Canadian National Standards
For the Education of Children and Youth
Who are Blind or Visually Impaired,
Including Those with Additional Disabilities

Developed by the Education Committee of the
National Coalition for Vision Health
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Executive Summary

The following document has been developed based on existing research outlining the unique learning needs of students who are blind or visually impaired. Throughout the development of this document educators, parents and other professionals in the field of visual impairment and blindness were consulted.

This document provides important information about the unique learning needs of students who are blind or visually impaired. The essential disability-specific skills required for students who are blind or visually impaired (i.e., the Expanded Core Curriculum) are outlined in this document. Research indicates to ensure students who are blind or visually impaired, including those with additional disabilities, receive quality educational programs, thirteen standards need to be achieved.

These standards include information that addresses:
1. School-based teams including participation from qualified professionals in the field of visual impairment and blindness
2. The type and frequency of instruction
3. Assessment
4. The development of individual program plans
5. Equal access to programs and services
6. Accessibility of alternate format materials
7. Assistive technology
8. Accessible Internet sites
9. Educational software in and accessible format
10. Parents as essential team members
11. Full array of program placement options
12. Early intervention services
13. Comprehensive transition planning

Within this document, each of the thirteen standards are stated and then followed by examples of indicators of effective programming. The implementation of these standards will be a major step forward in the establishment of essential and standardized programming for students who are blind or visually impaired across Canada.

Foreword

In 1998, a group of 125 representatives from various fields concerned with vision health, visual impairment and blindness came together in Toronto, Ontario to give consideration to an impending crisis associated with vision loss and the scarcity of essential support services. This gathering, the National Consultation on the Crisis in Vision Loss, was comprised of stakeholders representing ophthalmology, optometry, industry, research, rehabilitation, education, first

nations, consumers and representatives of disease specific organizations. Out of this National Consultation, the National Coalition for Vision Health (NCVH) was formed with a Board representing all major stakeholders, including education.

The Coalition is currently working to address many issues associated with vision loss including the following specifically related to education:
- the need for National standards for educational service to children who are blind or visually impaired
- the current need for more qualified teachers of students who are blind or visually impaired and the imminent crisis in the number of available teachers, with approximately half of the current teachers retiring in less than ten years.

The following document has been developed based on existing research outlining the unique learning needs of students who are blind or visually impaired and input from educators, parents and other professionals in the field of visual impairment and blindness. The initial draft of this document was circulated to experienced teachers of students who are blind or visually impaired, parents, administrators, organizations, representatives, and professionals in the field from across Canada. It is hoped that the standards outlined in this document will act to improve educational programming across the country and ensure that children, wherever they live, have access to the programs and services required to meet their unique learning needs.

Introduction

There have been tremendous changes in the philosophy and practices associated with the education of students who are blind or visually impaired during the last few decades. Children with severe visual impairments, who had few opportunities for academic success in the regular classrooms of the1960s, now frequently attain their formal education in the public school setting. Students who rely on Braille as their primary reading medium are commonly enrolled in the regular classroom for the majority of their instructional time. Previously limited opportunities for educational programming for children with multiple disabilities in addition to visual impairments have dramatically expanded with the provision of supports that allow these children to attend public schools with their age-appropriate peers.

In Canada, with only one traditional residential school for the blind, approximately ninety-five percent of students who are blind or visually impaired, including those with additional disabilities, are enrolled in inclusive educational settings. In addition, the number of children with disabilities entering the public school system is increasing as medical advances support the survival of more medically fragile children. While visual impairment and blindness is a low incidence disability, it results in very complex and long-term learning needs. Parents, educators and administrators planning for early intervention and educational programs for these children are seeking direction in the provision of essential programs and services which will ensure individuals who are blind or visually impaired are provided the opportunity to reach their potential.

Who are Children Who are Blind or Visually Impaired?

Children and youth who are described as blind or visually impaired comprise a heterogeneous population. While these individuals share a common trait of some degree of vision loss, mild through to total blindness, they represent a broad spectrum of characteristics specific to such areas as cognitive ability, level of independence, physical agility, severity of disability, and presence of additional disabilities. The traditional definition of visual impairment or blindness is grounded in medical terminology (e.g., visual acuity of 6/60 or a visual field of less than 20 degrees) and provides limited guidance for instructional content or strategies. From an educational perspective, the degree of vision loss is one aspect for consideration in assessment and program planning.

More importantly, however, intervention for a child who is blind or visually impaired is based on the degree to which an individual child can access, assimilate and respond to the wealth of sensory information encountered every moment of the day. Any child who has limited access to visual information whether associated with changes in the structure and functioning of the eye or its related cortical processes will experience difficulties in any number of daily activities. These children comprise those defined as blind or visually impaired. While research and practice have identified typical instructional and support services critical to accommodate the implications of vision loss on learning and development, each child will require programs and services designed to address her/his specific needs and environments.

Why Are Standards Needed?

Since the adoption of the philosophy and practice of inclusion, students who are blind or visually impaired have routinely been enrolled in public schools. Education is a fundamental right of all Canadians. For students who are blind or visually impaired, an education requires that their unique needs inherent to being blind or visually impaired be addressed as a compulsory part of their education. Educators and parents need to be knowledgeable about the implications of vision loss for learning and development, the unique learning needs of students who are blind or visually impaired, the components of essential program and services, and the professionals required to plan, implement and instruct these programs.

Therefore, the creation of a document outlining the standards for educational programs applicable across Canada will:
- Help to establish a common language and understanding of the terminology associated with the very specialized field of childhood visual impairment and blindness.
- Assist teachers of students who are blind or visually impaired, classroom teachers and teaching assistants to understand their role and its implications relevant to educational programming for students.
- Provide guidelines with respect to expectations for student performance, assessment, developmental and educational needs, instructional and programming needs, and rehabilitation services.

- Support the development of parent and professional networks across Canada, which will facilitate the sharing of scarce resources and expertise in Canada (e.g., information about assistive technology, access to materials, Braille literacy issues).
- Contribute to the support for the development of teacher education programs for teachers of students who are blind or visually impaired, consistency in the instructional content of teacher preparation programs, collaboration among these university programs, and the identification of professional development common to this group of specialists.
- Comply with the recent Supreme Court of Canada (Eaton v. Brant County Board of Education, 1997) ruling that children with disabilities are to receive the most inclusive placement possible while accommodating the unique learning needs associated with the disability.
- Assist parents, teachers and administrators to identify the best program options for children who are blind or visually impaired and support their efforts in providing the programs and services needed.

Unique Educational Needs of Students Who are Blind or Visually Impaired

The population of students who are blind or visually impaired across Canada is hugely diverse. Differences range in the degree of vision loss, prognosis of further vision loss, presence of other disabilities, and age of onset of vision loss. Because visual impairment or blindness is a low incidence disability, a child with vision loss is frequently the only child with this disability in his/her school or community. Regardless of the heterogeneity of this population, there is commonality in the impact that vision loss has on the ability of the child to participate within the educational environment. Vision is a distance receptor allowing the child to access visual information beyond arms' length. Without this information, children are not able to organize their environment or develop concepts that are important in understanding how things are connected in their world. Students who are blind or visually impaired need to access this information through direct experiences and hands-on, tactile exploration provided by a qualified professional who understands the significance of and strategies for addressing these unique needs.

Accessing mandatory curriculum that is presented to all students in a public school classroom is problematic for students with visual impairment or blindness. In order to participate fully within this educational environment students who are blind or visually impaired require instruction in disability-specific or compensatory skills such as Braille literacy skills, assistive technology skills, use of low vision devices, career and life management skills, social interaction skills, independent living and personal management skills and orientation and mobility skills. This disability-specific curriculum for children and youth who are blind or visually impaired is known as the Expanded Core Curriculum (Hatlen, 1996; Koenig & Holbrook, 2000). Because access to instruction in the skills outlined in the Expanded Core Curriculum is essential, National standards will help to ensure their incorporation in all programs for children and youth who are blind or visually impaired.

The Expanded Core Curriculum

Children who are blind or visually impaired have the same need for intellectual stimulation, social acceptance, emotional support, and physical activity, as do all children in our society. Therefore, the outcomes of education that are identified for all children enrolled in our schools will be appropriate for children with visual impairments. In addition to these expectations, children who are blind and visually impaired have unique learning needs associated with skills required to accommodate or compensate for the effect of vision loss on learning and development. The extent to which individuals with visual impairments are empowered to assume meaningful roles in our society relates directly to the success with which their unique educational needs are identified and addressed. While the individual needs of a given child will be specific to that child and the particular environment, the Expanded Core Curriculum incorporates universally recognized program needs for students who are blind or visually impaired. These are outlined below.

Compensatory or Functional Academic Skills, Including Communication Modes refer to those skills needed to access the regular curriculum presented in the regular classroom (i.e., compensatory skills), skills needed by students with multiple disabilities to enhance their ability to participate in home, school and community (i.e., functional skills), and an array of communication skills. "Communication needs of students with visual impairment will vary, depending on the degree of functional vision, the effects of additional disabilities, and the task to be done. Children may communicate through Braille, large print, print with the use of optical aids, regular print, tactile books, a calendar system, sign language, recorded materials, or combinations of these means (Hatlen, 1996)." Examples of other compensatory or functional academic skill area might include concept development, spatial awareness, keyboarding skills, listening skills, organizational skills, use of the abacus, or tactile discrimination skills. The acquisition of everyday concepts and practical knowledge usually acquired through incidental learning by children who are sighted requires specific instruction for students who are blind or visually impaired to ensure they are building their knowledge base on accurate information.

Orientation and Mobility is an area of instruction focusing on students' ability to know where they are in relation to their environment and to travel safely, efficiently, purposefully and independently throughout this environment. Good orientation and mobility skills are highly correlated with the degree of independence achieved by students later in life. Developing body awareness, directionality, spatial awareness, and practical knowledge associated with the characteristics of a given environment increase the probability that the student will be actively involved in age-appropriate activities with peers. Problem-solving strategies essential to travel in both familiar and unfamiliar environments, urban and rural areas and in various kinds of weather are all essential to the development of independence and self-esteem. Students who have low vision need to learn to interpret both visual and auditory information and may use an optical device to access information. The use of a white cane is essential for some students who cannot rely upon on the accuracy of the visual information they receive or for those who are blind. Students who are blind or visually impaired with additional disabilities need to have orientation and mobility instruction that addresses their specific needs and requirements of their daily routines. Orientation and mobility is taught by professionals who have completed certified programs in this very specialized area.

Social Interaction Skills are essential if students are to develop friendships with their classmates and participate in activities typically associated with school-age children, whether educational or extracurricular. Having good interpersonal communication skills is also highly correlated with employability in adults. For children who are sighted, social skills are primarily learned incidentally through interaction with family members and peers. Most of this learning occurs through observation, imitation and incidental experiences that are part of everyday routines. For children who are blind or visually impaired, this information must be provided through timely, insightful, and sequential instruction. Information associated with non-verbal communication (e.g., gestures, body language, facial expressions) or cultural practices (e.g., how close to stand to the person with whom you are speaking) must be made available to students who are blind or visually impaired. Furthermore, peers of children who are blind or visually impaired require specific instruction to increase their awareness of the implications of vision loss on social interaction if they are to become both comfortable in their interactions with their classmate who is blind or visually impaired and knowledgeable about how to include this student.

Independent Living Skills and Personal Management Skills are highly correlated with the achievement of life-long goals for students who are blind or visually impaired. "This area encompasses all the tasks and functions people perform, according to their abilities, in order to live as independently as possible (Hatlen, 1996)." Curriculum designed to address the development of independent living skills include instruction in areas such as personal hygiene, food preparation, money and time management, home management, organization of personal belongings and space to accommodate the lack of visual input. While similar skills may be taught within the public school curriculum, they do not provide sufficient opportunity for meaningful and frequent practice required for students who are blind or visually impaired. The content of the regular curriculum is often based on the assumption of the presence of a basic level of knowledge, acquired incidentally through vision. As with the skills of social interaction, students who are blind or visually impaired cannot learn these skills without direct, sequential instruction by knowledgeable people.

Recreation and Leisure Skills and experiences provide the same benefits for students who are blind or visually impaired as they do for their peers who are sighted (e.g., healthy lifestyle, fitness, shared peer interests). However, without modifications and/or specific instruction to master prerequisite skills, students who are blind or visually impaired are frequently excluded from such activities. Many of the motor skills learned during the rough and tumble play of childhood activities do not develop naturally in students who are blind or visually impaired. As well, if initial exposure to specific activities is cumbersome or their level of participation or success below that of their peers, students who are blind or visually impaired may become easily discouraged. The provision of specific and timely instruction and opportunities to practice newly acquired skills will ensure students who are blind or visually impaired derive pleasure from participation in an array of recreational and leisure activities.

Career and Life Management Skills provide students with information about the world of work, career options, and an overview of skills necessary to be successfully employed. For students who are blind or visually impaired there are many additional program components, which need to be addressed (e.g., accommodations needed to complete specific jobs, access to the appropriate assistive technology, self-advocacy skills and those to deal effectively with negative

attitudes toward individuals with disabilities). Frequently, students who are blind or visually impaired are unaware of the array of career options because they do not see the variety of workers in their environment or because adults around them are uninformed about the career opportunities available to those who are blind or visually impaired. Employment statistics from both Canada and the United States show that individuals who are blind or visually impaired are both underemployed and have unacceptably high rates of unemployment. Without specific and timely intervention to address career development issues, students who are blind or visually impaired encounter significant barriers to successful employment.

Assistive Technology enables a student who is blind or visually impaired to access information, participate in age-appropriate activities, or complete a task independently or with minimal assistance. The term "assistive technology" refers to a broad range of devices such as video magnifiers (i.e., closed circuit televisions), low vision devices, computers with Braille input/output, Braille embossers, software used to vary print size, large screen monitors, talking calculators, etc. Instruction in the use of assistive technology begins in the preschool years and evolves as the needs of the student change. Mastery of assistive technology contributes to the development of literacy and academic success, social interaction among peers, independence and the potential of future employment.

Visual Efficiency Skills are used to accurately interpret visual information and complete visual tasks as efficiently and effectively as possible. A child's ability to interpret visual information is affected by many variables (e.g., the type and severity of vision loss, cognitive ability, experiential knowledge, environmental factors such as lighting). However, with comprehensive, systematic training and practice, most students can learn to use their remaining vision more effectively and more efficiently. Visual efficiency training involves things such as blur interpretation, scanning and location skills, strategies to improve visual efficiency (e.g., use of appropriate lighting or wearing tinted lenses to reduce glare), and strategies which enhance a given student's access to visual information. Students learn about their particular eye condition, its implications on access to visual information, and how to explain their visual needs to others.

National Standards for the Education of Children and Youth Who are Blind or Visually Impaired, Including Those with Additional Disabilities

Standard One
All students who are blind or visually impaired will have a school-based planning team with the mandate to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate programs and services for these students. A qualified teacher of students who are blind or visually impaired and an orientation and mobility instructor will be members of this team.

Indicators of Effective Programming
A. Members of the school-based planning team will include classroom teachers, parents, administrators, the teacher of students who are blind or visually impaired, an orientation and mobility instructor, other professionals involved with assessment and/or programming with the

student, and the student, when appropriate.

B. Additional members are added to the school-based planning team as needed. These may include such professionals as an occupational therapist, speech and language pathologist, physiotherapist, school psychologist, behaviour specialist, nurse, social worker, or assistive technology consultant.

C. School-based planning team members have their roles and responsibilities clearly identified in a written document outlining the student's individualized program plan.

D. The school-based planning team develops goals and objectives for the student at the beginning of each school year. The student's progress is routinely monitored and evaluated. Changes to the student's individualized program plan are made in response to the student's progress during the academic year.

E. Qualified teachers of students who are blind or visually impaired identify programming needs through assessment, educate the team about the effect of visual impairment or blindness on learning and development, set appropriate expectations for the progress and performance of the student, provide strategies to address assessed learning needs, and provide direct instruction in disability-specific skill areas (i.e., the Expanded Core Curriculum).

F. An orientation and mobility instructor is an integral part of the school-based planning team and works to integrate instruction within the child's daily routines and the home, school, and community environments.

Standard Two
The type and frequency of instruction and the services provided by the teacher of students who are blind or visually impaired will be based on the assessed needs of the student and the level of support required within both the home and school environments.

Indicators of Effective Programming

A. Students with low vision (i.e., those who are visually impaired) have the same right and equal access to instruction and services provided by the teacher of students who are blind or visually impaired, as do students who are blind.

B. Students receive instruction from the teacher of students who are blind or visually impaired in any or all areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum as identified through assessment.

C. Other professionals and paraprofessionals working with students who are blind or visually impaired receive information relevant to the effect of vision loss on learning and development and strategies to address the student's unique learning needs in the educational setting.

D. Teachers of students who are blind or visually impaired are provided with ongoing professional development opportunities to ensure they stay abreast of new programs and research addressing the needs of students who are blind or visually impaired.

E. The caseloads assigned to teachers of students who are blind or visually impaired are determined by using a formal caseload analysis which considers the needs of the students, the direct instruction required for each student, preparation time, travel time, related duties such as classroom teacher and parent consultation, organizational and administrative responsibilities, and time for participation in continuing professional development. School districts employ an adequate number of teachers to address the assessed needs of the students in a given area.

Standard Three
The programs and services needed by students who are blind or visually impaired are determined through assessment conducted by the teacher of students who are blind or visually

impaired and other professionals identified by the school-based planning team.

Indicators of Effective Programming
A. The teacher of students who are blind or visually impaired and the orientation and mobility instructor routinely assess students who are blind or visually impaired in all areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum.
B. Students who are blind or visually impaired are assessed using tests designed specifically for students who are blind or visually impaired, standardized and informal tests with accommodations for students who are blind or visually impaired, and observation done by all members of the school-based team.
C. Students who are blind or visually impaired have access to a learning media assessment, which identifies their optimal means of access to visual information, as a routine part of their educational programming. All children with a visual impairment receive a learning media assessment prior to the initiation of formal literacy instruction. The school-based planning team established to design, implement and evaluate the student's individualized program plan examines and analyses assessment results to make an informed decision of the learning media to be used. Assessment is ongoing and learning media decisions are re-evaluated on a yearly basis or more frequently if decisions are tentative or problems arise.
D. Students who are visually impaired routinely receive a functional vision assessment, which outlines their visual needs, to guide the program planning of the school-based planning team.
E. Students who are blind or visually impaired participate in the same academic assessments as their classmates, including standardized testing completed through provincial Departments of Education.
F. In the absence of other disabilities students who are blind or visually impaired are expected to perform at a level consistent with provincial standards.
G. Students who are blind or visually impaired with additional disabilities receive assessment from qualified professionals identified by the school-based planning team.

Standard Four
The school-based planning team will develop an individualized program plan. All components of the Expanded Core Curriculum will be considered for inclusion in this plan. The individualized program plan becomes a working document for the school-based planning team for use throughout the year.

Indicators of Effective Programming
A. The school-based planning team gathers information pertinent to the development of the student's individualized program plan (e.g., personal information, medical information, current level of performance, assessment information).
B. The individualized program plan is a collaborative effort involving participation from all members of the school-based team.
C. The student's individualized program plan includes goals and objectives specific to the unique learning needs of students who are blind or visually impaired and the Expanded Core Curriculum, modifications or accommodations necessary to ensure access to the regular classroom curriculum, and/or individualized programs necessary to address other disability-specific needs.
D. Students who use braille receive daily braille literacy instruction from a teacher of students who are blind or visually impaired.

Standard Five

All children who are blind or visually impaired, regardless of the presence and severity of additional disabilities, will have equal access to the programs and services provided by teachers of students who are blind or visually impaired and by orientation and mobility instructors.

Indicators of Effective Programming
A. A teacher of students who are blind or visually impaired and an orientation and mobility instructor are contributing members of the school-based planning team for students who are blind or visually impaired with additional disabilities.
B. Student goals and objectives addressing areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum are integrated within the student's individualized program and daily routines.
C. The teacher of students who are blind or visually impaired provides consultation to parents and educators as well as direct instruction in the areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum when deemed appropriate by members of the school-based team.
D. The orientation and mobility instructor collaborates with members of the school-based planning team to organise the student's home and school environments and provides direct instruction to the student as deemed necessary by the school-based planning team.

Standard Six

Alternate format materials will be provided for students in the format identified by the members of the school-based planning team. These materials must be provided at the same time as the print materials are made available to their sighted peers. Students will have the opportunity to request materials in the format of their choice.

Indicators of Effective Programming
A. Students who are blind or visually impaired receive materials in their required alternate format for library collections, mandated curriculum, teacher prepared materials, leisure reading, school notices/announcements and report cards.
B. The production and distribution of materials in alternate format are coordinated to ensure efficient access.
C. Students receive materials in alternate format at the same time as classmates receive their materials.
D. Provincial alternate format centers receive textbook publisher electronic files for all textbooks purchased by provincial Departments of Education.

Standard Seven

Assistive technology needs of the student are determined through comprehensive assessments completed by those with experience in this area. Assistive technology will be made available for use in the home as well as at school. An appropriate level of technical support is necessary to ensure the student is able to access assistive technology and incorporate its use in everyday activities.

Indicators of Effective Programming
A. The school-based planning team includes an individual with expertise in assistive technology to provide consultation and/or assessment relevant to the student's use of assistive technology.

B. A comprehensive assistive technology assessment is completed to determine the needs of the student.
C. The teacher of students who are blind or visually impaired, classroom teachers, and parents are provided with information/training in the use of the assigned assistive technology to ensure the student has the support to master its use.
D. Students receive the newest version of an assigned piece of assistive technology or software to ensure the maximum level of access possible.

Standard Eight
All internet based material prescribed by the provincial Departments of Education for use in schools and information on Department of Education web sites will be developed using universal design principles to ensure access by students who are blind or visually impaired and by parents who are blind or visually impaired.

Indicators of Effective Programming
A. Students who are blind or visually impaired have access to the same online courses and/or support materials provided through the Internet as provided for their classmates who are sighted.
B. Research sites and databases subscribed to by schools are accessible to students who are blind or visually impaired.
C. The World Wide Web Consortium priority 1 and 2 levels of access are implemented in provincial schools.
D. Slide presentations or video clips used in online courses have a text alternative or provide video description for students who are blind or visually impaired.

Standard Nine
Educational software used for instruction or reinforcement of newly acquired concepts or incorporated in the curriculum by teachers will be made accessible to students who are blind or visually impaired. As well, access to educational software providing interactive computer based simulations or supporting the development of skills such as web page design, multimedia presentation, the use of spreadsheets, and desktop publishing will be provided so that students who are blind or visually impaired have equal access to essential learning opportunities.

Indicators of Effective Programming
A. Students who are blind or visually impaired are enrolled in and can independently complete the tasks assigned for technology courses prescribed by the provincial Departments of Education.
B. Students who are blind or visually impaired have access to simulated lab experiments using current assistive technology.
C. Students are enrolled in online courses and are able to access video clips, online discussion forums, and materials presented in various multimedia formats.
D. Students who are blind or visually impaired enjoy using the same educational software used by their peers to reinforce and practice newly acquired literacy skills in the elementary classroom.

Standard Ten
Parents are involved as valued and fully participating members of the school-based planning

team.

Indicators of Effective Programming
A. Parents are contributing members of the school-based planning team.
B. Parents identify and prioritize goals and objectives incorporated in their child's individualized program plan.
C. Parents receive information and training to assist them to provide instruction and monitoring of disability-specific skills in the home environment (e.g., independent living skills, Braille, orientation and mobility skills).

Standard Eleven
Students will have a full array of program placement options including short-term intensive training opportunities to address areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum.

Indicators of Effective Programming
A. Students who are blind or visually impaired have the opportunity to access short-term intensive training options, particularly in the areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum (e.g., Internet research skills using voice access technology, orientation and mobility in an urban environment).
B. Program placement decisions are made based on the assessed needs of the student, the recommendations of the school-based planning team, and the input from parents.

Standard Twelve
Children who are blind or visually impaired and their families will be provided with specialized early intervention services to address the implications of vision loss on learning and development. Early intervention programming and family support will be initiated at the time of diagnosis.

Indicators of Effective Programming
A. Children who are born blind or visually impaired as well as children who acquire vision impairment before the age of five, receive specialized early intervention services as soon as possible after diagnosis.
B. Services are provided by those who have formal education in both early childhood education and in the education of children who are blind or visually impaired.
C. Parents are provided with information about local and national parent support groups for families with children who are blind or visually impaired and with contact information for such organizations.
D. The provision of services from various organizations is coordinated in conjunction with the family and various service providers.
E. Goals and objectives designed to support the achievement of developmental milestones are based on assessment by professionals with experience and education in visual impairment and blindness.
F. Parents and other caregivers (e.g., daycare workers) are provided with training to assist them in parenting a child who is blind or visually impaired.

Standard Thirteen
A comprehensive transition plan must be developed for children and youth who are blind or

visually impaired each time they are moving to a significantly different learning environment or placement (e.g., preschool to kindergarten, school graduation to the work force or postsecondary education).

Indicators of Effective Programming
A. A transition planning team comprised of parents, the teacher of students who are blind or visually impaired, the orientation and mobility instructor, educators, representatives from other organizations involved with the student (e.g., CNIB personnel), and the student, where appropriate, meets to plan for the student's new placement.
B. The student's transition plan includes information pertinent to the skills necessary to succeed in the new environment (e.g., assistive technology, orientation and mobility, independent living skills) as well as resources available (e.g., scholarships available, supported work personnel).
C. Instruction necessary to prepare the student for transition to the new environment is provided.
D. Transition planning goals are outlined and completed prior to placement.

Conclusion

Educational mandates are the responsibility of each province or territory in Canada. The National Standards presented in this document are intended to apply to all students in Canada who are blind or visually impaired. It is acknowledged that implementation may be different in each province, however, the principles of these standards should be common throughout the country. Visual impairment and blindness is a low incidence disability and therefore meeting these standards for small numbers of students or for students in rural or remote areas creates special challenges.

In an effort to assist provinces in the implementation of these standards, educational leaders from across the country, should become involved in a coordinated effort to address the following:
- Establishment of a common language for use in the field of visual impairment and blindness.
- Development of an infrastructure to facilitate sharing of limited resources (e.g., professional expertise, assistive technology research and development).
- Completion of research to build a body of knowledge to guide program development and service delivery.
- Facilitate coordinated professional development opportunities.
- Develop a national voice to speak on behalf of students who are blind or visually impaired, their parents and educators.
- Address the shortage of qualified teachers of students who are blind or visually impaired by promoting the creation of teacher preparation facilities and recruitment incentives.
- Succession planning to ensure the continuation of current programs and services.
- Develop procedures to foster partnerships to ensure services are comprehensive, of high quality and provided in a timely manner by qualified professionals.
- Development of assessment models that collect important data with respect to outcomes

for children and youth who are blind or visually impaired.
- Support for the establishment of regional and national parent organizations for children and youth who are blind or visually impaired so parents can use a collective voice to promote high quality, national educational standards for their children.

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Endorsements

The organizations listed below have endorsed the content and principles of the "Canadian National Standards – For the Education of Children and Youth Who are Blind or Visually Impaired, Including Those with Additional Disabilities":

- The National Coalition for Vision Health
- A.E. Baker Foundation
- The Canadian National Institute for the Blind
- Canadian Ophthalmological Society
- Canadian Association Of Optometrists
- Vision Health Research Council
- The Foundation Fighting Blindness
- Association of Canadian University Professors of Ophthalmology
- BC Centre for Epidemiologic & International Ophthalmology, UBC
- Lions Eye Health Program Canada
- MEDEC – Medical Devices Canada
- School of Optometry, University of Montreal
- Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority
- Dr. Dianne Mc Connell
- Assembly of First Nations
- Opticians Association of Canada
- Canadian Institutes of Health Research
- AER – Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (Canada)
- ASVI – Alberta Society for the Visually Impaired
- CAFVI – Canadian Association for Families of Children with Visual Impairments
- VIEWS – For Blind and Visually Impaired Children
- Canadian Deaf Blind and Rubella Association