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Essential Evaluations for Students Who Are Blind or Low Vision

Ask what the team needs to know before deciding services

1. Start with the question, not a test name

A complete evaluation explains how a student learns, accesses information and participates, and identifies the instruction and support they need. No single test score or eye diagnosis provides that picture.

What the law requires

IDEA requires multiple tools and strategies, assessment in relevant areas of suspected disability, appropriate instruments and trained personnel. The evaluation must be sufficiently comprehensive to identify special-education and related-service needs, including needs not usually linked to the student's eligibility category. [1]

What families can contribute

- Describe your child's strengths, interests, communication and learning preferences. Include differences across home, school and community settings.
- Document tasks that are slow, inaccessible, tiring or dependent on adult help. Bring examples rather than only a general concern.
- Explain prior instruction and access opportunities. A student may not demonstrate a skill they have not had an accessible opportunity to learn.
- Ask the team to write the questions each proposed evaluation will answer, who will conduct it, what settings will be observed, and how the findings will affect the IEP.

A useful distinction

The areas in this guide are planning considerations, not a mandatory identical battery for every student. The child's needs determine the scope. A medical eye examination, functional vision assessment, learning media assessment and O&M evaluation answer different questions; one should not automatically replace the others.

2. Examine access, literacy and travel

Functional vision

Ask how vision functions during real tasks under different lighting, distance, contrast, clutter and fatigue conditions. Include observations, interviews and relevant clinical information. A qualified teacher of students with visual impairments (TVI) helps translate findings into educational access and instruction; medical diagnosis belongs to the appropriate clinician.

Learning media and literacy

Ask which media support efficient, sustainable reading and writing now and in the future. Consider print, Braille, tactile and auditory access as appropriate, together with comprehension, fluency, writing, endurance and instructional history. Audio access does not answer every literacy question.

Colorado requirement

The IEP must include a Learning Media Plan based on comprehensive assessment by a licensed teacher endorsed in visual impairment. The rule specifies the plan's instructional details and a Braille presumption subject to the team's assessment-based determination. Federal law also explicitly includes future Braille needs. [2, 3]

Orientation and mobility

Ask a qualified O&M specialist to assess orientation and safe, effective movement in relevant environments, including unfamiliar places when appropriate. Consider the student's age, mobility, sensory access, travel goals and needed supports. Do not reduce the question to whether the student can walk a familiar school hallway. [4]

3. Identify the rest of the learning needs

Assistive technology

Examine the student, tasks, environments and available tools. Ask for trials and data where needed, including training, compatibility, maintenance and use across settings. A separate formal AT evaluation is not required before every device or service; the team must determine what the child needs, and evaluate when necessary. [5]

Expanded Core Curriculum

Review compensatory access, sensory efficiency, AT, O&M, social interaction, independent living, recreation and leisure, career education, and self-determination. A screener can identify questions; detailed assessment should inform instruction where needs are identified. [6]

Academic and psychoeducational evaluation

Ask how tests were made accessible, whether adaptations affect score interpretation, and how conclusions distinguish a visual-access barrier from the skill being measured. Include observation, work samples and multiple sources. Seek collaboration between the psychologist and blindness specialists. [1, 7]

Communication, motor, daily living and transition

Include relevant speech-language, hearing, motor, adaptive, behavioral or other assessments when concerns indicate a need. Transition assessment should reflect the student's preferences and goals and actual education, employment and independent-living demands. Additional disabilities do not erase blindness-specific needs. [1, 2, 8]

4. Turn results into instruction

Questions for every report

- What was assessed, by whom, in which settings, and with which accessibility supports?
- What can the student do independently, with prompting, and with appropriate tools? What opportunities have they had to learn?
- What limitations affect the findings, including inaccessible items, nonstandard administration or insufficient observations?
- Which educational needs follow from the evidence? What goals, instruction, services, accommodations and additional data are recommended?
- How and when will the team act on the findings and check whether the response is working?

If information is missing

Request the missing evaluation in writing and describe the educational question. If the district refuses, request Prior Written Notice. If you disagree with a district evaluation, IDEA provides a process for requesting an independent educational evaluation at public expense, subject to its requirements; the district must without unnecessary delay fund it or seek a hearing to defend its evaluation. [9, 10]

Sources and use

This family planning resource distinguishes legal requirements from suggested actions. Follow the source links for the complete text. Historical professional resources provide background; they are not binding law.

1. IDEA § 300.304 — Evaluation procedures
Binding law

2. Colorado ECEA, 1 CCR 301-8 — rules 4.03(6)(b) and (d), printed pages 47–48; effective May 15, 2025
Binding law; SOS current version checked September 12, 2026

3. IDEA § 300.324 — IEP development and special factors
Binding law

4. IDEA § 300.34(c)(7) — Orientation and mobility
Binding law

5. U.S. Department of Education — AT Myths and Facts (2024)
Official guidance

6. Perkins — Expanded Core Curriculum booklet
Professional background; not law

7. APH — Intelligence Testing position paper (2011); landing page also links a 2024 update
Historical professional background; not law

8. IDEA § 300.320 — IEP and transition content
Binding law

9. IDEA § 300.503 — Prior Written Notice
Binding law

10. IDEA § 300.502 — Independent evaluations
Binding law