EXPANDED CORE CURRICULUM
AN EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENT

Compiled by Ken Woodring
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REASON FOR THIS STUDY

Parents and teachers frequently ask how they can justify including the “expanded core curriculum (ECC)” in the schools. Few school districts address the ECC as such. It is safe to say that most special educators do not recognize its existence. Why? There is no state or federal mandate requiring its use in programming for children who are blind and visually impaired.

However, as state and federal laws/rules/regulations do not directly address the need for including the ECC in educational planning, there is enough included in the statutes that will justify its use. This paper is intended to help parents and others understand that the expanded core curriculum is not only justified but also mandated.

Laws are always changing; therefore, this information will need periodic revision. This paper attempts to synthesize available information regarding the ECC. However, for legal advice about specific situations one should consult an attorney.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE FOR THE EXPANDED CORE CURRICULUM

The National Agenda for the Education of Children and Youth with Visual Impairments, Including Those with Multiple Disabilities was developed in the mid-1990s. One of the eight goals of this movement, designed to improve the quantity and quality of educational services for students with visual impairments, related to the “core curriculum.” It reads, “Educational and developmental goals, including instruction, will reflect the assessed needs of each student in all areas of academic and disability-specific core curricula.” The expanded core curriculum combines the general core curriculum for all students with a program designed to meet the disability-specific needs of students who are blind or visually impaired.
In Michigan, the knowledge and skills to be learned by students prior to high school graduation include the following core subjects: English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Fine Arts, Career and Employability, Technology, World Languages, Health Education, and Physical Education. This curriculum developed for sighted students is available to students with visual impairments. By providing supplementary aids and services and other accommodations, modifications, or devices a visually impaired student may very well benefit from this basic academic curriculum. However, a student with a severe visual impairment will need a broader educational program to address specific needs related to the disability.

Phil Hatlen, co-chairperson of the National Agenda Advisory Board, stated that “There are experiences and concepts casually and incidentally learned by sighted students that must be systematically and sequentially taught to the visually impaired student.” These become a major part of the curricula needs of a student and are considered to be the expanded core curriculum for students who are blind and visually impaired. The expanded core curriculum consists of the following areas: compensatory academic skills, including communication modes; orientation and mobility; social interaction skills; independent living skills; recreation and leisure skills; career education; use of assistive technology; and visual efficiency skills.

How then does the expanded core curriculum fit into the educational delivery system?

The generalized answer to this question is vital. The ECC is designed to meet the unique educational needs of students who are blind and visually impaired. Therefore, its use is justified under Part A of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA.) In 20 U.S.C. Sec. 1400 (d)(1) one finds the mission statement of IDEA. It states that one purpose of IDEA is “to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living.”

Justification for the ECC is also included in the definition of special education in IDEA. “Special education” according to 20 U.S.C. Sec.
A final broad answer to the question is found in one function of the IEP. 20 U.S.C. Sec. 1414 (d)(1) (A) (i) (I) (II) states: “The IEP must include a statement of annual goals including academic and functional goals designed to meet the child’s needs that result from the child’s disability to enable the child to be involved and progress in the general education curriculum and to meet each of the child’s other educational needs that result from the child’s disability.”

These sections of the law should provide the basis for including the ECC in the school’s program. They all refer to the need to meet the unique needs of a child with a visual impairment.

A more analytical approach in answering the question might prove helpful. The following includes a short description for each area of the expanded core curriculum and the legal basis for addressing it in the student’s IEP. The description of each component of the expanded core curriculum is taken directly from the 1996 paper by Hatlen entitled The Core Curriculum for Blind and Visually Impaired Students, Including Those with Additional Disabilities. The legal references are from the IDEA 2004 and Michigan’s Revised Administrative Rules for Special Education.

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

Compensatory skills are those needed by students who are blind and visually impaired 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 skills that students 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. 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. These compensatory and functional needs of the visually impaired child are significant, and are not addressed with sufficient specificity in the existing core curriculum.

**Legal References**

20 U.S.C. Sec. 1414(d)(A)(i)(ii) The IEP for each child with a disability must include…A statement of measurable annual goals, including academic and functional goals designed to meet the child’s needs that result from the child’s disability to enable the child to be involved in and progress in the general curriculum (i.e., the same curriculum as for nondisabled children) and to meet each of the child’s other educational needs that result from the child’s disability.

20 U.S.C. Sec. 1414(d)(3)(B)(iii) In developing each child’s IEP, the IEP team shall …in case of a child who is blind or visually impaired, provide for instruction in Braille and the use of Braille unless the IEP team determines after an evaluation of the child’s reading and writing skills, needs, and appropriate reading and writing media (including an evaluation of the child’s future needs for instruction in Braille or the use of Braille), that instruction in Braille or the use of Braille is not appropriate for the child.

20 U.S.C. Sec. 1412 (a)(23)(A)(B) The State must adopt the National Instructional Material Standards for the purpose of providing instructional materials to blind persons…in a timely manner. …If a State educational agency chooses not to coordinate with the National Instructional Materials Access Center it shall provide an assurance…that it will provide instructional materials to blind persons in a timely manner.

R 340.1799b(a) (i)(ii)(b)(ii)(iii) The teacher education program for teachers of students with visual impairment shall include…special skills and techniques for working with students with visual impairments including…beginning and advanced Braille…methods of teaching students with visual impairments …and the ability to develop and implement a curriculum and an instructional program for a range of students with visual impairments…and the ability to implement and support a program of communication skills and techniques…as deemed appropriate for the student.

**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 program. 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 general core curriculum does not include provision for this instruction. It has been said that the two primary effects of blindness of 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.

Legal References

20 U.S.C. Sec. 1401 (26)(A) As used in this part, the term related services means…other supportive services as…i.e. orientation and mobility services as may be required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education.

20 U.S.C. Sec. 1401 (29)(A) The term special education means specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, including… instruction in the classroom, in the home, and in other setting.

R 340.1708(b)(4) For students with visual impairment…an evaluation by an orientation and mobility specialist shall be conducted. The orientation and mobility specialist shall also include in the report a set of recommended procedures to be used by a mobility specialist or a teacher of students with visual impairments in conducting orientation and mobility training activities.

R 340.1799 b (b)(iii)(vi)(c) The teacher education program for teachers of students with visual impairment shall include the development of competencies in the ability to implement and support a program of orientation and mobility skills as deemed appropriate, and the ability to develop and implement instruction in…community transportation and mobility.

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 persons who are blind as they are by sighted persons. Social skills must be carefully, consciously, and sequentially taught to students who are blind and visually impaired. Nothing in the general core curriculum addresses this critical need in a satisfactory manner. Thus, instruction in social interaction skills becomes a part of the expanded core curriculum. The need to develop these skills is so fundamental that it can often mean the difference between social isolation and a satisfying and fulfilling life as an adult.

Legal References
The term related services mean developmental, corrective, and other supportive services as are required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education and includes…psychological services…counseling services…social work services in schools.

The IEP shall in case of a child whose behavior impedes his or her learning or that of others, consider the use of positive behavioral interventions and supports, and other strategies, to address that behavior.

Teachers of students with visual impairments must develop competencies in such areas as: ability to develop and implement curriculum and an instructional program for range of students with visual impairment; ability to instruct students with visual impairment regarding human sexuality, and home family and community living; and the ability to work intensively and extensively with parents of students with visual impairment, both as a home instructor for parents and a liaison between the educational agencies and the home.

**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 general 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 students with visual impairments, since the classes 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.

**Legal References**

The purposes of this title are…to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living.
Recreation and Leisure Skills

Skills in recreation and leisure are seldom offered as a part of the general 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 students with visual impairments. 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 lifelong skills.

Legal References

20 U.S.C. Sec. 1401 (26) (A) Related services means…supportive services as are required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education and includes…recreation, including therapeutic recreation….

20 U.S.C. Sec. 1401 (29) (B) Special education means specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability including… instruction in physical education.

20 U.S.C. Sec. 1414 (d) (1) (A) (i) (IV) (bb) The individualized education program will include establishment…of program modifications or supports for school personnel that will provide for a child…to be involved in and make progress… and to participate in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities.

R 340.1799b (b)(vi)(B) Teachers of students with visual impairments shall have the ability to develop and implement special instruction in… recreation and leisure time activities.
Career Education

There is a need for both general career and vocational education, as offered in the traditional core curriculum, and the need for career education offered specifically for blind and visually impaired students. Many of the skills and knowledge offered to all students through career and 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 visually impaired learners 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 student with a visual impairment 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 adults with visual impairments in the United States, this portion of the expanded core curriculum is vital to students, and should be part of the expanded core curriculum for even the youngest of these individuals.

Legal References

20 U.S.C. Sec. 1401 (26) (A) Related services means…supportive services as are required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education and includes…counseling services including rehabilitation counseling….

20 U.S.C. Sec. 1400 d (1) The purposes of this title are to ensure that children with disabilities have available a free and appropriate public education…to meet their unique needs and prepare them for … employment….

20 U.S.C. Sec. 1401 (34) (A) (c) Transition services means a coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that…is designed within an outcome-oriented process, that promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. …It includes the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.
The teachers of students with visual impairment shall have the ability to instruct students with visual impairment regarding…career selection and the use of local, state, and national resources.

**Technology**

Technology is a tool to unlock learning and expand each student’s horizon. 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 persons with visual impairments the capability of storing and retrieving information. It brings the gift of a library under their fingertips. Technology enhances communication and learning, as well as significantly expanding the world of persons who are blind and visually impaired. Thus, technology is a tool to master, and is essential as a part of the expanded core curriculum.

**Legal References**

20 U.S.C. Sec 1400 (c ) (5) (H) Congress finds that 30 years of research and experience has demonstrated that education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by supporting the development and use of technology, including assistive technology devices and assistive technology services to maximize accessibility for children with disabilities.

20 U.S.C. Sec. 1401 (33) The term supplemental aids and services means aids services, and other supports that are provided in regular education classes or other education-related settings to enable children with disabilities to be educated with non-disabled children to the maximum extent appropriate….

20 U.S.C. Sec. 1401(1) (A) (B) Assistive technology device means any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of the child with a disability.

20 U.S.C. Sec. 1401 (2) Assistive technology services means any service that directly assists a child with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device. This includes the: evaluation of needs, including a functional evaluation of the child’s customary environment (note: this includes the home); purchasing, leasing, or otherwise providing for the acquisition of assistive technology devices; selecting, designing fitting, customizing, adapting, applying, maintaining, repairing or replacing assistive technology devices; coordinating and using other therapies, interventions, or services with assistive technology devices, and those associated with existing education and rehabilitation plans and programs; training or technical assistance for such a child or, where appropriate, the family of such a child; training or technical assistance for professionals (including individuals providing education and rehabilitation services), employers or other substantially involved in the major life functions of such a child, and a statement or the program modifications or supports for school personnel that will be provided for the child.
20 Sec. 1414 (d) (1) (A) (i) (IV)  The projected date for the beginning of the services and modifications described in subclass IV of this section, and anticipated frequency, location, and duration of those services and modifications.

R 340.1799b (b)(iii)(iv) Teachers of students with visual impairments shall have the ability to implement and support a program of communication skills and techniques....and the ability to develop and implement special instruction in the use of personal aids.

**Visual Efficiency Skills**

The visual acuity of children diagnosed as being visually impaired varies greatly. Through the use of thorough, systematic training, most students with remaining functional vision can be taught to better and more efficiently utilize their remaining vision. The responsibility for performing a functional vision assessment, planning appropriate learning activities for effective visual utilization, and instructing students in using their functional vision in effective and efficient ways is clearly an area of the expanded core curriculum. Educational responsibility for teaching visual efficiency skills falls to the professionally prepared teacher of visually impaired learners.

**Legal References**

R 340.1743 Programs and services for students with visual impairments shall be determined by the severity and multiplicity of the impairments. ...The public agency shall ensure that low vision aids...are available and functioning properly.

R 340.1799b (b)(ii)(iv) Teachers of students with visual impairments shall have the ability to develop and implement a curriculum and an instructional program for a range of students with visual impairment. Teachers will have the ability to explain the structure and function of the eye and the impact of vision impairment on learning....