

Orientation and Mobility Resource

Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Resource Purpose:

- To increase awareness about O&M services to schools/Individualized Education Program (IEP) Teams
- To provide background knowledge regarding the provision of O&M services
- To support Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists (COMS) and Teachers of the Blind/Visually Impaired (TBVI) in developing appropriate services and supports for students who require services

Rationale

Minnesota is in a critical point in time regarding teacher shortage in education. Orientation and Mobility Specialists are no different. It is imperative that we support the early and appropriate identification of orientation and mobility need for students who qualify under the special education category of blind/visually impaired. By communicating the legal and best practices of O&M Services, we anticipate an increase in identification, screening and evaluations being completed.

Supports through the Minnesota Regional Low Incidence Projects (MNLIP)

- Regional O&M higher education program developments in Minnesota
- Tuition supports
- Technical Assistance resources
- Minnesota Mentoring Program (MMP), which includes COMS
- Regional Community of Practices
- Statewide COMS Meeting

Overview

Orientation and mobility services, which includes services provided to visually impaired students that enable them to move safely at home, school, and in the community, was first added to the definition of "related services" in the 1997 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Related services are supportive services provided to a child with a disability via the IEP process to assist him/her to benefit from special education. 34 CFR 300.34 (a). The 2006 IDEA regulations now draw a sharp distinction between orientation and mobility services and travel training. [See 34 CFR 300.34 \(c\) \(7\)](#).

Currently, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) requires orientation and mobility instructors to have Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Educational Professionals (ACVREP) Certification for districts to be reimbursed for service provision.

Orientation & Mobility Definition

- The 2006 IDEA Part B regulations define "orientation and mobility services" as: "services provided to blind or visually impaired children by qualified personnel to enable those students to attain systematic orientation to and safe movement within their environment in school, home, and community; and includes teaching children the following as appropriate."
- Individuals with visual impairments use O&M skills and techniques to travel safely and independently through the environment.
- O&M instruction focuses on the development of sensory perception and interpretation of visual, auditory, tactual, olfactory, kinesthetic, vestibular, and proprioceptive information. Independent travel often involves the use of orientation and mobility devices and tools (e.g., long canes and dog guides) and orientation technology (e.g., global positioning systems [GPS] and mobile apps).

Best Practices around Orientation and Mobility

Best practice indicates that all students who qualify for vision services shall have an O&M Assessment.

Current practice, due to the national and state critical shortage in orientation and mobility specialists, as well as the lack of preparation institutes of higher education programs in Minnesota, is that students are being screened and assessed at a lower rate than expected.

As a response to the shortage area, the Minnesota Regional Low Incidence projects are supporting the development of COMS in all economic development areas through tuition support to ensure we move towards increasing the number of COMS in each region. Currently we are supporting seven teachers to become certified in three of eleven different regions for the 2018-19 school year.

Information on how we are addressing the need and technical assistance to support teachers to identify, evaluate and provide services to students who require O&M services can be found below.

Identification

In Minnesota, teachers of the blind and visually impaired address O&M needs through the functional vision assessment. If O&M needs go beyond what a TBVI can provide, a COMS is contacted to complete an O&M evaluation. O&M screening tools can also be used to determine if a student would benefit from an O&M evaluation.

Resources for Identifying students for Orientation and Mobility services

[Minnesota Orientation and Mobility Screening Tool](https://education.mn.gov/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=MDE074453&RevisionSelectionMethod=latestReleased&Rendition=primary)

(https://education.mn.gov/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=MDE074453&RevisionSelectionMethod=latestReleased&Rendition=primary)

[EVS Orientation and Mobility Screening](https://www.edvisionservices.org/Formsupdated/OMForms/EVS_OandMScreeningForm.pdf) (https://www.edvisionservices.org/Formsupdated/OMForms/EVS_OandMScreeningForm.pdf)

[Minnesota Region 10 Orientation and Mobility Checklist](https://www.region10.org/r10website/assets/File/OMCklist3_22.pdf)

(https://www.region10.org/r10website/assets/File/OMCklist3_22.pdf)

[Preschool Orientation and Mobility Screening 2nd Edition](http://my.aerbvi.org/AER-Store/Publications/BKctl/ViewDetails/SKU/AERA008) (<http://my.aerbvi.org/AER-Store/Publications/BKctl/ViewDetails/SKU/AERA008>)

[Colorado Orientation and Mobility Resource](https://www.cde.state.co.us/sites/default/files/documents/cdesped/download/pdf/om_related_service.pdf)

(https://www.cde.state.co.us/sites/default/files/documents/cdesped/download/pdf/om_related_service.pdf)

Evaluation

Orientation and mobility assessment

COMS conduct initial and ongoing comprehensive assessments of individuals' travel skills and needs. The assessment process includes interviews with individuals, family members, and other people who interact with them; review of medical records; evaluation of travel skills using formal and informal tools; evaluation of auditory perception, use of functional vision, wheelchair mobility and other sensory systems; and evaluation of current and future travel needs. When appropriate, COMS may recommend assessments by other professionals (e.g., audiologists, counselors). Assessment results guide subsequent O&M goals and services.

Functional low vision mobility assessment

COMS conduct functional low vision mobility assessments for individuals who have some remaining vision. The purpose of this assessment is to evaluate how an individual uses his or her vision in a variety of travel situations, including familiar and unfamiliar environments, different times of day, and varying lighting conditions. To gain the most comprehensive picture of one's visual functioning, components of a functional low vision mobility assessment include review of records (e.g., eye reports), interviews with the individual and others (e.g., family members, teachers), and observations of the individual performing specific tasks in natural settings. Areas of assessment include visual field, visual acuity, depth perception, visual efficiency (e.g., scanning), color perception, contrast sensitivity, glare, and light sensitivity, as relevant to functional mobility performance. Assessment results are used to make recommendations and plan individualized instruction.

Environmental assessment

COMS conduct environmental assessments to evaluate areas where people with visual impairments currently travel or may travel in the future. Environmental assessments focus on aspects of an environment that could support or hinder independent travel such as signage, sound, texture, and organization; and safety features and hazards. A key element of this assessment involves observations of an individual performing tasks in the environment; however, COMS may also use checklists, interviews, and questionnaires to gain a more thorough understanding of the individual's functioning. For individuals with low vision, environmental assessments may also include visual attributes such as lighting, glare, color, and contrast. Based on the assessment results, the COMS recommends modifications to the environment (e.g., home, workplace) that could promote safety and independent functioning.

Resources for Evaluation and Assessment

- [The Michigan Orientation and Mobility Severity Rating Scale](https://mdelio.org/sites/default/files/documents/BVI/SRS/OMSRS%20Revised%208.15.2017.pdf) (https://mdelio.org/sites/default/files/documents/BVI/SRS/OMSRS%20Revised%208.15.2017.pdf)
- [TAPS: Teaching Age-Appropriate Purposeful Skills](http://www.tsbvi.edu/taps) (http://www.tsbvi.edu/taps)
- [TDPB: Transdisciplinary Play-Based O&M, Evaluation and the Young Child Who is Deafblind: Assessing Orientation and Mobility Skills](http://www.tsbvi.edu/math/124-general/3249-tdpb-evaluation-and-the-young-child-who-is-deafblind-assessing-orientation-and-mobility-skills) (http://www.tsbvi.edu/math/124-general/3249-tdpb-evaluation-and-the-young-child-who-is-deafblind-assessing-orientation-and-mobility-skills)

Planning and Instruction

O&M services should be individually determined based on the results of an evaluation. The evaluation drives the need for service. COMS design and adapt the difficulty of the lesson depending on the individual’s skill level, complexity of the environment, and amount of feedback provided to the individual. They preview and select training environments based on individuals’ immediate and future needs, while considering their cognitive, physical, and psychosocial functioning (Wall, Emerson & Corn, 2006). COMS individualize the structure and pace of instruction and incorporate relevant aspects of different learning theories (e.g., behavior theory, cognitive learning theory, social cognitive theory, and discovery learning theory). They establish a rapport with individuals that fosters a positive learning environment. COMS provide opportunities for independence and self-advocacy throughout O&M instruction so individuals learn to do things for themselves and do not become overly reliant on others. O&M is a critical component of the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC), the concepts and skills that require systematic, sequential instruction to account for the information that many children with visual impairments do not learn incidentally through visual observation and experience (Hatlen, 1996). O&M instruction often includes content in the ECC areas of self-determination, social interaction skills, independent living, sensory efficiency, career education, recreation and leisure, compensatory skills, and assistive technology.

Resources for Program Planning and Instruction

The chart below lists common concerns related to the provision of O&M services, federal and state requirements, best practice and current practice.

Concern	Federal / State requirements	Best Practice	Current Practice
No certified staff to provide O&M service	OSEP: O&M Related Service 34 C.F.R. § 300.34(a) and (c) (7); Fed. Reg. 46573 (2006). O&M Case Law	Provision of services based on evaluation data, IEP, and service delivery	Residential programs through Minnesota State Academies, State Services for the Blind, North Dakota Vision Services / School for the Blind, Summer program, weekend service delivery, Vision Loss Resources, Duluth Lighthouse, Blind Inc.

Concern	Federal / State requirements	Best Practice	Current Practice
<p>Other individuals who are not ACVREP certified are providing instruction; a difference in philosophy and methods of instruction</p>	<p>MDE funding manual requires ACVREP Certification for reimbursement</p>	<p>ACVREP COMS provide instruction</p> <p>O&M Certification Resource</p>	<p>ACVREP COMS provide instruction</p> <p>National Orientation and Mobility Certification (NOMC) instructors are providing service through agency programs</p>
<p>Permission for night lessons denied by district</p> <p>Permission for out of school day lessons denied by district</p> <p>Permission for extended day lessons denied by district</p> <p>Inability to leave school grounds</p>	<p>OSEP: O&M Related Service</p> <p>MDE Q&A Orientation and Mobility Services</p>	<p>Service provision should occur in naturally occurring conditions and environments</p> <p>Instruction should be provided with least impact on general education curriculum, when possible</p> <p>Use natural environments to show how things can change from day to day or in different weather conditions</p>	<p>Different in districts/region based on special education directors and IEP teams</p> <p>Varies by district</p> <p>In some districts, it is not possible and must set up simulations</p> <p>Transportation of students can be a concern</p>
<p>Difficulty with transportation, driver certification, setting up district transportation</p> <p>Funding for cabs, bus tickets, alternative transportation</p>		<p>COMS transport student to environment where specific O&M skills need to be taught: neighborhood grocery store, complicated intersection, Light Rail station, college campus, airport</p>	<p>Schedule a vehicle from district transportation department</p> <p>Districts have a vehicle provided for itinerant staff</p> <p>Some districts have vans for COMS use</p> <p>Districts contract with cab companies</p>

Concern	Federal / State requirements	Best Practice	Current Practice
Limited time of staff		Local educational agencies hire adequate COMS to meet current student need	Repeat and practice is done by other IEP team members, paras or classroom staff
<p>Missing large amounts of instructional time due to not being able to provide services outside of the school day</p> <p>Child misses access to general education curriculum</p>		<p>Provide O&M instruction outside the normal school day</p> <p>Adapt required physical education class to include O&M instruction</p>	<p>Explanation of Expanded Core Curriculum. Least impact on educational opportunities</p> <p>Not able to fit all in typical school day</p>
Cultural barriers to services		Take into consideration language and gender barriers as well as culturally based family expectations	Varies by district
Working with students who have multiple needs		<p>Special consideration for students who are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deafblind • Autistic • Wheelchair Users • Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) 	Student communication (need for interpreter or intervenor on lessons), hearing aids (separate setting to include environmental noises)
O&M staff may request professional liability insurance		COMS carry individual professional liability insurance	Varies by district

What TBVI can teach in regards to O&M service delivery

TBVI can provide indoor mobility skills as well as reteach and practice O&M skills and established routes on a school campus. TBVI need to work closely with COMS in provision of O&M skills and re-teaching mobility routes.

TBVI should **not** prescribe canes, mobility aids or devices, or provide O&M related instruction outside a school campus. Under no circumstances should TBVI be teaching safe-street crossing skills or establishing mobility routes.

O&M Skills a TBVI Can Provide

- Concept / Sensory / Orientation Skills.
- Human/Sighted Guide Skills.
- Precane Skills.
- Repeat and practice COMS established routes only on a school campus.

Non-Cane Techniques

- Systematic Search.
- Dropped Objects.
- Low Vision Techniques: Interpretation of Object/Environment.
- Low Vision Techniques: Using Color, Glare, Contrast, etc.
- Use of low vision aids (i.e., monocular).

Self-Protective Techniques

- UPAT: Upper Protective Arm Technique.
- LPAT: Lower Protective Arm Technique.

Directional Techniques

- Trailing.
- Direction Taking.
- Open Spaces.

Human/Sighted Guide (HG) Techniques

- Basic Human Guide.
- Narrow Spaces With A Guide.
- Reversing Direction With A Guide.
- Transferring Sides.
- Doors With A Guide.
- Stairs With A Guide.

Resources

- [A Guide to Orientation and Mobility Services in Region 9 & 10](http://region10projects.org/bvi-cop/) (http://region10projects.org/bvi-cop/)
- [Orientation and Mobility Overview](http://www.visionaware.org/info/everyday-living/essential-skills/an-introduction-to-orientation-and-mobility-skills/123) (http://www.visionaware.org/info/everyday-living/essential-skills/an-introduction-to-orientation-and-mobility-skills/123).
- [MDE Orientation and Mobility Q&A](http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/dse/sped/cat/bvi/049077) (http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/dse/sped/cat/bvi/049077).
- [Family Centered Practices for Infants and Toddlers with Visual Impairments](http://community.cec.sped.org/dvi/resourcesportal/positionpapers) (http://community.cec.sped.org/dvi/resourcesportal/positionpapers).
- DRAFT 2018 COMS scope of practice.
- [The National Agenda for the Education of Children and Youths with Visual Impairments, Including Those with Multiple Disabilities, Revised](http://www.afb.org/info/national-agenda-for-education/goal-statements/25) (http://www.afb.org/info/national-agenda-for-education/goal-statements/25).

Professional Development Planned for SY2018-19

- Minnesota referral process for O&M based on shortage crisis.
- Screening tools for TBVI.
- Clarification of COMS and TBVI Roles.
- Wheelchair mobility.

O&M Referral Process

Step 1: Student referred for BVI

Step 2: TBVI Screens for O&M

Step 3: TBVI Refers for O&M evaluation based on screening results

Step 4: COMS completes evaluation

Step 5: COMS recommends services based on evaluation results

Services are based on need of the individual student.