

# SUPPORTING INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS

## Educational Assessment: Considerations for Students Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired (BVI)

### Introduction

Manitoba Education and Training provides this information as a guide for educators who are teaching and assessing students who are blind or visually impaired. This resource highlights factors to be considered in determining appropriate educational assessment of individual students in Manitoba schools:

In accordance with *The Manitoba Public Schools Act*, Manitoba school divisions have an obligation to conduct regular assessment of student learning and report to parents\* at the regular reporting periods. Assessment methods should be appropriate for and compatible with the purpose and context of the assessment [as well as with the needs of the student]. (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, [Appropriate Educational Programming in Manitoba: Standards for Student Services](#) 13)

Students who are blind or visually impaired attend schools throughout Manitoba. Depending on the nature, severity, and age of onset of the visual condition, some students may continue to be primarily visual learners, while others will be aural and/or tactile learners, and many will use a combination of sensory styles.

This support document explains the impact of blindness, low vision, and/or cortical visual impairment on student learning and the considerations for adaptations that are necessary when assessing students who are blind or visually impaired. The document outlines the importance of a collaborative team approach to assessment practices.

\* The term *parents* is used to refer to parents, legal guardians, or others who have responsibility for caring for students.





## Considerations for Adaptations

Adaptations for assessment are required for students who are blind or visually impaired. The impact of blindness, low vision, and/or cortical visual impairment needs to be considered in determining adaptations for assessment of individual students. The following are considerations to keep in mind when including these students in classroom, school-wide, or divisional assessments, as well as more specialized assessments done by psychologists, speech language pathologists, and others.

### ■ **Impact of Blindness on Assessment**

Students who are blind, or have no functional vision, need to use their senses of touch (haptic) and hearing to gather and process information.

- Developmental history of children who are congenitally blind will follow a different pattern than that of sighted children, and individuals may present with delays in motor and language development. Their understanding of vocabulary may differ from what is intended and understood by people who are sighted.
- Decreased opportunities for incidental learning and learning through imitation may have an impact on communication, self-help, and social skills.
- Concept development will depend on experiential learning; understanding of concepts may reflect the amount of participation in early intervention opportunities. Using authentic tasks to assess understanding of concepts will be more reliable than verbal questioning.
- Processing of auditory and tactile information differs from visual information in that it is sequential and may take more time to process.

If vision loss has been recent, or is the result of a progressively deteriorating eye condition, this will have an impact on the above areas of development.

- **Impact of Low Vision on Assessment**

Students with low vision (reduced vision) are visual learners but will need material adaptations such as large print or audio recordings to gather and process information.

- Vision loss is measured on a continuum from mild to severe. The functional impact of vision loss will depend on the eye condition, time of onset, severity, and prognosis.
- The limitations of low vision and the accompanying challenges a student may experience can be difficult to understand, as the process is more than simply “seeing something” or “not seeing something.” Besides having limited acuity (clarity of the visual image and amount of detail that can be discriminated), students may also experience visual field losses, colour blindness, contrast issues, and sensitivity to too much or not enough light. The ability to see detail in pictures may be affected, as well as discrimination of print.
- Eye conditions, such as nystagmus, may affect visual efficiency. As a result, fatigue may complicate performance during assessment, and students may require visual breaks or more time.

- **Impact of Cortical Visual Impairment on Assessment**

Many students who have impairments due to neurological trauma may also have cortical visual impairment (neurological vision loss) and will have difficulty processing visual information. Functional vision will be related less to visual acuity and more to how visual information is being understood and interpreted by the brain, although individuals with cortical visual impairment may also have low visual acuity because of additional eye conditions.

- Students may be unable to deal with even a limited amount of visual complexity. Assessment materials may need to be simplified.
- Students may be unable to attend to visual information in the presence of other sensory distraction. The assessment environment will need to be evaluated to ensure the best conditions are available for testing.
- Students may show considerable latency in their responses, and may need more time to respond to assessment activities.



## Educational Assessment

Students who are blind or have low vision, and are undergoing educational assessment, will need both material adaptations (e.g., braille, large print, audio) and environmental adaptations (e.g., time allotment, location of assessment).

### ■ **Classroom Assessment**

Students who are blind or visually impaired and who are following the provincial curriculum should be included in classroom- and division-based assessment with appropriate adaptations. In general, adaptations used for daily classroom work should be allowed for assessments, and students should not be expected to use unfamiliar adaptations in an assessment setting. The **functional vision assessment** provided by Manitoba Education and Training consultants for the blind or visually impaired (BVI) will provide classroom and resource teachers with student-specific information on adaptations. Standards for large print and braille production should be followed (see [Alternate Format Services for Students with Print Disabilities](#)). The consultant for BVI will assist school staff in making decisions about assessment strategies and formats and will facilitate obtaining materials. If a student is transitioning from print to braille and/or audio, print-based assessments may need to be postponed until the student is comfortable in the new medium.

### ■ **Provincial Standards Assessment**

Students who are blind or visually impaired and who are following the provincial curriculum will also write provincial standards tests with appropriate adaptations. Procedures that schools must use for requesting and providing adaptations are outlined in the department's [Policies and Procedures for Provincial Tests](#), Section 3.3. Policy on exemption from provincial standards tests is outlined in Section 3.4. Requests for exemptions are evaluated by the Instruction, Curriculum and Assessment Branch (ICAB). The coordinator for BVI services at the Inclusion Support Branch will review tests and approve appropriate formats.


- **Specialized Assessment**

A school team may determine that a specialized assessment is necessary:

Specialized assessments are conducted by qualified professionals on an individual basis to determine what factors are affecting the student's learning and what approaches would assist the student to meet the learning outcomes in the classroom. (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, [Appropriate Educational Programming in Manitoba: Standards for Student Services](#) 13)

Standardized assessments do not generally have norms for use with students who are blind or visually impaired. The assessor will need to evaluate the assessment tools and environment to ensure a fair assessment, and the assessment report must contain an explanation of changes in procedure, and adaptations of materials and methods used to assess the individual student's abilities (e.g., timed subtests, enhanced print, electronic text, braille, auditory materials, or a combination of formats). Some assessments are available in braille and large print formats. For a comprehensive list of assessment tools, see the annotated compendium on the [Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired](#) website. Criterion-referenced assessments may provide the most beneficial information for the school support team.

Results of assessments will need to be interpreted with consideration given to the impact of visual impairment. Collaboration with the student's school support team and the consultant for BVI is essential.



## Collaboration with Consultants for the Blind or Visually Impaired (BVI)

A team of Manitoba Education and Training consultants for BVI work together with schools to provide support services to students who are blind or visually impaired, and this team will be able to support the assessment process as well. The consultants for BVI are certified teachers who have specialized educational training in teaching students who are visually impaired. They will have a background in working with students with blindness, will have comparative knowledge of developmental patterns, and will be aware of adaptations and materials the student requires. They will also be familiar with low- and high-tech equipment necessary for student success.

Medical information on a student's eye condition is requested from an eye specialist as part of the referral process for BVI services. If a student has residual vision, this information will be included in a **functional vision assessment** conducted by a consultant for BVI and will be available in the student's cumulative file. This assessment is observation based and focuses on how the student uses vision in the school setting. It will include information about the impact of various seating and lighting situations, presentation of print materials, and other factors that may have an impact on the student's visual performance. Functional measures of acuity will be included. The assessment will contain recommendations for adaptations such as enhanced print, low-vision devices, presentation strategies, time considerations, and physical space. Appropriate technology will be recommended as well. A consultant for BVI will also complete a **learning media assessment**, which informs decisions about the appropriate formats to use for print access. Awareness of the recommendations contained in the functional vision assessment will be necessary for appropriate assessment of the student.

Consultants for BVI are available to discuss pre-assessment considerations regarding typical adaptations being used by the student in the classroom and community. Discussion with the consultant for BVI will provide further information on the impact of low vision or blindness on the student's development and learning. The consultant for BVI will facilitate obtaining adapted materials from Alternate Format Services for classroom and assessment purposes.

Subsequent conversations to discuss assessment results and answer questions arising from the assessment may be necessary when interpreting data.

A collaborative assessment process will ensure that assessment practices are inclusive, fair, and compatible with the purpose of the assessment.



## Contact

For more information, please contact:

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Inclusion Support Branch  
Manitoba Education and Training  
Telephone: 204-945-7907  
Toll-Free (in Manitoba): 1-800-282-8069, ext. 7907  
Email: [pssbinfo@gov.mb.ca](mailto:pssbinfo@gov.mb.ca)



## Recommended Resources

### Books

American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and National Council on Measurement in Education. *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*. AERA Publications, 2014.

Establishes best testing practices and includes information on determining reliability and validity of standardized testing procedures when working with different populations

Loftin, Marnee. *Making Evaluation Meaningful: Determining Additional Eligibilities and Appropriate Instructional Strategies for Blind and Visually Impaired Students*. Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, 2005.

Provides background information on visual impairment, as well as sections on preparing for evaluation, observation, and assessment protocols

Roman-Lantzy, Christine. *Cortical Visual Impairment: An Approach to Assessment and Intervention*. 2nd ed., AFB Press, 2018.

Background information on cortical visual impairment, assessment protocols, and programming suggestions for this population

### Articles

Douglas, Laura Stein. *Psycho-educational Assessment Practices with Students Who Have Vision Losses*. <https://www.csdb.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Psycho-educational-Assessment-Practices-with-Students-who-have-Vision-Losses.pdf>. Accessed 20 Dec. 2018.

Goodman, Stephen, Carol Evans, and Marnee Loftin. *Position Paper: Intelligence Testing of Individuals Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired*. 2011, <https://www.aph.org/accessible-tests/position-papers/intelligence-testing/full/>. Accessed 20 Dec. 2018.



## Websites

American Printing House for the Blind. *APH Accessible Tests Resource Center*. <https://www.aph.org/accessible-tests/>. Accessed 20 Dec. 2018.

Manitoba. *The Manitoba Public Schools Act*. C.C.S.M. c. P250, Queen's Printer—Statutory Publications, 1987, <https://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/statutes/ccsm/p250e.php>. Accessed 22 Nov. 2018.

Manitoba Education. *Services for Students Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired*. 2011, [https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/bvi\\_services/index.html](https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/bvi_services/index.html). Accessed 29 Nov. 2018.

Manitoba Education and Training. *Alternate Format Services for Students with Print Disabilities*. <https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/afs/index.html>. Accessed 29 Nov. 2018.

———. *Policies and Procedures for Provincial Tests*. Revised 2018, [https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/assess/docs/pol\\_proc/](https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/assess/docs/pol_proc/). Accessed 29 Nov. 2018.

Outlines policies and procedures related to the registration of students, and the administration, local marking, and reporting of provincial tests

———. "Services for Students Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired." *Student Services*, <https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/blind/index.html>. Accessed 29 Nov. 2018.

Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth. *Appropriate Educational Programming in Manitoba: Standards for Student Services*. 2006, [https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/aep/pdf/Standards\\_for\\_Student\\_Services.pdf](https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/aep/pdf/Standards_for_Student_Services.pdf). Accessed 29 Nov. 2018.

Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. "Assessment." *Instructional Resources*, <https://www.tsbvi.edu/instructional-resources/1879-assessment>. Accessed 29 Nov. 2018.

Contains a variety of articles on assessment, including an annotated compendium of assessment tools



This resource is available on the Manitoba Education and Training website at:  
<https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/blind/index.html>  
<https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/documents.html>

Available in alternate format upon request.

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