

The special education for the visually impaired

[Education](#), [Special Education](#)



Specialeducationhas come a long way since the room down the hall with the crayon books and easy work. There was a time that special education students were placed together in a classroom, given easy work to do that would not challenge them and provided separate recesses and lunch periods so that they would not mingle with the regular education students. It was a stigma that nobody wanted for their child but it wasn't until the mid-1960's that it began to change.

Beginning with Brown vs the school board lawsuit, stemming from a Black student who wanted to attend a predominately white school, the life of a special education student has transformed significantly. Today, special education students are protected fromdiscriminationand segregation by federal and state laws. Students with special learning needs are educated in the least restrictiveenvironmentand school systems are ordered to accommodate their special needs so that the playing field will be level for their educational journey. Blind students are classified special education by the very nature of their disability.

They are classified as such so that the federal education statutes with regards to special education can protect them from being segregated or shunned by the regular education system. Blind students have their inability to see in common, however, outside of that they are as individual and diverse as their sighted peers. There are federal guidelines in place regarding the education and interventions that pertain to blind students however. A student who is blind can present challenges when it comes to behavioral interventions because some of the tried and true methods are not applicable when it comes to a blind student.

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Making a student write an essay, write sentences or run laps is not feasible when the student needing the intervention is blind. While many behavioral interventions that apply to sighted students will in fact work with blind students it is important to have alternative plans in place for the behavior intervention of those who cannot see. When the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 was passed, educators, parents and students began to hammer out plans and pathways to the fair treatment and education of those who had special needs.

The students who were blind had previously been sent off to schools for the blind, where they only associated with other blind students, worked with blind geared materials and learned that they were blind in a sighted world. Today, blind students who want to attend regular public schools are not only encouraged to do so they are given the right by federal law to do so, and the school must take whatever steps are needed to allow that education(Anderson, 2004).

The 1997 Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the resulting final federal regulations published in 1999 describe related services as an essential component of a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) for many students with disabilities(Anderson, 2004). " Those related services include everything from transportation to counseling services that will assist the special education student in their quest to receive a public education with their peers. Every special education student, including those who are blind is provided with an IEP (Individualized Education Plan).

This plan outlines the student's educational needs, the way those needs will be met and what accommodations will be provided by the school system in providing that education (Zabriskie, 2003). While the federal law protects all special education students there are areas of interest that are specifically geared to the education of blind students (Kozub, 2006). As part and parcel of an blind student's IEP it is important to consider the disability and remember its limitations when planning the student's curriculum, extra curricular activities and physical education abilities.

Because a blind student is often at a disadvantage when it comes to physical activity in both during the routine school curriculum and the aspects of physical education the IEP team must consider alternatives to include these elements in the school day. In addition the IEP team must consider appropriate behavior interventions for the blind student that acts out due to frustration about not being able to participate as fully as their sighted peers.

This frustration may be from the child's anger at his or her limitations or may be founded in messages being sent to that student by well meaning parents who are concerned about their child's physical development as well as educational development. " The need for heightened levels of fitness in order to navigate barriers found in both home and community settings is important for children and adults with visual impairments. This is a critical mobility issue for children given the need for independence in daily living activities that increases with age and becomes a necessity during adulthood.

In addition, issues of mobility within the larger community are a concern later in adulthood if individuals who lack vision rely on public transportation

(which may or may not be accessible depending on fitness levels needed to independently reach bus stops). In all, it is imperative that adequate levels of physical activity are encouraged in children and adolescents with visual impairments to facilitate independence into adulthood. The following study is an initial investigation using a family systems framework of activity levels in a select group of children and adolescents with visual impairments (Kozub, 2006). "

These and other concerns raise a need for behavioral interventions that are specifically geared to meet the needs of blind students (Robinson, 2001). " School success may be minimal for students who have difficulties building social relationships and ultimately fail at developing social competence. As a result, social skills training is often provided to increase pro-social interaction. Despite evidence of the effectiveness of teaching appropriate social functioning, there is concern about generalization and maintenance of learned skills (Gilles, 2003). " Blind students are at a specific disadvantage in the regular classroom setting.

They are unable to determine when the classroom is noisy when it is appropriate to speak out, when it is appropriate to remain quiet and how to gain the teacher's attention by finding her by sight then moving toward her (Bricker, 2004). It is situations such as these that create a problem when it comes to behavior for the blind student. Not only are inappropriate behaviors a risk when a student is frustrated by being blind, but there are every day behaviors that must be addressed for the blind student and the

regular education student to blend into a classroom and create a positive and cohesive learning environment.

A student who cannot see where the teacher is to gain his or her attention will often times yell out or shout out the teacher's name. This can not only be disruptive to the classroom from a educational standpoint, but it can also provide a foundation for mimic behavior from the sighted students(Prochaska, 2002). A classroom with 15-23 students all shouting out names of the teacher or others that are needed will quickly become an impossible learning environment. It is important to develop a behavioral intervention for such situations and implement that intervention with the blind student(Bricker, 2004).

One intervention would be to provide the blind student with a bell, with which he could ring it once and then patiently wait for the teacher to either arrive at the desk or verbally let the student know he or she will be there momentarily. A blind student may become loud and disruptive when frustrated or angry. It is important for teachers to understand that the frustration may not be with any one person in particular but may in fact be about not being sighted the way the other students in the classroom are.

It is important o have appropriate behavior interventions in place from the beginning so that the students who are blind can depend on the consistent response to certain behaviors. When a student acts out and become verbally loud and disruptive it can be disruptive for the entire classroom. Whereas a sighted student can be told to go to the hall or go to the principal the

sending of a blind student is more complicated as they will require an aide to accompany them.

If less drastic attempts to reduce the undesired behavior are not successful then an aide should be appointed to escort the student from the classroom, however, there should be mandated approaches built into the student's IEP for behavioral interventions before that point arrives. One step that can be taken in behavior intervention with a blind student is to have the student learn how to self direct the anger. If he or she is feeling frustrated it is important that the student have a place to vent that frustration so that it does not come out in inappropriate behaviors in the classroom.

Allowing that student to be excused to talk to the guidance counselor about the current frustration is one behavior intervention that will allow the student to address the frustration while at the same time preserving the integrity of the classroom setting and the lessons being taught to the remaining students. Another approach to redirecting undesired behavior will be touch and sound. A blind student cannot read social cues from other students and teachers by the look on their face.

It is important to help the student who is blind find ways to read social cues using the other senses. Teachers should instruct the seeing students in ways to use hearing and touch to convey cues to the students who are blind. In addition the students that are blind should be guided in listening to voice cues and other sounds that can clue them to the social attitudes and feelings of those around them. It is important that blind student intervention

programs provide clear cut guidelines in helping the students redirect themselves and their behavior to more acceptable avenues.

It is important for teachers and students to recognize the very real limitations that a blind student must face on a daily basis. The student who is educated in a regular education classroom is subjected to a well rounded experience, while at the same time must face frustrations that he or she would not have to deal with in a school for the blind. It is important that behavior interventions for the blind student take into consideration the disability and how that disability impacts the student not only from an educational standpoint, but also from a social and emotional standpoint as well.

Behavior interventions should include guidance for future behaviors that will provide a foundation for the student to build on successful encounters with each passing year. The federal government mandates that accommodations be put in place but it is up to the individual school to design the accommodations that fit the individual blind student. Blind students are as diversified as sighted students and as such must have behavioral intervention plans in place that address their individual needs.