

# When you get a referral



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## Vision Mentorship Program | Outreach Access Services

Teachers of learners with blindness or low vision find out about new students in a variety of ways. Questions about a potential new student may cause a teacher to act quickly to provide service to the student, but it is essential to consider relevant information before moving forward. Take a deep breath and a moment to think through the scenario and best next steps! Here are some scenarios and best practices when encountering a potential new student in your district.

### **1. A student transfers in from out-of-district.**

- Review the current evaluation and IEP. Districts may accept the student's current evaluation and IEP or choose to re-evaluate and/or amend the IEP.

### **2. A student is newly diagnosed with a visual impairment that appears later in childhood, such as Retinitis Pigmentosa or Stargardt macular degeneration. These students will have been seen by an ophthalmologist or optometrist to diagnose their condition.**

- When contacted about a student with newly diagnosed vision loss, the first step is to have the district (school psychologist, special education administrative assistant) request the medical records related to vision.
- If the medical information indicates that a student's vision could adversely affect their education, the team will proceed with an evaluation.

### **3. A teacher or other school personnel approaches you regarding concerns about a student's vision. Often teachers will hope that a TSVI can come take a look at a student or offer suggestions right away.**

- It is nearly impossible to know what might be going on with a student's vision just by peeking at them for a moment in a classroom. Medical information is key to understanding the diagnosis and implications of a visual impairment. The student may need glasses, and not be wearing them to school.
- Ask the teacher if the student has seen an eye doctor.
  - If yes, ask them to follow district protocols to request medical information related to visual impairment.
    - When the medical report is received, review the records to determine if it implies that a student's vision could adversely affect their education.
  - If no, ask them to follow up with the student's family about an appointment with an eye doctor. When the report is received, continue as above.

**4. A student is in general education, and you are asked to offer input on a 504 plan.**

- 504 plans provide accommodations to students who have a documented disability.
- Start the process by reviewing information from the student's most recent visit to an ophthalmologist or optometrist.
- Once the medical information is received, a TSVI can work with a school psychologist to determine if the student needs a Functional Visual Assessment. The evaluation would be initiated by the school psychologist and the FVA would be completed by the TSVI to determine eligibility for special education.
- If the student is determined not to need specially designed instruction, but does need accommodations, the TSVI can recommend accommodations related to vision for the 504 plan.

**5. A student receives vision therapy outside of school, and the team is wondering if they will qualify for school-based educational services from a Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments.**

- As with any other inquiry about supports for a student with a suspected visual impairment, the process should start with information from an ophthalmologist or optometrist.
- If the report is from an optometrist who specializes in vision therapy, and the student's visual acuity is at or near 20/20, you may see diagnoses of convergence insufficiency, amblyopia, and/or strabismus.
- Follow guidance on educating teams about the difference between vision therapy and school-based educational services from a Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments. A formal Functional Vision Assessment is most likely not needed: [Vision Therapy and Educational Visual Impairment Services: What's the Difference?](#)

**6. A school psychologist or other team member notifies you of a student with an open evaluation and a very short timeframe to complete the assessment.**

- It is essential that you have time to gather information about a new referral for a student who may have blindness or low vision. Whenever possible, this includes obtaining medical records from the student's most recent visit to an ophthalmologist or optometrist. If this medical information is not already available in the student's educational file, the parent will need to sign a release of information for the district to request those records from the doctor.
- Once medical information is received, review the records to determine if the student has a diagnosed visual impairment.
- If indicated by the diagnosis and family/school team concerns, proceed with evaluating the student.
  - It is important for the TSVI to take time to get to know the student, talk with the family, observe the student, and complete the FVA, LMA, and ECC assessments. Explain to the team that these assessments take time and offer essential information about a student's use of vision and needs for support. This may not be possible in the short time frame you are allowed by short notification from the team!
  - A school psychologist can re-open and amend the recently completed evaluation to add a vision only evaluation after the team has completed their evaluation. They can then make an amendment to the evaluation. This allows proper time for the TSVI to complete the evaluation

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