VISUAL IMPAIRMENT (INCLUDING BLINDNESS)

The category of visual impairment (including blindness) means a medically verified visual impairment accompanied by a limitation in sight that interferes with acquiring information or interaction with the environment to the extent that special education and related services may be needed. Many children are affected by visual impairments, some much more intrusive than others.

Signs of Visual Impairment

Certain characteristics, as described by Nielsen (2009), of possible visual difficulty may be observed by the teacher and are listed below.

- Holds work too close or too far
- Thrusts head forward to see distant
- Blinks continually when reading
- Tilts head to see better
- Covers one eye
- Holds body tense when reading or looking at distant objects
- Rubs eyes frequently
- Suffers from crusted, red-rimmed, or swollen eyelids
- Has problems with eyes, often watering or appearing bloodshot
- Is sensitive to light
- Has frequent headaches
- Frowns when looking at printed material

If such signs continue to a marked degree over a period of time, the teacher should refer the student for vision screening.

Some vision impairments are refractive errors. Refractive errors include hyperopia, myopia, and astigmatism. Children experiencing difficulties caused by refractive errors generally do not meet eligibility requirements to receive special education services because these impairments can be remedied with corrective lenses.

HYPEROPIA

Also known as farsightedness, this is a condition in which distant vision is better than near vision. Common signs that may indicate that your child or student is experiencing farsightedness include the following.

- Difficulty in concentrating on and maintaining a clear focus on near objects, such as when reading or writing in the classroom
- Eye strain
- Fatigue and/or headaches after close work
- Aching or burning eyes
- Irritability or nervousness after sustained concentration
- Difficulty tracking from one line to the next while reading, or a tendency to read the same line over and over again
- Have difficulty reading
- Have lack of interest in reading
- Have "crossed" eyes
MYOPIA

Also known as nearsightedness, this is a condition in which near vision is better than distant vision. This is a very common vision condition that affects 30% of the United State's population. Common signs that may indicate that your child or student is experiencing nearsightedness include the following.

- Squints or frowns
- Holds books or other objects very close to the face
- Sits at the front of a classroom or theater or close to the TV or computer
- Is not interested in sports or other activities that require good distance vision
- Has reduced athletic performance
- Gets headaches regularly
- Indicates difficulty seeing the blackboard, TV, or movie screen

ASTIGMATISM

This is a condition that causes blurred vision at any distance due to either the irregular shape of the cornea or the curvature of the lens inside the eye. Astigmatism usually occurs with hyperopia or myopia. Common signs of astigmatism include the following.

- Distortions in portions of visual field
- Blurring of vertical, horizontal, or diagonal lines
- Eyestrain or fatigue
- Headaches

School vision screening is most often used to screen for refractive errors; however, traditional school vision screening has focused on the examination of distance vision in order to detect myopia, which is the most common of the visual disorders (Appleboom, 1985). The screening of other visual functions in school, specifically hyperopia, or "near vision," is inconsistent across the states. Ophthalmology and optometry experts strongly support the school screening of near vision in young children to detect hyperopia. Undiagnosed hyperopia can result in reading difficulty, lack of interest in reading, and school failure (Proctor, 2005).

Specific criteria must be met in order to be eligible for special education services under the visual impairment category. There must be a medically verified visual impairment accompanied by limitation in sight that interferes with a child's ability to acquire or gain knowledge. Specific medically diagnosed visual impairments that may or may not require the need for special education services are listed below.

ALBINISM

Albinism is an inherited condition that causes decreased pigment either in the skin, hair, and eyes or in the eyes alone. Albinism is present at birth and does not become worse over time. With corrective lenses, visual acuity usually measures around 20/100 or 20/200, although it may be as good as 20/40. Approximately one in 20,000 children are born with this condition each year.
Medical Treatment for Albinism

Albinism is most often treated with the use of tinted or pinhole contact lenses, absorptive lenses, or optical aids, although these may not always be helpful.

Educational Approaches for Albinism

Adjusting the lighting and conditions for individuals and having them wear sunglasses and seek shade when outdoors are essential for those who are very sensitive to bright lighting.

CATARACT

A cataract is a clouding of the eye lens. Its cause could be the result of heredity, an infection, severe malnutrition, the mother’s drug use during pregnancy, or trauma. Symptoms include a whitish appearance of the pupil and blurred vision.

Medical Treatment for Cataracts

The only medical treatment for cataracts is surgery. Cataracts should be removed within the first few months of life if acuity is to develop normally. Contact lenses or glasses may help with vision acuity.