

I am here to voice my opposition to House Bill 1012.

BESB... Board of Education and Services for the Blind. What does the mean? Your predecessors felt it was important enough to establish a stand alone agency to provide services to the blind. What type of services could be SO important? I am in a unique position ....I know because I have my son Alex. I truly understand what those services look like...Alex has CHARGE syndrome and is educationally classified as Deaf/blind ...which is so unique IDEA has taken the time to define it separately. This is a low incidence disability and requires specialized instruction. In the history of our district Alex is the very first child with that classification. Imagine having BOTH of your learning senses compromised. Our district does not have someone who is knowledgeable in deaf/blind education on staff.....But BESB does... Alex has a Teacher of the visually impaired that has that specialized expertise. She has provided in-services on CHARGE syndrome to the staff every year to reassure them they can do this. Alex's TVI comes to the table with years of experience and can offer solutions that really work. She is a vital member of Alex's IEP team.

BESB also helps the whole family. I have been offered and I have attended many BESB coordinated workshops and the knowledge gained is priceless.

With the proposed moves of BESB children's services to the State Department of Education can you insure that Alex's

TVI will be available and can continue the level of support?  
What will become of the parent training?

Starting in September we begin planning Alex's transition to adult services. Currently BESB offers a seamless transfer of services as they are both under the same roof so they are able to work collaboratively to get the necessary services for Alex. What will happen when children's services and adult services are separated? Will Alex's future be at the mercy of 2 separate agency's ability to work together effectively?

I think it is important that you know that Alex does not have friends from his local school. The friends Alex has made are from the many BESB programs Alex has participated in. They have truly given Alex a place to feel welcome. They have offered programs that develop real life skills through their work using the Expanded Core Curriculum.

Things are going well academically for Alex in his local public school directly due to the involvement of the TVI. I hope you do not think this has been easy. Getting a group of individuals together to understand the unique needs for Alex so he can stay in his local school has been a long and difficult road to navigate. I have had to fight for very basic services for Alex....numerous years have been spent getting the district to understand the need for large print materials. What happens when the new delivery of services fail? What happens when the responsibility for deaf/blind services falls to the district and then they can decide what things are

unnecessary? The potential for Alex to fall through the cracks is enormous.

I just can't seem to understand why you would select a projected saving over the integrity of these very specialized services the offer our kids a shot at being relevant in their own lives???

For me that is far too big a risk.

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# **AFB** American Foundation® for the Blind

Expanding possibilities for people with vision loss

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## **The Expanded Core Curriculum for Blind and VI Children and Youths**

### **The Existing Core Curriculum**

- English language arts other languages, to the extent possible
- mathematics science
- health physical education
- fine arts social studies
- economics business education
- vocational education history

### **The Expanded Core Curriculum**

- compensatory or 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
- sensory efficiency skills
- self-determination

### **The Expanded Core Curriculum**

#### **Nine Unique Educational Needs for Students with Visual Impairments**

The Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) is the body of knowledge and skills that are needed by students with visual impairments due to their unique disability-specific needs. Students with visual impairments need the expanded core curriculum in addition to the core academic curriculum of general education. The ECC should be used as a framework for assessing students, planning individual goals and providing instruction.

A short description for each of these areas of expanded core curriculum follow:

#### **Compensatory or Functional Academic Skills, Including Communication Modes**

(Note: for this area of the expanded core curriculum for blind and visually impaired students, a distinction must be made between compensatory skills and functional skills. Compensatory skills are those needed by blind and visually impaired students in order to access all areas of core curriculum. Mastery of compensatory skills will usually mean that the visually impaired student has access to

learning in a manner equal to that of sighted peers. Functional skills refers to the skills that students with multiple disabilities learn that provide them with the opportunity to work, play, socialize, and take care of personal needs to the highest level possible.)

Compensatory and functional skills include such learning experiences as concept development, spatial understanding, study and organizational skills, speaking and listening skills, and adaptations necessary for accessing all areas of the existing core curriculum. Communication needs will vary, depending on degree of functional vision, effects of additional disabilities, and the task to be done. Children may use braille, large print, print with the use of optical devices, regular print, tactile symbols, a calendar system, sign language, and/or recorded materials to communicate. Regardless, each student will need instruction from a teacher with professional preparation to instruct students with visual impairments in each of the compensatory and functional skills they need to master. These compensatory and functional needs of the visually impaired child are significant, and are not addressed with sufficient specificity in the existing core curriculum.

### **Orientation and Mobility**

As a part of the expanded core curriculum, orientation and mobility is a vital area of learning. Teachers who have been specifically prepared to teach orientation and mobility to blind and visually impaired learners are necessary in the delivery of this curriculum. Students will need to learn about themselves and the environment in which they move - from basic body image to independent travel in rural areas and busy cities. The existing core curriculum does not include provision for this instruction. It has been said that the two primary effects of blindness on the individual are communication and locomotion. The expanded core curriculum must include emphasis on the fundamental need and basic right of visually impaired persons to travel as independently as possible, enjoying and learning from the environment through which they are passing to the greatest extent possible.

### **Social Interaction Skills**

Almost all social skills used by sighted children and adults have been learned by visually observing the environment and other persons, and behaving in socially appropriate ways based on that information. Social interaction skills are not learned casually and incidentally by blind and visually impaired individuals as they are by sighted persons. Social skills must be carefully, consciously, and sequentially taught to blind and visually impaired students. Nothing in the existing core curriculum addresses this critical need in a satisfactory manner. Thus, instruction in social interaction skills becomes a part of the expanded core curriculum as a need so fundamental that it can often mean the difference between social isolation and a satisfying and fulfilling life as an adult.

### **Independent Living Skills**

This area of the expanded core curriculum is often referred to as "daily living skills." It consists of all the tasks and functions persons perform, in accordance with their abilities, in order to lead lives as independently as possible. These curricular needs are varied, as they include skills in personal hygiene, food preparation, money management, time monitoring, organization, etc. Some independent living skills are addressed in the existing core curriculum, but they often are introduced as splinter skills, appearing in learning material, disappearing, and then re-appearing. This approach will not adequately prepare blind and visually impaired students for adult life. Traditional classes in home economics and family life are not enough to meet the learning needs of most visually impaired students, since they assume a basic level of knowledge, acquired incidentally through vision. The skills and knowledge that sighted students acquire by casually and incidentally observing and interacting with their environment are often difficult, if not impossible, for blind and visually impaired students to learn without direct, sequential instruction by knowledgeable persons.

## **Recreation and Leisure Skills**

Skills in recreation and leisure are seldom offered as a part of the existing core curriculum. Rather, physical education in the form of team games and athletics are the usual way in which physical fitness needs are met for sighted students. Many of the activities in physical education are excellent and appropriate for visually impaired students. In addition, however, these students need to develop activities in recreation and leisure that they can enjoy throughout their adult lives. Most often sighted persons select their recreation and leisure activity repertoire by visually observing activities and choosing those in which they wish to participate. The teaching of recreation and leisure skills to blind and visually impaired students must be planned and deliberately taught, and should focus on the development of life-long skills.

## **Career Education**

There is a need for general vocational education, as offered in the traditional core curriculum, as well as the need for career education offered specifically for blind and visually impaired students. Many of the skills and knowledge offered to all students through vocational education can be of value to blind and visually impaired students. They will not be sufficient, however, to prepare students for adult life, since such instruction assumes a basic knowledge of the world of work based on prior visual experiences. Career education in an expanded core curriculum will provide the visually impaired learner of all ages with the opportunity to learn first-hand the work done by the bank teller, the gardener, the social worker, the artist, etc. It will provide the student opportunities to explore strengths and interests in a systematic, well-planned manner. Once more, the disadvantage facing the visually impaired learner is the lack of information about work and jobs that the sighted student acquires by observation.

Because unemployment and underemployment have been the leading problem facing adult visually impaired persons in the United States, this portion of the expanded core curriculum is vital to students, and should be part of the expanded curriculum for even the youngest of these individuals.

## **Technology**

Technology is a tool to unlock learning and expand the horizons of students. It is not, in reality, a curriculum area. However, it is added to the expanded core curriculum because technology occupies a special place in the education of blind and visually impaired students. Technology can be a great equalizer. For the braille user, it allows the student to provide feedback to teachers by first producing material in braille for personal use, and then in print for the teacher, classmates, and parents. It gives blind persons the capability of storing and retrieving information. It brings the gift of a library under the fingertips of the visually impaired person. Technology enhances communication and learning, as well as expands the world of blind and visually impaired persons in many significant ways. Thus, technology is a tool to master, and is essential as a part of the expanded core curriculum.

## **Sensory Efficiency Skills**

Sensory efficiency includes instruction in the use of residual vision, hearing, and the other senses; for example, learning how to use optical devices, hearing aids, augmentative communication devices, and the like. In addition, learning how to integrate all remaining senses to counter the impact of any missing or impaired sense is also integral to this area; for example, learning how to use tactual, gustatory, and olfactory input rather than visual cues to identify one's personal possessions, or using hearing and the other senses to identify people one knows without visual cues, fits into this area.

## **Self-Determination**

This area of the ECC highlights the importance of believing in oneself, while understanding one's abilities and limitations. Students learn from successes and failures how to achieve one's goals in life. Self-determination is the ability for people to control their lives, reach goals they have set and take part fully in the world around them.

*Bringing together all of these skills learned in the expanded core curriculum produces a concept of the blind or visually impaired person in the community. It is difficult to imagine that a congenitally blind or visually impaired person could be entirely at ease and at home within the social, recreational, and vocational structure of the general community without mastering the elements of the expanded core curriculum. What is known about congenitally blind and visually impaired students is that, unless skills such as orientation and mobility, social interaction, and independent living are learned, these students are at high risk for lonely, isolated, unproductive lives. Accomplishments and joys such as shopping, dining, attending and participating in recreational activities are a right, not a privilege, for blind and visually impaired persons. Responsibilities such as banking, taking care of health needs, and using public and private services are a part of a full life for all persons, including those who are blind or visually impaired. Adoption and implementation of a core curriculum for blind and visually impaired students, including those with additional disabilities, will assure students of the opportunity to function well and completely in the general community.*

The components of the expanded core curriculum present educators with a means of addressing the needs of visually impaired children with additional disabilities. The educational requirements of this population are often not met since the lack of vision is considered "minor", especially when the child is severely impacted by cognitive and physical disabilities. Each area in the expanded core curriculum can be further defined to address the educational issues facing these children and assist parents and educators to fulfill their their needs.

This expanded core curriculum is the heart of the responsibility of educators serving visually impaired students. These areas are not adequately addressed by regular classroom teachers, nor should they be, for this is the core curriculum that is essential to students who are blind and visually impaired, and it epitomizes their "...right to be different..."

Additional information on the National Agenda may be found at the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired website, [www.tsbvi.edu/agenda](http://www.tsbvi.edu/agenda).

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