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**What is the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) for Students with Visual Impairments?**

This document is meant for Special Education Directors, parents, classroom teachers, teachers of students with visual impairment (TVI), certified orientation and mobility specialists (COMS), and other stakeholders who wish to be more familiar with the ECC.

**What is the ECC?**

This term encompasses a specific set of concepts and skills in which a student with visual impairment often requires systematic instruction. “The ECC proposes that instruction for students with visual impairments should include all the traditional areas of academic instruction and instruction in areas that are directly affected by a child’s visual impairment.” (Sapp & Hatlen, 2010) With the passage of Senate Bill 39 in 2013, evaluation is required in all areas of the ECC, and priority needs must be identified and addressed in the student’s IEP.

**The Expanded Core Curriculum contains “Real Life” skills that students with visual impairments may need extra assistance learning:**

* Assistive Technology – Includes all assistive and adaptive tools as well as instruction in the use of these tools that enable access to the environment, to curriculum, and to any type of learning.
* Career Education – Provides the opportunity to learn about work and work-related skills and discover personal strengths and preferences in order to plan for transition to adult life.
* Compensatory Skills – Includes any skills necessary in order to access the general (core) curriculum. This may include Braille, communication, access to print, tactile symbols, audio materials, and more.
* Independent Living Skills & Personal Management – Includes all the tasks performed in the course of daily life that increase independence and contribute to the family structure.
* Orientation & Mobility – Allows persons with visual impairment to be oriented to their environment and move as safely and independently as possibly within it.
* Recreation & Leisure – Ensures that persons with visual impairment have opportunities to experience a variety of activities in order to determine their own preferences.
* Self-Determination – Often an overarching focus, self-determination refers to empowering the student with visual impairment to make choices, set personal goals, learn how to be appropriately assertive, and learn about and value themselves.
* Sensory Efficiency – Encompasses instruction in how to use senses efficiently.
* Social Interaction Skills – Awareness of self and how to relate to and interact with others in a complex world.

(Adapted from *What is the Expanded Core Curriculum?*, Texas ECC Committee, 2014)

**Why is extra assistance needed?**

**Texas State Law**

Texas Education Code 30.002 became effective June 14, 2013. In summary, the law adds language that requires the evaluation of and subsequent instruction in Braille, concept development, Orientation and Mobility, social interaction skills, career planning, assistive technology, including optical devices, independent living skills, recreation and leisure enjoyment, self-determination, and sensory efficiency for students who are blind or visually impaired. These instructional areas are commonly referred to as the Expanded Core Curriculum. To view the law, go to <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/ED/htm/ED.30.htm#30.002>

**It’s the right thing to do.**

Typically developing students learn many of the skills that are part of the Expanded Core Curriculum incidentally through visual observation. They see different workers in their community; they watch a parent prepare a meal; they see peers playing with one another. For students who have a visual impairment, however, such visual information may be distorted, incomplete, or missing. For instance, children who cannot observe social behaviors such as facial expressions and body language cues must be taught to make “eye contact.” Otherwise they may be perceived as being uninterested and are left out of conversations. The student with a visual impairment must learn to converse, interact, and relate; skills facilitated by sharing of common experience. Systematic, intentional instruction is often required in order to teach these types of skills, as well as those previously listed, to children with a visual impairment.

**How are students with a visual impairment affected who do not learn these basic concepts and skills?**

Basic concepts are a foundation for understanding content in core curriculum areas. Without basic experiential concepts, students with a visual impairment will have difficulty in the academic setting. For example, if a student with a visual impairment learned about an airplane by being shown a toy or model version, then their experience and knowledge is based on that limited contact. While they might be able to describe an airplane and say that it flies in the air, they would have no concept of the actual size of an aircraft, or that the pilot sits in a different place than the passengers, or where luggage is stored. Other children can learn these simple concepts by looking at pictures or watching television or movies.

In addition, many of the skills and concepts that are learned as part of the ECC are necessary for successful transition into post-secondary education and the competitive workforce. To become an independent, contributing member of society, a student with a visual impairment needs to be able to negotiate the environment and have the social skills required in the competitive world of work or post-secondary education. Without competence in the very important life skills outlined in the ECC, even an academically successful student will likely have difficulty being successful in post-secondary ventures.

**Who is responsible for teaching these skills to students with visual impairments?**

Texas Education Code (TEC) 30.002

(c) the comprehensive statewide plan for the education of students with visual impairments must: …

(4) include methods to ensure that children with visual impairments receiving special education services in school districts receive, before being placed in a classroom setting or within a reasonable time after placement:

1. evaluation in the impairment; and
2. instruction in an expanded core curriculum, which is required for students with visual impairments to succeed in classroom setting and to derive lasting, practical benefits from the education provided by school districts….

Thus, since students with visual impairment have an IEP, the IEP (ARD) or IFSP team is responsible for determining, based on data, how areas of need in the ECC will be addressed. It makes sense for the TVI to address Braille and the COMS to address needs related to orientation to and travel in the school or community. But who should address career related concerns and what about learning to cook a meal? TEA does not delineate who must teach specific areas of the ECC, so it is up to the IEP team to get creative and determine what resources can be used to teach specific skills.

**How can school district personnel address needs related to the ECC?**

* Enroll the student in general education courses such as Business Computer Information Systems (BCIS), or Home Economics or other functional courses, and provide accommodations with assistance from the TVI and/or modification based on IEP team recommendations.
* Life Skills types of classes may be a place to teach some skills.
* The TVI and COMS can provide direct instruction during the school day, outside of school hours, or in the summer.
* Parents can assist in the development of skills by giving the student chores at home or providing other experiences outside of the school day.
* Check with local Community Colleges for a course the student can monitor.
* Students can attend short-term, weekend, or summer programs at Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI).
* Contact other agencies such as DARS/DBS, Lighthouse for the Blind, American Federation for the Blind, Texas Parents of Blind Children (TPOBC), or your Regional Education Service Center.
* **Students can participate in programs designed to address areas of the ECC that are sponsored by Region 10 Education Service Center’s Committee: “Real Life” Addressing the ECC.**

Regardless of how needs are met, the importance of addressing the Expanded Core Curriculum cannot be overemphasized if students with visual impairments are to be empowered with the scope of cognitive, motor, social, and organizational tools necessary for success in post-secondary endeavors.

**References**

Sapp, W. & Hatlen, P. (2010). *The Expanded Core Curriculum: Where We Have Been, Where We Are Going, and How We Can Get There.* Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness, June 2010. Retrieved from [www.afb.org/jvib](http://www.afb.org/jvib)

Texas ECC Committee (April 28, 2014). *What is the Expanded Core Curriculum?* Retrieved from <http://www.tsbvi.edu/resources/3973-ecc-flyer>

**Resources**

| Resource Name | Link |
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| Region 10 ESC Addressing the ECC “Real Life” Programs | <http://www.region10.org/supplementary-services/programs/expanded-core-curriculum-ecc/>  |
| Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) | [www.tsbvi.edu](http://www.tsbvi.edu)  |
| TSBVI Resources for the Expanded Core Curriculum (RECC) | <http://www.tsbvi.edu/recc/>  |
| TSBVI Short-term programs | <http://www.tsbvi.edu/short-term-programs>  |
| TSBVI Summer programs | <http://www.tsbvi.edu/summer-programs>  |
| American Federation for the Blind (AFB) Center on Vision Loss (in Dallas) | <http://www.afb.org/info/programs-and-services/center-on-vision-loss/12>  |
| Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind | <http://www.dallaslighthouse.org/>  |
| Texas Lions Camp | <http://www.lionscamp.com/>  |