

**TIP SHEET # 2**

# The Expanded Core Curriculum

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**What is the core curriculum?**

The core curriculum is the knowledge and skills that all students are expected to know upon high school graduation.

**What subjects comprise the core curriculum?**

- English language arts, other languages
- Mathematics
- Science
- Health, Physical Education
- Fine Arts
- Social Studies
- Economics, Business Education
- Vocational Education
- History

**Who receives instruction in the core curriculum?**

Students who are blind and visually impaired can and should receive instruction in the core curriculum, just as their sighted peers. Depending on the extent of vision loss and the impact of additional disabilities, various types and degrees of supports will be needed for successful participation.

**What is the Expanded Core Curriculum?**

The Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) is the body of knowledge & skills needed by students with vision loss in order to be successful in school & in post-graduate pursuits as a result of unique, disability-specific needs.

**Does the Expanded Core Curriculum replace the existing core curriculum?**

No. The ECC is an addition to the core academic curriculum. It should be used as a framework for assessing students, planning individual goals and providing instruction.

**Why do students who are blind & visually impaired need an expanded core curriculum?**

Throughout their lives, sighted children have rich visual experiences by which they learn concepts casually or incidentally. Students with vision loss often miss or learn concepts in an incomplete or distorted way. Since they provide a foundation for future learning, these concepts must be explicitly & systematically taught to ensure that students with vision loss learn them.

**Is the ECC the same for blind and visually impaired students who have additional disabilities?**

The ECC is especially important for students with additional disabilities as it addresses many functional skills needed for success in daily life in school, home and community. Professionals in other related-service areas play an important role in developing and implementing the goals depending on the impact of additional disabilities on individual students.

**What comprises the expanded core curriculum?**

- Compensatory/ functional academic skills, including communication modes
- Orientation and Mobility
- Social Interaction skills
- Independent Living skills
- Recreation and Leisure skills
- Career Education
- Use of Assistive Technology
- Visual Efficiency skills
- Self-determination

**What skills are included in each of the nine areas of the expanded core curriculum?****1. Compensatory and functional academic skills, including communication modes**

Includes learning experiences of concept development, spatial understanding, study and organizational skills, speaking and listening skills, and adaptations necessary for accessing all areas of the existing core curriculum.

Depending on degree of functional vision, effects of additional disabilities, and the individual task, communication needs will vary. Variations include:

- Braille
- Large print
- Print with the use of optical devices
- Regular print
- Tactile symbols
- Sign language
- Recorded materials and/or live readers

Many students will use some combination of these.

**2. Orientation and Mobility**

Blind and visually impaired students need to learn to travel as safely and independently as possible; to learn about and from the environment through which they move. This requires systematic instruction in how to orient themselves and avoid obstacles without the benefit of visual cues. Early instruction helps develop foundational skills of body image and essential spatial concepts. Throughout the school years, instruction involves travel in school, home and community, including travel in residential, city and rural areas. It often includes instruction in the use of a long cane or other travel device.

**3. Social Interaction Skills**

Since nearly all social skills are learned by observation of the environment and people, this is an area where students with vision loss need careful, conscious and explicit instruction. Without the opportunity to learn appropriate social interaction skills, students who are blind and visually impaired are at high risk for social isolation at school, in the community and into adulthood.

#### **4. Independent Living Skills**

This area includes the tasks and functions people perform in daily life to optimize their independence - skills such as personal hygiene, food preparation, money management, household chores and organization. Traditional classes in family and consumer science are not sufficient nor specialized enough to teach blind and visually impaired students to use adaptive techniques and equipment designed specifically to accomplish these tasks with limited or no vision.

#### **5. Recreation & Leisure Skills**

While many of the activities in the core curriculum area of physical education are appropriate for students with vision loss, others require adaptations in rules and equipment to enable them to participate in a meaningful way. In addition, students with vision loss need to develop recreation and leisure skills that they will be able to enjoy throughout their lives. Sighted people generally gain interest in these areas through observation of others. As with other skill areas, students with vision loss have limited exposure to the wide array of recreation and leisure activities that exist so their choices and access are also limited. Including this skill area in the ECC means making a deliberate effort to expose, teach, and explore adaptive techniques and materials.

#### **6. Career Education**

For sighted students, exposure to and development of interest in various careers often comes through observing what others do in daily life. As with many of the other skills areas of the ECC, vision loss impacts the ability to observe and develop interest in the wide variety of career choices that exist. Students with vision loss benefit most from an experiential learning approach. Structured visits to community sites and discussions with people who perform various jobs, enable them to understand concepts and specific skills that are needed to be successful in those jobs.

Considering the national rate of unemployment or under-employment of working-age adults who are blind is 70% - 75%, this area needs attention throughout the school years to help students with vision loss develop marketable job skills.

#### **7. Assistive Technology**

While not truly a curriculum area, assistive technology is a powerful tool that can enable students with vision loss to overcome some traditional barriers to independence and employment. This includes both low and high-tech solutions that allow increased efficiency in accomplishing a wide array of tasks from skills of daily living to more complex tasks associated with computer and electronic access-skills that are growing every day and are essential for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### **8. Visual Efficiency Skills**

Most students who are “legally blind” do have some vision which, given the proper training, can be used to increase their ability to successfully perform necessary tasks of daily living at home and school. Both clinical and functional assessments of visual skills are essential to determine how visual efficiency can be further developed. Assessments must be conducted by qualified professionals and should be repeated on a regular basis throughout the school years as the types of activities and the demands change with each grade.

#### **9. Self-Determination**

A new addition to the ECC, this area addresses the need for students with vision loss to develop a realistic concept of who they are and what they can do. All too often, these students become “victims” of pity and low expectations, attitudes which may translate into low self-esteem and self-confidence and create a self-fulfilling prophecy of under-performance. Students with vision loss need to learn self-advocacy through clear communication of their strengths and abilities and a positive approach to constructive problem-solving to overcome any barriers that may exist.

#### **Who is responsible for implementing the ECC?**

A certified teacher of the visually impaired (TVI) will be the lead professional in assessment and goal development for ECC skills. Since the skills that comprise the ECC are used throughout the student’s day, they must be incorporated into every area of the core curriculum and supported by all those who instruct the student, including para-educators and parents. However, there are two exceptions where assessment and instruction must be conducted by professionals specifically trained to teach students who are blind and visually impaired.

A TVI is the only professional who should teach Braille, a complex code with skills and rules which need to be mastered by the student in order to be used as an effective literacy tool.

A certified orientation and mobility specialist (COMS) will assess the student’s safe, efficient travel and provide 1:1 instruction in the use of specific techniques and travel devices in a variety of school and community locations.

Both Braille and mobility skills can and should be reinforced by all who work those who with the student. The TVI is also responsible for obtaining specialized equipment and materials, advising the educational team on appropriate assistive technology and consulting to all members of the team to develop appropriate expectations for students with vision loss.

#### **REFERENCES and ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

American Foundation for the Blind [www.afb.org](http://www.afb.org)  
California School for the Blind [www.csb-cde.ca.gov](http://www.csb-cde.ca.gov)  
Texas School for the Blind [www.tsbvi.edu](http://www.tsbvi.edu)

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