

The Definition and the Role of a TVI

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Ever dream of learning braille? Or being the Annie Sullivan to the Helen Keller of this generation? Or using technology to increase visual access of printed page for a student with low vision, or adapting a physical education game to include a student who is blind, or teaching geography concepts with tactile maps? These are all the skills of a teacher certified in the area of visual impairments (TVI).

Colorado has licensure specific to a teacher certified in the area of visual impairment. The license, entitled Special Education Specialist: Visually Impaired for Birth - 21, is reserved for individuals who have graduated from an approved undergraduate or graduate university program specific to educating children with visual impairment. There are rigorous competencies attached to this licensure, as can be found on pages 90-97 of the Rules for the Administration of the Educator Licensing Act of 1991, which are located at www.cde.state.co.us/cdeboard/download/bdregs-301-37.pdf.

The teacher certified in visual impairment is often referred to as a TVI. The focus of this acronym is on the word teacher. This individual should not be referred to as a vision specialist or a vision therapist. There is, however, a special national-level certification, that some TVIs may have called Certified Low Vision Therapist, which is very different from the term vision therapist that is associated with optometric visual exercises. A CLVT is someone who specializes in low vision evaluation and training on low vision devices such as magnifiers.

There are numerous roles of a TVI, as this position requires knowledge of the human development, the regular education curriculum, the impact of visual impairment upon the developing child from birth through 21 years, and the methodology and materials needed for the child to have equal access to the school curriculum. Every child is unique with varying skills, needs, levels of participation, and levels of development. The child's educational team will discuss the type of direct (primary instructor), indirect (collaborating instructors), and/or consultation services that will be necessary from each service provider.

One role that is especially important to highlight is the responsibility of Colorado TVIs to provide the assessment framework for the state-mandated Literacy Modality Plan for every child who is

visually impaired. A literacy modality is the method(s) of how a child with a visual impairment accesses information, communicates, and demonstrates literacy. For example, will the child use braille, regular print, tape books, and/or enhanced print as a reading media? It is the responsibility of a TVI to work with the educational team (which, of course, includes parents) to determine the literacy modality(ies) of the child. A Functional Vision and/or Literacy Modality Assessment are the assessment specialties of a TVI. If braille is determined to be a primary or secondary literacy mode for a child, the TVI have a CDE Certificate of Braille Competency on file with his or her administrative unit's human resources office. Visual impairment affects more than a child's academic arena. A TVI is also responsible for ensuring that each child with a visual impairment has access to what is called the *Expanded Core Curriculum*, or "additional knowledge and skills needed beyond the general education curriculum." More information about the Expanded Core Curriculum can be found at <http://www.tsbvi.edu/Education/corecurric.htm>.

A Council of Exceptional Children Division on Visual Impairments position paper entitled *The Role and Function of the Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments* by Drs. Susan Jay Spungin and Kay Alicyn Ferrell can be found on the CEC DVI website at <http://www.ed.arizona.edu/dvi/Postion%20Papers/tvi.htm>. This paper provides an excellent summary of the comprehensive responsibilities of a TVI specific to the following areas: (a) assessment and evaluation; (b) educational and instructional strategies for the learning environment and adapting the curriculum, (c) guidance and counseling, (d) administration and supervision, (e) school community relations.

There are currently about 85 TVIs in Colorado working with close to 1,100 children and youth ages birth through 21 years. More TVIs are needed to fill current vacancies across the state. If you are interested in learning more about the role of a TVI or how to pursue this profession, please contact Tanni Anthony at Anthony_t@cde.state.co.us or (303) 866-6681.