

## **Understanding Students with Visual Impairments**

### **Defining Visual Impairments**

- Two different definitions
  - Legal definition
    - Based on acuity and field of vision
  - IDEA definition
    - Low vision
    - Functionally blind
    - Totally blind

### **Prevalence of Visual Impairments**

- Various measures used, so it is difficult to get an accurate count
- In 2006, 25, 661 students (0.04%) of the special education population

### **Characteristics**

- Incidental learning
  - The way sighted children naturally learn about their environment
  - Lack of incidental learning skills can impact the development of motor, language, cognitive, and social skills
- Limitations in range and variety of experiences
- Limitations in the ability to get around
- Limitations in interactions with the environment

### **Determining the Causes**

- Congenital vision impairments
  - Occur at birth or before vision memories have been established
- Adventitious vision impairments
  - When a person has had normal vision but then acquires a vision loss

### **Determining the Presence**

Determining how a student uses vision

- Functional vision assessment (FVA)
- Provides more concrete information about a student's vision that may help in making IEP decisions

Determining the appropriate reading medium

- Finding the appropriate learning medium (learning media assessment)
  - Braille, print, audiotapes, and access technology
- Allows the IEP team to know needed accommodations

### **Determining the Nature of Specially Designed Instruction and Services**

- Expanded Core Curriculum
  - Compensatory and Communication Skills
  - Social and interaction skills
  - Orientation and Mobility skills
- Informal assessments should include the student's ability to function independently
- Assessments should include the age-appropriateness of tasks
  - What are the student's peers doing?
  - Determine skills typically learned through incidental learning, analyze task involvement, and begin teaching these tasks earlier
- Avoid making assumptions about a student's previously acquired learning

### **Partnering for Special Education and Related Services**

Over 71% spend most of their day in the general education classroom

In planning an IEP, team members must consider:

- Provision of instruction to support the child's success in the general education curriculum
- Non-academic priorities on which the special education will focus
- Location of special education and related services
- Ways in which they will communicate to meet the student's needs

#### **Partnering for Special Education and Related Services**

- Providing Specialized Instruction
  - Slate and stylus
  - Abacus
- Reading instruction
  - Braille
  - Braille contractions
  - Issues for second language learners
- Determination of non-academic priorities
- Determining the location of services
- Communicating to meet student's needs

#### **Determining Supplementary Aids and Services**

- Providing adapted materials
  - Print materials: American Printing House for the Blind
  - Authentic materials
  - Optical devices
  - Assistive technology
- Planning for Universal Design for Learning
  - Direct experience and increased experiential activities

#### **Planning for Other Educational Needs**

- Daily living skills
- Orientation and mobility
- Self-determination
- Partnering is key

#### **Measuring Students' Progress**

- Many students take the same math, social studies, language arts, and science tests as others
  - Transcribe print materials into Braille
  - Allow use of a magnifier when reading the test
  - When students prepare Braille answers, the specialist interlines their work for the general educator (writes in print exactly what is written in Braille above the Braille)
  - For Braille spelling tests, students spell the words both with and without the Braille contractions

#### **Making Accommodations for Assessments**

- Additional time is needed
- Braille and/or magnifiers
- Reader
- Scribe or computer
- Quiet testing area
- Frequent breaks

