

Q&A: Orientation and Mobility Services

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) Division of Compliance and Assistance and the Division of Special Education have developed this document to address questions raised by parents and school districts regarding special education and orientation and mobility related services needs for students who are blind or visually impaired. The intention of this document is to provide helpful, general information to the public. It does not constitute legal advice nor is it a substitute for consulting with a licensed attorney. The information below should not be relied upon as a comprehensive or definitive response to specific legal situation(s). This document may not include a complete rendition of applicable state and federal law.

Question 1: What are orientation and mobility services and who receives such services?

Answer: As defined in the 2006 federal regulations developed based upon the 2004 changes to the Individual with Disabilities Act (IDEA), orientation and mobility services are included in the definition of related services and are specifically limited to students who are blind or who have a visual impairment and need the services to enable the student to benefit from special education. In order to clarify that students with significant cognitive disabilities and any other students with disabilities who may also need travel training, the revised regulations made travel training a separate related service category. As explained in the comments to the regulations, travel training is not the same as orientation and mobility services and was not intended to diminish or take the place of appropriate orientation and mobility and travel training services for students who are blind or have a visual impairment. Accordingly, the evaluation for a student who is blind or visually impaired may include assessments to determine related service needs for both orientation and mobility and travel training.

As defined in the related services regulation, orientation and mobility services are provided to enable blind or visually impaired students to systematically orient themselves and provide safe movement within their school, home, and community environments. In addition, orientation and mobility services include, as appropriate, spatial, and environmental concepts and the use of sensory information to establish, maintain or regain orientation and line of travel. An example is the use of hearing to listen at traffic intersections to learn how to safely cross a street. Orientation and mobility services can also include the use of a long cane or service animal (guide dog) to supplement visual travel skills or to safely negotiate a student's environment when the student has no available travel vision. In addition, orientation and mobility services include, as appropriate, helping a student learn how to use remaining vision and distance low vision aids. Orientation and mobility services may also include, as appropriate, other concepts, techniques, and tools.

Authority: 34 C.F.R. § 300.34(a) and (c)(7); Fed. Reg. 46573 (2006).

Question 2: How does a special education evaluation team determine whether it should include an orientation and mobility assessment for a student suspected of being blind or visually impaired?

Answer: The student's evaluation team, which would include the student's parent and relevant district staff, identify the student's area(s), or potential areas, of need to be assessed in the evaluation plan. If a student is blind or has a visual impairment, the evaluation team is responsible for determining if the student has suspected orientation and mobility needs that require assessment. As part of the licensure components for a teacher of the blind and visually impaired, s/he must have the requisite skills to assess, in collaboration with certified specialists as appropriate, the need for orientation and mobility

services for students who are blind, visually impaired, or deaf-blind, and those with additional disabilities that include a vision loss.

The evaluation plan must list the type of assessments to be conducted and who will conduct the assessments. It is up to the evaluation team to determine whether an orientation and mobility assessment is necessary, in addition to a functional vision assessment, in order to determine a student's educational needs.

Authority: 34 C.F.R. §§ 300.34(a) and (c); 300.301(c)(2); 300.303(c)(6); 300.324; and 300.503; Minn. R. 8710.5100 subp. 3B(7). See also [MDE Q&A: Needs Based Goals](#), Question 1; and [MDE Q&A: Related Services](#), Questions 9 and 10.

Question 3: What should a district do if it did not include an orientation and mobility assessment on a student's initial evaluation or reevaluation plan and then determines that the student may be in need of orientation and mobility related services?

Answer: When determining a student's need for related services, those related service area(s) of suspected need should be addressed during an initial evaluation and during subsequent reevaluations. In order for an evaluation to be comprehensive, it must address all areas of suspected disability, whether or not commonly linked to a specific disability. Accordingly, school districts should be including assessments that address all suspected areas of related service needs based on the needs of that particular student, such as orientation and mobility related services for students with visual impairments.

If the district is in the process of evaluating a student and determines that an additional assessment is necessary, the district would need to provide prior written notice to the parent and seek consent for the additional assessment. The evaluation would not be complete until all assessments are conducted and the evaluation report is completed.

If a district or parent suspects that a child has additional related service needs, such as orientation and mobility needs that were not identified in the most recent evaluation, the district must conduct an evaluation to identify all of the child's related service needs, whether or not commonly linked to the disability category in which the child has been classified. This evaluation is a reevaluation.

Once the evaluation or reevaluation has been completed, the IEP team would meet to discuss the results and determine whether the special education and related services, IEP goals and objectives and/or supplementary aids and services need to be revised to address the student's orientation and mobility related service needs as reflected in the evaluation.

Authority: 34 C.F.R. §§ 300.34(a), (c)(7), 300.301(c)(2), 300.303(a)(1); 71 Fed. Reg. 46640, (Aug. 14, 2006); 34 C.F.R. §§ 300.304(c)(6), 300.503; and Minn. R. 3525.2710. See also [MDE Q&A: Related Services](#), Questions 15 and 16; and [MDE Q&A: Reevaluations under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#).

Question 4: How does an IEP team determine the amount and type of orientation and mobility related services that should be provided to a student who is blind or visually impaired?

Answer: The student's most current evaluation report should provide guidance to the student's IEP team on the student's need for orientation and mobility related services. At the IEP meeting, the team would discuss and determine the type of instruction and special education and related services the student needs to receive a free and appropriate public education. The IEP must include a statement of the special education and related services and supplementary aids and services to be provided to the student to enable the student to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum and to participate in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities. The IEP team, based upon

assessment and other data, makes the determination of whether or not a student needs a specific related service in order to benefit from special education.

For example, a student who is blind or visually impaired may be in need of orientation and mobility related services to learn spatial orientation and specific motor skills, such as grasping with finger and thumb, prior to being able to learn how to move from one location to another with the use of a cane. If the student has the foundational skills, then orientation and mobility related services may include learning how to use environmental clues to become more self-sufficient in moving from one location to another. Environmental clues could include listening for other student's movements, listening for traffic sounds, paying attention to a unique scent associated with a particular site, and learning the location of fixed objects, such as restroom doors, water fountains, elevator doors, or stairwells.

Authority: 34 C.F.R. §§ 300.324(a)(4) and 300.34(c)(7). See also MDE Q and A Documents [Q&A: Needs Based Goals](#), Questions 2, 3 and 6; and [Q&A: Related Services](#), Question 10.

Question 5: Must orientation and mobility related services only be offered during the school day in the school setting?

Answer: No. For example, if a student who is blind or visually impaired has a specific need to obtain orientation and mobility related services during low-light hours, and it cannot be accomplished during the school day, the IEP team, which would include the district representative, would need to determine how those services would be delivered. The IEP must specify where the services will be provided, who will provide the services, how often the services will be provided, and the length of each related services session.

Authority: 34 C.F.R. §§ 300.34(c)(7) and 300.324.