TIPS FOR WORKING WITH STUDENTS WHO ARE BLIND OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED

BRAILLE
YOU WILL NOT BE EXPECTED TO READ AND/OR TEACH BRAILLE YOURSELF. Materials can be given to you with a print "interlined" transcript, so that you can follow along as the student does his work.

In regards to braille, the VI teacher will be providing the following:
- direct instruction with the student to teach braille reading, writing, and formats (writing personal letters, outlines, graphs, charts, maps, tables, etc.)
- a print interpretation of everything the student brailles so that you may grade it
- all of your handouts and overhead transparencies in Braille (if provided ahead of time)
- many students will be able to load your MS Word files directly onto their Braille notetaker or laptop using a USB thumb drive

Some print formats do not transform into braille well. Always try to provide a copy of the assignment and the VI teacher will change the format so that the student still learns the concept.

BRAILLE PROCUREMENT
The print materials you use in your class should be made available to the blind student at the same time they are issued to the print students so as to avoid gaps in learning. If you are using "duplicating masters", "practice worksheets", or other papers generated from the various subject curricula, let the VI teacher know about two weeks in advance so she can braille them on time. DO NOT be afraid to ask to have something put in braille, thinking you may not use it after all. The VI teacher/Braillist would much rather braille too much than not enough.

You, the VI teacher and the Braillist will discuss how to organize this "paper shuffle" so that you find it workable.

Before we leave this topic - a word on "spontaneity". Many teachers say they sometimes feel somewhat stymied by having to prepare in advance so that the braille student will have the materials needed, particularly in situations in which they see the class needs immediate review of a concept they are having trouble learning. You should go ahead with what you would normally do, and do your best at describing the material in a way to include the blind student. Remember, you can download a Word file to a USB thumb drive for their use.
**LARGE PRINT**
We encourage our students to use their prescribed glasses, magnifiers or assistive technology from a young age. That said, it can be difficult to encourage students in middle school to use anything that looks “different”. We have found the iPad to be a helpful tool for students with low vision, as it is easy to enlarge text and looks similar to what others are using. There are many types of assistive technology to help with this as well. Consult with your VI Teacher.

**BRAILLE BOOKS**
Braille books are available through the Textbook Coordinator, and the TVI will order these for you. One print book may have as many as 4 or more braille volumes.

Braille books may be taken home if you assign homework from the book.

**LARGE TYPE BOOKS**
Similarly, these books are available for order through the Textbook Coordinator. They are typically much larger than regular print, although there is some effort being made to make these more “true to size”.

**ELECTRONIC TEXTS**
There has been an influx of materials available in electronic formats over the past few years. The TVI can assist in ensuring that the student has access to these texts through Bookshare, Learning Ally, or the Texas State Library.

**DICTIONARY WORK**
Subject text glossaries can be used to teach and reinforce this skill. If you are covering dictionary work fairly often, the VI teacher can provide your visually impaired student with an electronic dictionary. Those students using a Braille notetaker have access to a dictionary on their machine.

**MATERIALS WRITTEN ON WHITEBOARD/CHARTS**
If the VI teacher knows which charts and maps you typically use, she will braille the materials in advance. Students with low vision will use some type of assistive technology, an iPad or telescope or distance device to access the information.

It helps the student if you read over the materials which have been written on the chalkboard, and/or verbalize as you write. Another approach is to have a neighboring student quietly read the material to the blind or visually impaired student as she writes anything that is needed for later use (e.g. vocabulary words, daily assignments, math problems). Many Smartboard programs can be accessed on a computer or iPad using a program such as Join.me or Air Display. Your instructional technology support people should be able to help find solutions.

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STUDENT OUTPUT

Studies indicate a braille reader sometimes takes as much as twice the time to read and write due to the bulkiness and awkward formats of braille. Sometimes the best thing to do is to allow the braille student to complete a little more than half the work WHEN THIS WILL NOT JEOPARDIZE content mastery. This will often work for math drills, spelling sentences, etc. Assign the same volume of work the first 6 weeks to roughly evaluate the student’s speed, then talk with the VI teacher about reducing the work load, if needed. The student who is blind or visually impaired will prepare his answers on a notetaker, laptop, or iPad and will print out a copy, save to USB, or email the work to you.

MATH

Because braille students cannot "figure" on paper as easily as print students, they are taught to use a device called a Cranmer abacus. This is an abacus that has been modified for use by blind students. The VI teacher will provide all instruction on the abacus in conjunction with your math curriculum. The abacus typically takes years of training and is fairly complex. However, TEA allows this device to be used in all standardized testing situations through college, and therefore it is a tremendous advantage for the blind student. Additionally, the use of a "talking calculator" is allowed for use on STAAR for students who are blind. However, VI teachers will still want the student to learn the math facts.

COMPUTER/TECHNOLOGY

If your class frequents the computer lab, a computer will be equipped with the software necessary for the student's use. The VI teacher will be expected to ensure that students have the skills necessary to access the computer.

ORGANIZATION

You and the VI teacher will work together to teach organization to the student. They have so many books to deal with and papers coming from all directions that they may have a real impossible time FINDING things! Ideally, students should have a system for containing papers, such as pocket folders or binders for loose worksheets to keep materials together in one place OR an organized electronic system of folders that is accessible to them.

DISCIPLINE

Children who are blind or visually impaired are not different from their sighted peers regards to discipline. They, too, require a structure that is well defined with consequences for misbehavior. This is crucial if we are to help a child function successfully within any environment. So if homework isn't turned in on time, if the child doesn't raise his hand before responding, if he talks out of turn, if he does a sloppy job on his work, or goes against any of the other rules you feel are important -- react as you would for any child. If a particular behavior bugs you
and/or seems "socially inappropriate", it would be a tremendous social value to the child for you to help change that behavior, and, in fact, that's one of the main reasons blind or visually impaired children benefit so much from an education in the general education setting.

Some typical behaviors we try to change in children are poor postures (with head hanging down), "eye poking" (child gently presses a finger on the eye), rocking (like Ray Charles) and "looking" off in a different direction while people are talking to him. Please feel free to give constructive feedback to the student as necessary. Often, all that is needed is a gentle tap on the shoulder as a reminder.

TEACHING METHODS

These are some things you might consider as you embark on the day to day routines of teaching with a student who is blind or visually impaired in your classroom:

- verbalize as you write on the board, SMART Board, and/or charts
- be as explicit as possible as you verbalize, for example: "Go stand by the door" instead of "Go over there", "Let's look at sentence #5" instead of "Look at the next one"
- as you introduce a lesson and are giving examples how to complete an activity, ask the student a question to check his understanding of the task
- if you are handing out a worksheet on which the directions have been modified for the student, you may want to develop a routine in which you go around to him for more specific instructions after you get the class started
- don't be afraid to use the words "look" and "see", as these sound more normal than saying things like, "Here, feel this (!), or, "Did you listen to T.V. last night?"
- if it can be touched, encourage tactual exploration, and if you have access to any real life models of concepts that you are covering, bring them in (your VI teacher will, too); it may be helpful to work with the TVI to do some 'pre-teaching of concepts" as needed
- help from teachers should be aimed at teaching the child to do the task for him/herself, not doing it for the child
- expect children to face you or keep their head up during instruction—think what they will look like at work years from now!
- large print is not necessarily better, work with your TVI to understand what is best for your student
- enhance social experiences by providing seating arrangements that facilitate student's entry into a peer group
- with permission of the student, allow classmates to learn about the visual impairment and let them help come up with activities that will include the student