



# The Expanded Core Curriculum

Incorporating the best learning approaches for  
your child with blindness or vision impairment





## Specialized learning compensates for vision loss

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Vision is the primary sensory system that a child uses to learn.\* From formal teaching methods to informal classroom and social interaction, a child's understanding of the world relies heavily upon visual input.

For children who are blind or visually impaired – including those with additional disabilities – learning is much more complicated. To compensate for vision loss their education must incorporate the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC).

The ECC is foundational to all other learning for a child with low or no vision. It is critical for families not only to understand the components of the ECC, but also to partner with their school

districts to design an Individualized Education Program (IEP) that adequately addresses these supplemental needs.

This guide serves as a brief introduction to the ECC for children and young adults who are blind or visually impaired, and outlines important issues for parents and school districts to consider in developing IEPs. It also lists valuable resources for those interested in learning more.

\*Allman, Carol B, and Sandra Lewis (Ed.) Susan J. Spungin (Consulting Ed.) (2014). ECC Essentials: Teaching the Expanded Core Curriculum to Students with Visual Impairments. New York: AFB Press.

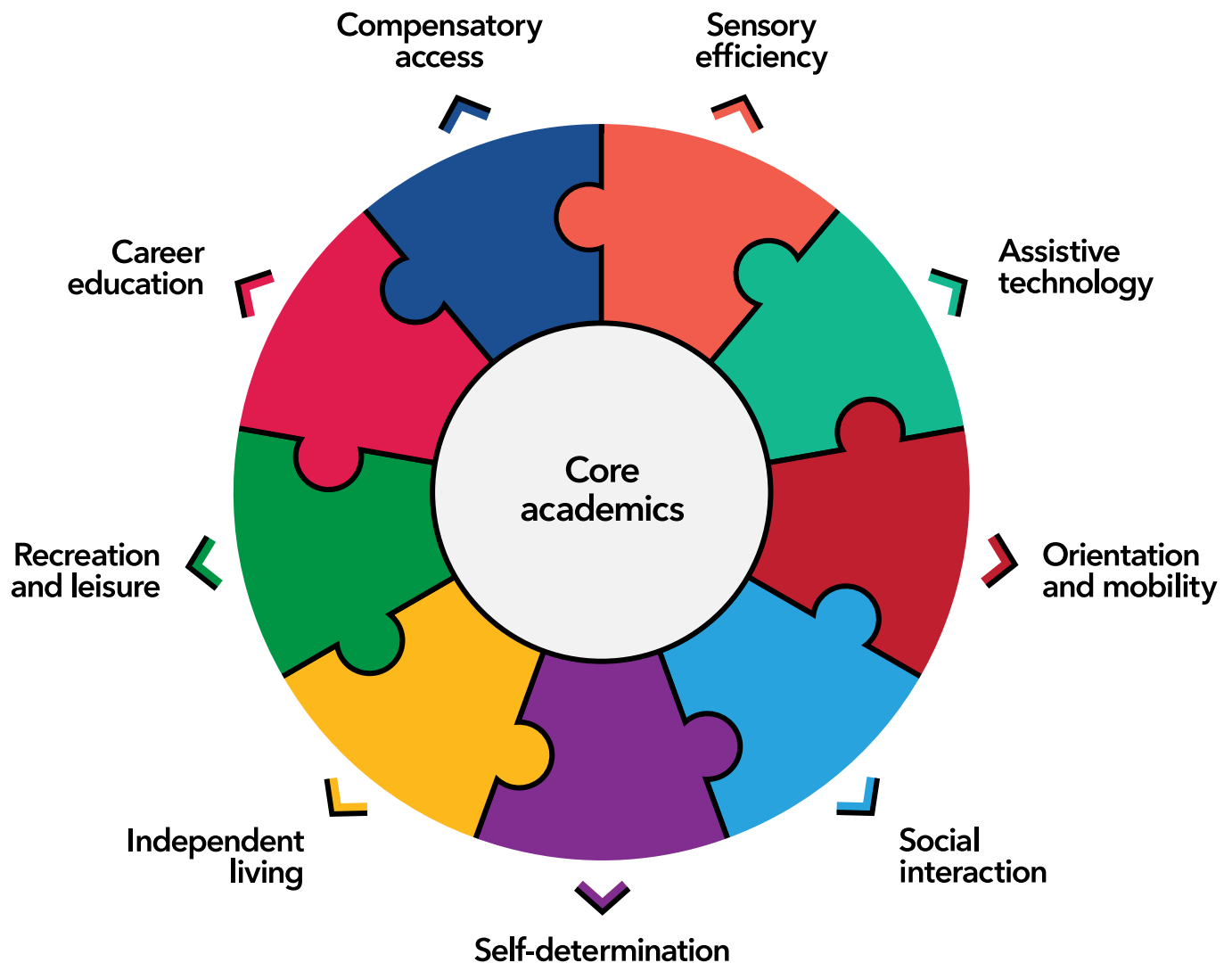
## Your child's unique needs

In a typical classroom, children access core subjects such as math, language arts, science and social studies through textbooks, printed handouts, whiteboards and computer screens. Because much of this information is inaccessible to a child who is blind or visually impaired, these materials must be adapted into usable formats such as braille, audio and large print to facilitate learning success.

But adaptation of visually-based material is only one ingredient of a comprehensive learning approach. Sighted children use vision not only to access information, but also to monitor their environment automatically. They watch how their teachers and fellow students interact in a classroom setting. They learn non-verbal communication and the norms of social interaction inside and outside the classroom through observation.

From the earliest age, this **incidental learning** is a critical part of a child's development at school, home and in the community. Children who are blind or visually impaired miss out on most of this incidental learning. If compensatory learning is not adequately provided, children who are blind may struggle with social interaction, which can create enormous barriers to successful learning and achieving independence. To best prepare these children to learn and thrive with peers at school and in their lives, parents and educators must partner to design the most effective educational program.





## What is the Expanded Core Curriculum?

The Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) is an essential curriculum that is considered foundational in preparing students who are blind or visually impaired for success as adults. The ECC has evolved through decades of instruction by leading educators and was formalized by Dr. Philip Hatlen in 1996. The ECC is widely accepted by public and private school educators of students who are blind and visually impaired, and continues to be the compensatory learning framework for innovation and educational program design.





## The nine components of the ECC

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See pages 7 and 8 for examples of the ECC skill areas that correspond to different developmental stages.

- **Compensatory access:** Learning how to acquire, share and process information, including the general education curriculum, without sight or with severely limited vision.
- **Sensory efficiency:** Using all senses to access information and communication in an efficient manner.
- **Assistive technology:** Leveraging high-tech devices, such as screen-reading software and refreshable braille keyboards, and low-tech devices, such as white canes and magnifiers, to support outgoing and incoming communication and access one's environment.
- **Orientation and mobility:** Navigating independently and safely by knowing one's position relative to other people, objects and places, and getting from place to place safely and efficiently.
- **Social Interaction:** Learning how to read and respond to social situations without the benefit of visual cues.
- **Self-determination:** Learning how to advocate for one's own needs, understand strengths and limitations, build confidence and solve problems.
- **Independent living:** Taking care of oneself as independently as possible, including a broad range of activities such as eating, dressing, money management and household operation.
- **Recreation and leisure:** Discovering and pursuing interests and extra-curricular activities, often with creative adaptations, and learning how to plan for and engage in social and leisure time.
- **Career education:** Developing the skills and knowledge needed for success in employment.

# Planning your child's education using the ECC

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Historically, students with blindness or visual impairment attended schools that specialize in blindness education, where ECC skills are incorporated continuously and taught in a natural, sequential way. When educational programs in the U.S. moved to inclusive options, more students with blindness or visual impairment began attending public school – a setting where instruction, time and resources dedicated to these critical skills often compete with academic and other demands.

Today, the ECC is not automatically built into a child's educational program in public and most private schools. Instead, parents and districts must partner to ensure the components of the ECC are incorporated into a student's IEP.



## Weighing the options

When evaluating public school, private school or continuing education courses, families today have multiple options to consider. Any one of these choices may meet all of a child's needs. Moreover, during the course of a child's development, the best primary educational setting may change over the course of his or her development. Successful educational plans often involve a primary source supplemented with additional courses as necessary.

## A common goal

Schools or districts that are new to teaching students with visual impairment can also use the ECC to evaluate the completeness of the education offered to these students. To ensure an effective partnership, schools and districts should share the ECC with students' families, so they are fully informed of the breadth of instruction their children need to gain access to fundamental academics.







## The ECC as a guide

The ECC can serve as a guide for the full team of family members, educators and administrators planning the education of a student who is blind or visually impaired. The ECC provides a common understanding and vocabulary, enabling parents and educators to evaluate their education alternatives. In assessing their child's current or potential education choices, parents will want to determine where and how each of the nine elements of the ECC is being integrated into the program. If there are gaps, families may want to consider whether additional educators or alternative providers can fill them.





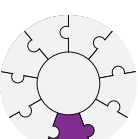

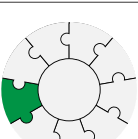

Young adults who may have completed a high school education but do not feel ready to transition to independent living, employment or continuing education can also use the ECC as a guide. Does the individual feel adequately prepared in each of the nine components? If there are gaps, consider looking for courses or programs, such as online, day or residential options, to meet those needs and ensure they will be as prepared as possible for a fulfilling life.

## ECC resources

- **ECC Essentials**  
[Teaching the Expanded Core Curriculum to Students with Visual Impairments](#)  
 Edited By Carol B. Allman, Sandra Lewis, Ed.D., Susan J. Spungin, AFB Press, 2014
- **Perkins School for the Blind**  
[Educating with the Expanded Core Curriculum](#)  
[Perkins.org/ECC](http://Perkins.org/ECC)
- **Texas School for the Blind**  
 "What is the Expanded Core Curriculum?"  
[TSBVI.edu](http://TSBVI.edu)
- **American Foundation for the Blind**  
 "The Expanded Core Curriculum for Blind and Visually Impaired Children and Youths"  
[AFB.org](http://AFB.org)

# The ECC in action

This chart shows what a progression of ECC skill development might look like for typically developing children who are blind or visually impaired. Adaptations can be made for children with additional disabilities so they can learn in a manner that best suits their needs.

		Infant/Toddler	Elementary school
	<b>Compensatory access</b>	Communicating wants and needs.	Engaging in simple conversation, in person or in writing. If appropriate, learning braille or sign language.
	<b>Sensory efficiency</b>	Practicing tactile and auditory discrimination, localizing sound. For students with low vision, practicing eye tracking.	Practicing listening skills. Understanding his or her visual impairment and making maximum use of any existing vision.
	<b>Assistive technology</b>	Practicing swiping, pressing keys, buttons and switches for cause and effect. Using computer software for pre-literacy exposure.	Using a screen-reader, developing keyboarding skills and magnification software or portable braille notetaker.
	<b>Orientation and mobility</b>	Learning to reach for objects and move toward a target, sound or stimulus. Exploring adaptive mobility devices.	Recognizing and using landmarks and following simple instructions when traveling. Developing techniques for use of adaptive mobility devices.
	<b>Social interaction</b>	Learning non-verbal communication. Facing those who are speaking. Taking part in healthy reciprocal play. Understanding sharing.	Practicing self-regulation. Recognizing and identifying emotions. Asking appropriate questions, understanding the importance of listening.
	<b>Self-determination</b>	Learning to choose activities and express basic preferences during play.	Understanding his or her visual impairment. Developing a positive sense of self-worth. Identifying and expressing feelings appropriately.
	<b>Independent living</b>	Learning to assist in eating, dressing and toileting. Learning to put toys away.	Keeping track of belongings, feeding and dressing self, practicing hygiene routines. Making bed and picking up after oneself at home and school.
	<b>Recreation and leisure</b>	Learning how to play independently, how to pretend, how to play with toys and manipulate objects. Engaging in physical play.	Learning how to use one's time. Listening to music, completing simple projects, participating in games with physical adaptations.
	<b>Career education</b>	Learning responsibility like putting away toys. Understanding different roles people play (e.g. firefighter, teacher, parent).	Taking responsibility for actions and working individually or in a group. Understanding the concept of work and identifying various jobs.



Middle school	High school
Communicating with others using technology. Listening and comprehending recorded material. Conversational and written fluency.	Advocating for and managing adaptive materials. Answering questions clearly and articulating needs.
Using low vision aids to read signs. Interpreting feedback accurately from mobility device (e.g., white cane). Listening for auditory cues when traveling.	Discriminating between more complex objects and auditory cues to determine direction and other details, including in unfamiliar environments.
Developing Internet research skills and responsibly accessing social media.	Accessing and collaborating on online learning platforms, organizing and formatting digital files and projects; troubleshooting and evaluating new apps and devices.
Using a white cane or other mobility device to learn and master familiar routes under supervision. Understanding direction and increasing sense of spatial awareness.	Using a white cane or other mobility device to travel safely in the community. Learning proper techniques to travel safely and independently using public transportation.
Recognizing and respecting differences among individuals and maintaining meaningful friendships. Recognizing appropriate boundaries. Using refusal skills.	Working effectively with diverse populations. Exploring dating relationships.
Demonstrating self-control and awareness of his/her own interests, abilities and skills. Awareness of disability-related resources. Advocating for self in peer situations.	Developing strong sense of identity. Becoming comfortable with accommodations. Knowing how to decline offers to help. Negotiating with others to resolve problems.
Using a watch to manage time, maintaining daily schedule and using a calendar to plan ahead. Using a wallet to organize money. Assisting with household chores.	Understanding budgeting and managing money. Shopping and cooking for meals. Taking responsibility for cleaning personal space. Completing household chores independently.
Exploring extra-curricular activities and community resources of interest. Playing physical games, reading for pleasure.	Researching extra-curricular activities available to him/her including adapted sports. Engaging in a variety of leisure activities to fill spare time.
Developing social skills for work. Understanding workplace behavior and attire. Identifying areas of personal interest that could relate to a future career.	Participating in work/volunteer activities and developing awareness of his/her interests and abilities. Planning for transition to life after high school. Developing resume and cover letter, building interview skills.



## Why Perkins?

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Perkins School for the Blind's goal is to prepare every student for a successful transition to tomorrow. We offer a full spectrum of specialized education programs and services – on campus and in the community – for children with blindness, visual impairment and deafblindness, including additional disabilities. Our experts partner with families, schools and districts to make sure students have the resources they need to learn and succeed.

### We're vision experts.

Perkins is a national and international leader in blindness education. We've been developing and applying the total person learning concepts embedded in the ECC since our founding in 1829, leveraging Perkins' vast global experiences and networks. Through Perkins' programs, services and teacher training, these best practice approaches reach students and educators in schools and organizations around the world. Our 38-acre campus in Watertown, Mass., is only a 20-minute drive from Boston Logan International Airport.

### We offer a full range of services.

We partner with families to create the educational fit that's right for your child:

- Early intervention for babies and toddlers (ages 0-3 years), including parent networking and support
- Day and residential programs with our team of experts to deliver customized learning and fully incorporate the ECC (ages 3-22 years, September-July)
- Specialized courses with expert instructors to supplement learning and peer engagement on weekends and during vacation periods
- Summer learning programs on our campus
- Comprehensive evaluations by our team of specialists to help facilitate the best learning plan for your child, including comprehensive cortical visual impairment (CVI) assessments
- Expert itinerant teachers, resources and services to support your child in his or her public school classroom



## We teach the whole child.

An academic foundation is not enough to prepare your child to engage as a lifelong learner and fulfill their unique potential. Whether on our campus or in your public classroom, our educators balance academic learning with navigation, social and self-advocacy skills, vocational explorations and other ECC skills critical for maximizing learning and independence.

## Planning for independence must start now.

To participate in social situations and engage with their community, your child will need to work harder and focus on developing compensatory skills that his or her sighted peers may take for granted. If your child pursues a job or career, they will compete with sighted peers who have the benefit of incidental learning that occurs through processing visual information.

## We focus on what happens when young learners transition to adult life.

Our ultimate measure of success is seeing each child become a flourishing young adult with skills and strategies that empower lifelong learning and allow them to engage as fully as possible in college, vocational pursuits or community living.



## Learn more

Learn how Perkins School for the Blind can partner with you in support of your child.



**Web:** [Perkins.org/Admissions](https://Perkins.org/Admissions)

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# Perkins SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND

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