

## *Visually Impaired Teacher Certification*



Sight is a crucial aspect of learning and without being able to see, much of the world is unknown. This presents many unique challenges to educating visually impaired students. They have the same capacity to learn as any other student, but they require special teachers to help them through the process.

Think back to your own experience in school. Imagine having a significant visual impairment. You struggle to read your teacher's notes on the board at the front of the class. You cannot make out the cell diagrams included in your science textbook. You have to navigate a labyrinth of school hallways filled with throngs of students. You struggle to connect with your peers who can play football and get their driver's licenses. These are just a few of the challenges that visually impaired students face in a traditional education setting.

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Teachers who work with visually impaired students are commonly called “vision teachers.” They have many responsibilities that other teachers don’t consider. It is their responsibility to help visually impaired students receive a comprehensive education while also teaching them strategies to live a full life, regardless of their disability.

Vision teachers draw on a number of specialized resources and methods to accomplish all of the traditional goals of education. It is their job to evaluate the learning needs of students with visual impairments and to tailor personalized education programs to support them. With the proper support,

visually impaired students can receive all the benefits of a comprehensive education. Vision teachers guide them on that path.

### *What is Certification?*

Teachers are required to gain state level certification before they can work with students. This is to ensure that all new teachers have the education and experience they need to effectively educate children in a K-12 environment.

A standard teacher's certificate will not provide the knowledge necessary to work with the visually impaired. Aspiring vision teachers must gain a supplemental certification that qualifies them to work with this special population of students.

The requirements for certification vary by state, but in almost all cases it will be necessary to take graduate level coursework centered in the area of visually impaired education. Classes will focus on pedagogical methods for teaching the visually impaired, overcoming sight and mobility issues, working in Braille and other alternative mediums, and teaching students with multiple disabilities.

Once coursework and student teaching assignments have been completed, it will be necessary to pass a comprehensive test assessing the teacher's abilities. The test will measure an educator's ability to meet the academic, social, emotional and physical needs of visually impaired students.

Many vision teachers also choose to get certified as mobility teachers. Working with the visually impaired is as much about physical education as academics. Some vision teaching jobs will require applicants to have multiple certifications.

Certification requirements vary by state. Learn more about [teaching certification requirements in your state](#).

### *What is a Vision Teacher?*

Vision teachers are educators who have received specialized training to work with visually impaired students. They have all the skills of an ordinary teacher, but have also been taught how to meet the unique needs of students with visual impairments. Without dedicated vision teachers, students with vision problems would be isolated from traditional learning opportunities.

The responsibilities of a vision teacher vary widely depending on the needs of the student population. In some cases, they may teach a dedicated class of visually impaired students. The vision teacher will be responsible for every aspect of the core curriculum from science education to language arts. They will also teach Braille skills as well as strategies for independent living.

In other cases, the vision teacher will act as a consultant for other teachers and administrators. They will advocate for the needs of visually impaired students and ensure that the environment both inside and outside of the classroom can accommodate their special needs.

Education for the visually impaired is designed to help students live in a sighted world. Vision teachers do far more than teach the basic curriculum. They show their students how to make friends, go to movies, and cook their favorite meals. Proven strategies have been developed for integrating visually impaired students into school and society. Trained vision teachers can provide guidance that no one else, including parents, can provide.

### *Working with Braille*

Braille is a system of writing that employs universal arrangements of raised dots to stand in for the standard alphabet. Using this system, the visually impaired can read texts of any kind using their fingers rather than their eyes. Documents written in Braille are the most common way for the visually impaired to engage with printed material.

The vision teacher will use Braille in two ways. First, they teach young students how to read Braille quickly and proficiently. Many of the basic strategies used to teach sighted children to read will also work with students studying Braille. After a student has mastered the Braille alphabet, they will use this foundational knowledge to consume texts of greater length and complexity.

Second, the vision teacher secures resources that are written in Braille, or that are otherwise comprehensible to the visually impaired. This includes everything from textbooks to test taking materials. All the traditional tools used for learning have an equivalent for the visually impaired. It is the responsibility of the vision teacher to evaluate the learning needs of students, and to secure materials that will be most useful for their education. If a necessary text is unavailable, the vision teacher must find an equivalent alternative.

Braille is not the only tool used to help visually impaired students to access textual material. Many books are available in large print format. There are also print enlarging devices that can be used to magnify any text immediately. Audio and other electronic formats can also be a great aid to visually impaired students. It is the role of the vision teacher to identify the medium that will most benefit the student and to gather the necessary resources.

### *Mental Processes Involved In Reading*

Researchers have identified 12 mental processes that are necessary for the comprehension of any given text. These skills will apply to both sighted and visually impaired readers.

- To discover the main theme with supportive ideas
- To recognize a sequence of events or developments
- To predict outcomes and anticipate reactions
- To retain details from material of high concept density
- To recognize stated and implied cause and effect

- To recognize pivotal words that are cues to sequence, contrast, cause, and effect
- To distinguish between fact and opinion
- To appreciate shades of meaning expressed by various words
- To assess values and exercise judgment
- To evaluate the source of information
- To adjust the pattern of listening and thinking to the type of material and to the listening purpose
- To select and summarize material pertinent to the listening purpose

### *Independent Living Skills*

One of the most important responsibilities for a vision teacher is working with students to develop independent living skills. Vision impairment affects every area of a person's life. Everything from traveling to eating dinner becomes a challenge. It is the vision teacher's job to teach students the skills they need to integrate and adapt.

The goal of all education is to prepare students to live happy, successful lives. But the duties of most classroom teachers do not extend into areas of table etiquette, romance, or interior decorating. These are just a few of the skills that a vision teacher will try to cultivate in their students.

Depending on a student's level of impairment, independent living skills can occupy up to half of a student's time in the classroom. It is also the responsibility of the vision teacher to work with student's families to reinforce and expand on the lessons learned in school. Vision teachers may work with parents to arrange their furniture, standardize the location of food and utensils, and ensure full access to bathroom facilities. The role of the vision teacher extends out of the school and into the home of the student.

### Independent Living Skills for the Visually Impaired

- **Dating** – Meeting partners, planning dates, maintaining relationships
- **Social courtesies** – Giving compliments, responding to criticism
- **Requesting sighted assistance** – Finding resources to help accommodate their disability
- **Sharing** – Sharing things and asking that others share
- **Participation in social and recreational activities** – Making friends, playing sports, having friendly and personal conversations
- **Self Identity** – Understanding personal strengths and weaknesses, self advocacy

- **Miscellaneous** – Table and phone etiquette, being a host/guest

### *Becoming Certified*

Vision teachers are committed educators who have dedicated their careers to helping the visually impaired live full and independent lives.

If you are interested in becoming a teacher for the visually impaired, explore your state's [teaching certification requirements, here](#).

### *Working With Students Who Have Low Vision*

It is important to draw a distinction between students who are fully blind, and those who simply have trouble seeing. As many as 10% of visually impaired students are considered “functionally blind,” meaning they have problems with their vision but are otherwise functional. They require educational interventions, but not of the same kind or intensity as students who are fully blind

According to the American Foundation for the Blind, it is imperative that students with low vision be diagnosed by an optometrist, or ophthalmologist, to determine the exact nature of their vision impairment. Once a diagnosis has been reached, the child can access a variety of devices that can aid their vision and support their educational goals. These can range from magnifiers that enhance the size of books, to lenses that allow students to see things at a distance.

In addition to optical devices, there are a number of strategies that vision teachers can employ to help students with low vision. Preferential seating at the front of a classroom is important for creating a link between the student and the material being taught. Handouts and test taking material should include special amendments to help direct students who struggle to see. Laboratory equipment should have large print displays. Group learning can also be an effective way for low vision students to access information. As long as there is open and honest dialogue between the student and the vision teacher, almost any obstacle can be overcome.

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- [Teaching certification programs](#)
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