

SPECIAL EDUCATION ELIGIBILITY IN THE IDEA CATEGORY OF "VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS INCLUDING BLINDNESS"

WHAT IS SPECIAL EDUCATION ELIGIBILITY?

If a parent or a teacher thinks a student (PreK - 12th grade) might have a disability and benefit from special education services, they need to first make a referral. The referral is the start of the special education process. Once a school receives a referral, the school team, including the student's parents/guardians, must meet to hold an initial eligibility meeting. This meeting allows team members to discuss what data are needed to determine if the student has one or more of the disabilities listed in IDEA (2004). General definitions of each disability category are listed in IDEA. However, states are allowed to set their own definition for each disability category. Eligibility criteria for the category of visual impairment varies from state to state.

The following tables were developed for families, policy makers, educators, researchers, advocates, and teacher preparation programs. The purpose is to help individuals understand the special education eligibility criteria for students with visual impairments in each state/territory. The eligibility criteria reported were collected in 2021 and are for informational purposes only. Be sure to check your state/territories' specific eligibility criteria to ensure you are looking at the most up-to-date information.

Information presented in the tables is based on Schles and colleagues' (2022) research. All data were compiled as part of the National Plan to Train Personnel 2 initiative. Access to the full dataset is available publicly ([Schles et al., 2022](#)).

Understanding the Key Used in the Table:

Both Eyes - This means the state does not limit eligibility to the vision in the better eye, or it specifies eligibility should be based on vision in both eyes.

Better Eye - This means the state requires eligibility to be based on the vision in the better eye when an acuity measure qualifies a student.

Not Required - Many potential components of eligibility were considered during this review; any box with an 'X' indicates that specific component was not required in the state's eligibility criteria, though in some cases it was recommended as best practice.

Required - The state required the specific component indicated as part of the eligibility process.

Conditional - The state required this component only in certain conditions as part of the eligibility process.



Additional definitions for terms used in this document can found at the end of this file.

This resource is available in both English and Spanish. Este recurso está disponible en español e inglés.










This document is available in a screen-reader friendly Word document at this [link](#).

VISUAL IMPAIRMENT ELIGIBILITY

The following was developed for use by families, policy makers, educators, researchers, advocates, and teacher preparation programs to promote understanding of special education eligibility criteria for students with VI based on Schles and colleagues' (2022) research. The eligibility criteria reported here was collected in 2021 and is for informational purposes only. Be sure to check your state/territories' specific eligibility criteria to ensure you are looking at the most up-to-date information.



| KEY | | | |
|---|--------------|---|------------------------------|
|  | BOTH EYES | + | ALL ECC AREAS LISTED BY NAME |
|  | BETTER EYE | | |
| X | NOT REQUIRED | - | PARTIAL LIST OF ECC AREAS |
| ✓ | REQUIRED | | |
| ~ | CONDITIONAL | | |

NORTHEAST













| STATE | EYES | VISUAL ACUITY THRESHOLD | VISUAL FIELD THRESHOLD | EYE REPORT | FUNCTIONAL VISION ASSESSMENT | LEARNING MEDIA ASSESSMENT | EXPANDED CORE CURRICULUM ASSESSMENT | ORIENTATION & MOBILITY ASSESSMENT | TEACHER OF STUDENTS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS | CERTIFIED ORIENTATION & MOBILITY SPECIALIST |
|---------------|---|-------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| | QUALIFYING CONDITIONS | | | ASSESSMENT COMPONENTS | | | | | PROFESSIONALS | |
| CONNECTICUT |  | 20/70 | 20° | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| MAINE |  | X | X | ✓ | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| MASSACHUSETTS |  | X | X | X | ~ | X | X | X | X | X |
| NEW HAMPSHIRE |  | X | X | ✓ | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| NEW JERSEY |  | X | X | ✓ | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| NEW YORK |  | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| PENNSYLVANIA |  | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| RHODE ISLAND |  | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| VERMONT |  | 20/70 | 20° | ✓ | X | X | X | X | X | X |

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MIDWEST










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|--------------|---|-------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| | QUALIFYING CONDITIONS | | | ASSESSMENT COMPONENTS | | | | | PROFESSIONALS | |
| ILLINOIS |  | 20/70 | 50° | ✓ | ~ | ~ | + | ~ | ✓ | ~ |
| INDIANA |  | X | X | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | X | ~ | X | X |
| IOWA |  | X | X | X | ✓ | X | X | X | X | X |
| KANSAS |  | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| MICHIGAN |  | 20/70 | 20° | ✓ | X | X | X | ~ | ~ | ~ |
| MINNESOTA |  | 20/60 | 20° | ✓ | ✓ | X | X | X | ~ | X |
| MISSOURI |  | 20/70 | 20° | ✓ | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| NEBRASKA |  | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| NORTH DAKOTA |  | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| OHIO |  | X | X | ~ | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| SOUTH DAKOTA |  | 20/70 | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| WISCONSIN |  | 20/70 | 50° | ✓ | ✓ | X | X | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

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SOUTH (PAGE 2 OF 2)










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|----------------|---|-------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| | QUALIFYING CONDITIONS | | | ASSESSMENT COMPONENTS | | | | | PROFESSIONALS | |
| MISSISSIPPI |  | X | 20° | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| NORTH CAROLINA |  | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| OKLAHOMA |  | 20/70 | 20° | ✓ | ✓ | X | X | ~ | ✓ | ~ |
| PUERTO RICO |  | 20/70 | 20° | ~ | X | X | + | X | X | X |
| SOUTH CAROLINA |  | 20/70 | 40° | X | ~ | X | X | X | X | X |
| TENNESSEE |  | 20/70 | 60° | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | + | ✓ | ✓ | ~ |
| TEXAS |  | X | X | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | X | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| VIRGINIA |  | 20/70 | 70° | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| WEST VIRGINIA |  | 20/70 | 20° | ✓ | ✓ | X | X | X | ✓ | X |

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| | QUALIFYING CONDITIONS | | | ASSESSMENT COMPONENTS | | | | | PROFESSIONALS | |
| ALASKA |  | 20/70 | 20° | ✓ | X | X | X | X | ✓ | X |
| AMERICAN SOMOA |  | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| ARIZONA |  | X | X | ✓ | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| CALIFORNIA |  | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| COLORADO |  | 20/70 | 20° | X | X | X | - | X | X | X |
| GUAM |  | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| HAWAII |  | 20/70 | 20° | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| IDAHO |  | 20/70 | 70° | ✓ | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| NEVADA |  | 20/70 | 20° | ✓ | X | X | X | X | ~ | X |

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WEST (PAGE 2 OF 2)

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|--------------------------|---|-------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| | QUALIFYING CONDITIONS | | | ASSESSMENT COMPONENTS | | | | | PROFESSIONALS | |
| NEW MEXICO |  | X | X | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | X | ~ | ✓ | ~ |
| NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS |  | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| MONTANA |  | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| OREGON |  | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| UTAH |  | X | X | ✓ | X | ✓ | X | ✓ | X | X |
| U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS |  | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| WASHINGTON |  | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| WYOMING |  | 20/50 | 20° | ✓ | ~ | X | X | X | ✓ | X |

DEFINITIONS

VISUAL ACUITY - the smallest object that a person can see at a set distance, usually 20 feet.

VISUAL FIELD - the total area that can be seen without moving your eyes.

FUNCTIONAL VISION ASSESSMENT - an assessment of how the student functionally uses their vision in everyday environments like their classroom.

LEARNING MEDIA ASSESSMENT - an assessment to select the appropriate literacy medium (i.e. braille, print, audio, etc.) for a student.

EXPANDED CORE CURRICULUM (ECC)

Nine skill set areas in which students who are visually impaired need specialized instruction to learn. The nine areas of the ECC are:

#1 | ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY - *the skills to use assistive and adaptive tools to help complete a task or gain access to an environment.*

#2 | CAREER EDUCATION - *the skills necessary to understand and access the different careers available to them.*

#3 | COMPENSATORY ACCESS - *the skills needed to access the core curriculum.*

#4 | INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS - *the skills needed to live as independently as possible.*

#5 | ORIENTATION & MOBILITY (O&M) - *the skills needed to physically move about in their environment as safely and independently as possible.*

#6 | RECREATION & LEISURE - *the skills and awareness to choose recreation and leisure activities they will enjoy participating in.*

#7 | SELF-DETERMINATION - *the skills needed to take control and responsibility of one's own life.*

#8 | SENSORY EFFICIENCY - *the skills to use the five senses (sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste) as efficiently as possible.*

#9 | SOCIAL INTERACTION SKILLS - *the skills needed to appropriately communicate and interact with others.*

TEACHER OF STUDENTS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS - a teacher providing direct or consult special education services to students with visual impairments.

CERTIFIED ORIENTATION & MOBILITY SPECIALIST - a specialist who provides instruction to students with visual impairment on how to safely and independently move in their environment.

EYE REPORT - a report written up by an eye doctor that includes information such as: visual acuities, diagnosis, prognosis, recommendations, and other medical information related to eye health.

O&M ASSESSMENT - an assessment of how well a student can travel safely indoors and outdoors conducted by an orientation and mobility specialist.

Citation:

Schles, R. A., Gosnell, G., & Johanns, G. (2023). Summary report of states' visual impairments including blindness IDEA special education eligibility criteria in 2021. Nashville; Vanderbilt University.

This document can be found online at the [Vanderbilt University Institutional Repository](#).