

FACT SHEET



Sensory Impairments: Blindness/Visual Impairment

What are Blindness/Visual Impairments?

The Center for Parent Information and Resources (2017) reported the rate of occurrence for visual impairments in students under the age of 18 is the rate of 12.2 per 1,000. Legal or total blindness occurs at a rate of .06 per 1,000. Current special education demographics obtained from the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB), (2018) reported:

- 93,600 students who are blind or visually impaired; and
- 55,200 students who are legally (totally) blind.

“Blindness” means a visual impairment that requires dependence on tactile and auditory media for learning (K.A.R. 91-40-1(g)).

The student is considered “Totally blind” if the eyeball(s) is absent (i.e., anophthalmoic). In either situation, the student usually will rely on other sensory channels to gather information, in addition to tactile, such as olfactory, gustatory, kinesthetic, and proprioceptive. These senses will assist the student to learn information in unfamiliar and familiar (indoor and outdoor) environments, as well as, communication, academics, and career and college ready. To be identified as legally blind, an individual may have visual acuity of 20/200 or greater with correction, or have a field of vision restricted to 20 degrees or less at the widest point (American Printing House for the Blind (APH, n. d.).

“Visual impairment” means an impairment in visual system that, even with correction, adversely affects a child’s educational

performance (K.A.R. 91-40-1(uuu)).



The term, often includes low vision and or partially sighted (Medicinenet, 2017). To be identified as having a visual impairment, visual acuity falls in a range between 20/70 to 20/160 with correction, or a visual field that is 40 degrees or less (AFB, 2018). Students who have visual impairments using the above measurements of acuity and field are eligible for APH Quota Funds.

Types of Visual Impairments

Blindness or visual impairments often are divided into two categories based on the age of onset:

- Congenital – occurs during fetal development, at birth or immediately following birth.
- Adventitious – occurs after having full vision or partial vision either through a hereditary condition, toxins, infections, trauma.

Additional types of vision loss for students include:

- Functional vision loss – is a vision condition that does not have an organic origin (lesion) and may be the result of reduced acuity or visual field (residual vision).
- Cortical or Cerebral Vision Impairment (CVI) – is a mild to profound neurological condition often caused by infections, prematurity, trauma, head injury, toxins, etc. (APH, n. d.).
- Colorblind – is the inability to determine colors (i.e., achromatopsia) that often results in eye fatigue, reduced vision function, and an involuntary movement of the eyes vertically or horizontally (AFB, 2018).



Sensory Impairments: Blindness/Visual Impairment

Causes and Characteristics of Blindness/Visual Impairments

Visual impairments are used to describe the loss of sight or degree of residual vision common in that is a result of a number of different medical conditions that occur prenatal, perinatal, or postnatal.

Some common causes of visual impairments are:

- congenital glaucoma,
- retinopathy of prematurity,
- congenital cataracts,
- Infections,
- trauma, and
- toxins.

In addition, the impact of the visual impairment on student learning is also tied to the onset, the severity, and the type of visual loss, as well the presence of additional disabilities.

There may be issues with sensitivity to light or glare, blind spots in their visual fields, or problems with contrast, or figure-ground.

Resources

Kansas Special Education Process Handbook
<http://www.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=598>

KSDE Eligibility Indicators
<https://www.ksde.org/Portals/0/SES/misc/iep/EligibilityIndicators.pdf>

KSDE SETS
<http://www.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=506>

Kansas Technical Assistance System Network (TASN) <https://ksdetasn.org/>

Kansas State School for the Blind
www.kssb.net

American Council of the Blind
www.acb.org

American Foundation for the Blind
www.afb.org

American Printing House for the Blind
<http://www.aph.org>

Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)
www.cec.sped.org

For more information, contact:

Special Education and Title Services Team
 (785) 296-7454
specialeducation@ksde.org



Kansas State Department of Education
 900 S.W. Jackson Street, Suite 102
 Topeka, Kansas 66612-1212
 (785) 296-3201
www.ksde.org

The Kansas State Department of Education does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability or age in its programs and activities and provides equal access to the Boy Scouts and other designated youth groups. The following person has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the nondiscrimination policies: KSDE General Counsel, Office of General Counsel, KSDE, Landon State Office Building, 900 S.W. Jackson, Suite 102, Topeka, KS 66612, (785) 296-3201.