document also includes services to be provided. This term was chosen as it is the term used by a majority of the provinces.

Other Common Term:
Individualized Program Plan (IPP)

Learning Media Assessment (LMA)- A dynamic, team based evaluation framework for selecting the appropriate literacy media for a student who is blind or visually impaired. Students should receive an initial LMA prior to the outset of formalized literacy instruction. A continuing LMA should then become part of the student's on-going assessment profile to identify new literacy media needs and to ensure the continued efficiency of the student's learning media.

Functional Vision Assessment (FVA)- An assessment of how a student uses remaining vision in his/her learning environments. The FVA leads to recommendations for accommodations in the classroom as well as identifies instructional areas such as sensory efficiency skills and use of low vision devices from which the student would benefit. This assessment should be updated on a regular basis.

Unified English Braille (UEB)- Braille code used by English-speaking nations that provides a means for representing both literary and technical materials. On April 24, 2010, the Canadian Braille Authority (CBA, now called Braille Literacy Canada) voted to adopt UEB, replacing English Braille American Edition (EBAE) for literary materials and Nemeth Code for mathematics. Transition plans were developed and are in being carried out by provinces and territories. More information is available at: http://www.braille literacycanada.ca/home and http://www.brailleauthority.org/ueb.html

Appendix D

Representative Provincial Documents on Guidance for the Education of Students who are Blind or Visually Impaired

In addition to the Canadian National Standards for the Education of Children and Youth Who are Blind or Visually Impaired, Including Those with Additional Disabilities, provincial resources exist that provide policy guidance to educational programming for students who are blind or visually impaired. The following list provides links to relevant legislation and policy guides.

Province or Territory	**Provincial/Territorial Education Act**	**Policy Guidance on Programming for Students with Visual Impairments**
Alberta	Education Act [Statutes of Alberta, 2012 c. E-0.3]	Services for Students with Visual Impairments Vision Education Alberta
British Columbia	School Act [RSBC 1996] Chapter 412	Special Education Policy Manual
Manitoba	Public Schools Act [C.C.S.M. c.P250]	Appropriate Educational Programming Regulation Services for Students who are Blind or Visually Impaired
New Brunswick	Education Act [S.N.B. 1997 c. E-1.12]	Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority Act
Newfoundland and Labrador	Schools Act [SNL1997 c. S-12.2]	Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority Act Programming for Individual Needs: Teaching Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired
Northwest Territories	Education Act [S.N.W.T. 1995 c.28]	NWT Ministerial Directive on Inclusive Schooling (2016)
Nova Scotia	Education Act [SNS 1995-96, c1]	Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority Act
Nunavut	Education Act [S.Nu. 2008,c.15]	Inuglugijaittuq – Foundation for

		Inclusive Education
Ontario	Education Act [RSO 1990, c. E.2]	Guidelines for Programs and Services for Students Who Are Blind or have Low Vision (K-12) (under development) Policy/Program Memorandum No. 1: Ontario Schools for the Blind and Deaf as Resource Centres.
Prince Edward Island	Education Act [R.S. P. E. I. 2016, c. E.02]	Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority Act Services for Students who are Blind or Visually Impaired
Quebec	Loi sur l'instruction publique [CQLR c 1-13.3]	L'organisation des services éducatifs aux élèves à risque et aux élèves handicapés ou en difficulté d'adaptation ou d'apprentissage (EHDAA)
Saskatchewan	Education Act [c. E-0.2]	Teaching Students with Visual Impairments: A Guide for the Support Team
Yukon	Education Act [RSY 2002, c.61]	Yukon Student Support Services Manual