

# Florida's Educational Opportunities for Students with Sensory Impairments



This publication is produced through the Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEESS), Division of K-12 Public Schools, Florida Department of Education, and is available online at <http://www.fldoe.org/ese/pub-home.asp>. For information on available resources, contact the BEESS Resource and Information Center (BRIC).

BRIC website: <http://www.fldoe.org/ese/clerhome.asp>

Bureau website: <http://www.fldoe.org/ese/>

Email: [BRIC@fldoe.org](mailto:BRIC@fldoe.org)

Telephone: 850-245-0475

Fax: 850-245-0953

## Overview

In Florida, boys and girls with special learning needs who meet specific eligibility criteria are considered to be **students with disabilities**. The special help they are given at school is called **exceptional student education**, also known as **ESE** or **special education**. Students with disabilities who have visual impairments, hearing impairments or dual-sensory impairments (deaf-blindness) are considered **sensory impaired**.

Families and schools work together to determine the educational needs of these children and plan appropriate special education and related services for them.

When a student is suspected or known to have a sensory impairment, a comprehensive evaluation will be completed. After the evaluation, the school holds a meeting called an eligibility staffing. The parents and the rest of the individual educational plan (IEP) team at the eligibility staffing discuss the information collected about the child. Then the IEP team determines whether the child is eligible for ESE services. If the child has been determined eligible to receive ESE services, the parent is asked to give written consent for the child to receive such services. The next step is to hold a meeting to write an IEP. The IEP team determines which special services and supports the child needs to make progress and achieve the child's annual goals.

The IEP team also decides where the student will receive services. Most students with disabilities spend the majority of their school day in general education classrooms. Some students receive their services in their general education classrooms. Some students leave the general education classroom for part of the day to receive services in an ESE resource class. A few students spend all day in a special class, a special school or a residential school.

School districts **must** provide educational programs to each eligible student who has a sensory impairment, beginning on the student's third birthday and continuing until the student's 22nd birthday or until the student graduates with a standard diploma, whichever comes first. At the option of the school district, educational services may be provided to children ages birth to three who have sensory impairments.

For students who have sensory impairments, local school districts may provide instruction and services directly, or they may work in cooperation with other school districts or agencies or through contracts with nonpublic schools.

For students between the ages of 5 and 22 who have sensory impairments and who meet enrollment requirements, the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind (FSDB) provides educational and co-curricular programs, support services, day school and residential programs. Day-school services include toddler and prekindergarten (PreK) programs.

The eligibility staffing may take place in the local school district or, upon request by the school district or parent, at the FSDB.

## **Who Is Eligible?**

### **Definitions**

The following definitions are used to describe the various sensory impairments for the purpose of determining eligibility.

### **Visually Impaired**

Students who are visually impaired have disorders of the eye that, even with the best possible ocular correction, interfere with learning. A student's medical information from an ophthalmologist or optometrist is used to determine the medical eligibility. A functional vision and learning media assessment determines how a student uses any remaining vision. The information from these assessments helps to determine the suitable forms of presentation, such as braille or large print, for the curriculum materials.

### **Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing**

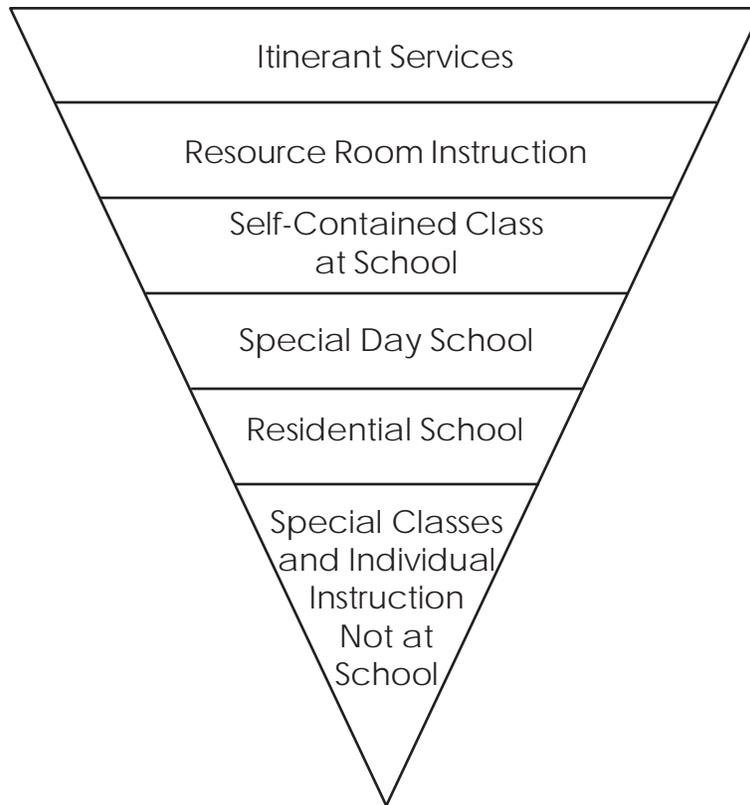
A student who is deaf or hard-of-hearing has a hearing impairment, aided or unaided, that interferes in processing linguistic information and that adversely affects communication, developmental skills, academic achievement, vocational-career skills or social-emotional adjustment. The degree of loss may range from mild to profound.

### **Dual-Sensory Impaired**

A student who is dual-sensory impaired has impairments affecting both vision and hearing, the combination of which causes a serious impairment in the abilities to acquire information, communicate or function within the environment, or has a degenerative condition that will lead to such impairment.

## **Services Available**

Because students with sensory impairments have different needs, there are many kinds of programs that provide instruction in one or more of the following ways:



**Itinerant services** are provided in two ways: consultation and direct instruction.

Consultation may include one or more of the following services: participating in IEP team meetings; requesting annual medical evaluations; checking equipment to make sure it is working properly; orienting, advising and coaching parents, classroom teachers and other professional staff; advocating for the student's needs; observing the student in educational environments; and providing comprehensive assessments of skills known to be impacted by the sensory impairment.

For direct instruction, the IEP team determines the need and amount provided, e.g., daily, weekly or even monthly, depending on the student's needs. Direct instruction may include one or more of the following: compensatory academic skills, social interaction skills, use and care of assistive technology, independent living skills, career education, and specific sensory deficit instruction, such as auditory training and visual efficiency skills.

**Resource Room Instruction** is extra help in a different room for students with disabilities who receive most of their education in other general education, vocational or ESE classes.

**Self-Contained Class at School** is the provision of instruction for students with disabilities in a traditional public school, within an ESE classroom.

**Special Day School** is a separate school that serves only students with disabilities.

**Residential School** is a school where students with disabilities live and receive their education during the school year.

**Special Classes and Individual Instruction Not at School** is the provision of instruction for students with disabilities in a hospital, home or other facility that is not a school.

### **Related Services**

Some of the related services that may be available to students who are sensory impaired include transportation, speech or language therapy, parent counseling, guidance, orientation and mobility, interpreters and braillists, and specialized instructional materials and equipment. These services are identified at the IEP meeting.

### **Specially Designed Instruction for Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing**

In addition to regular classes available to all students, students who are deaf or hard-of-hearing may receive specially designed instruction to meet their needs. This instruction emphasizes learning language, communication skills, speech and the use of amplification based on the student's need. Teaching aids include auditory assistive listening devices, captioned media, telecommunication devices for the deaf (TDD) and videophones. Support services may include oral and sign language interpreters, note takers, and real-time captioning.

### **Specially Designed Instruction for Visually Impaired**

In addition to regular classes available to all students, students who are visually impaired may receive specially designed instruction to meet their needs. This instruction emphasizes compensatory skills such as communication and listening modalities, visual efficiency skills, orientation and mobility, use of low vision devices, independent living skills, recreation and leisure activities, and career and technical education skills. Teaching aids include accessible textbooks in braille, large print and digital format; braille writers and electronic note takers; tactile graphics and manipulatives; specialized curriculums for math, reading, and assistive technology; and emergent literacy books in braille and large print.

### **Instruction for Dual-Sensory Impaired**

Students who are dual-sensory impaired have impairments of both their vision and hearing. Their instruction can be delivered in settings ranging from regular classrooms to residential schools and are based on early establishment of communication. Support services may include communication interpreters, interveners, classroom aids, orientation and mobility, vision instruction, vocational training, and job coaches. Educational aids are determined by the needs of each student and may be similar to those provided for students who are deaf or hard-of-hearing or have a visual impairment.

## **Resources**

### **Florida Department of Education (FDOE)**

Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEES)

325 W. Gaines Street, Suite 614

Tallahassee, FL 32399

850-245-0475

<http://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/index.stml>

BEESS provides leadership for the development, communication and effective implementation of state policies and procedures related to ESE for students with disabilities. In accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, BEESS implements a comprehensive system of general supervision, including targeted technical assistance and professional development, integrated monitoring activities, fiscal management, data collection, analysis and interpretation, parent involvement, and effective dispute resolution.

**BEESS Resource and Information Center (BRIC)**

325 W. Gaines Street, Suite 628

Tallahassee, FL 32399

850-245-0475

<http://www.fl DOE.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/beess-resources>

BRIC provides students, parents and educators with materials relevant to ESE. Florida-specific information regarding specific exceptionalities, IEPs, accommodations, transition planning and many other related topics is available. The website contains a complete listing of publications and items are formatted for easy download. Free print copies of many materials are available upon request. BRIC also maintains a large collection of loan materials, including books, DVDs, multimedia kits, assessment tools and other materials produced by commercial printers and national, state and local programs. Return labels and postage are provided.

**Division of Blind Services (DBS)**

325 W. Gaines Street, Room 1114

Tallahassee, FL 32399-0400

850-245-0300

800-342-1828

<http://dbs.myflorida.com/>

DBS provides services to individuals of all ages whose primary disability is visual impairment to help them maximize their physical, vocational, social and economic well-being. Services include vocational rehabilitation, counseling, guidance, parent training and assistance in locating school and other community-based programs.

**Division of Blind Services**

Bureau of Braille and Talking Book Library Services (BBTBL)

420 Platt Street

Daytona Beach, FL 32114

800-226-6075

<http://dbs.myflorida.com/Talking%20Books%20Library/index.html>

BBTBL is a no-cost service for individuals who cannot use standard print reading materials as the result of a visual, physical or reading disability. It is the largest library of its kind in the United States, with a collection of more than 2.4 million items in braille and audio format, including cassette and digital recordings. In addition, the library also provides adaptive equipment, accessories and other types of players on loan. Overall annual loans exceed 1.99 million items.

## **Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)**

Department of Education  
4070 Esplanade Way, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Tallahassee, FL 32339-7016  
850-245-3399  
800-451-4327

<http://www.rehabworks.org>

<http://www.FLJobConnections.com>

VR is a federal-state program that works with people who have physical or mental disabilities prepare for, get or keep a job. VR is committed to helping people with disabilities, including those with sensory disabilities (hearing loss, visual loss), find meaningful careers. Passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) further supports VR's efforts to prepare youth for success in the 21st century workforce.

**What is a pre-employment transition services referral?**

Schools may refer a student to VR just for services offered through WIOA, including career exploration, work readiness training and work experience. This lets the student access important services without having to apply to VR. A student may still submit a VR application, if additional services or supports are needed to pursue a career.

**When does VR get involved with students with disabilities attending school?**

VR representatives are available to participate in the transition IEP meetings when the student turns 15, if a student needs VR services while in high school. The purpose of this early communication is to ensure that the student and their family are aware of VR eligibility requirements and possible services. Early referral and application are necessary to allow VR sufficient time to determine eligibility and assist in developing an individualized plan for employment.

**What type of assistance may be available from VR?**

- Medical and psychological assessment,
- Vocational evaluation and planning,
- Career counseling and guidance,
- Work readiness training,
- Work experiences,
- Workplace accommodations,
- Job placement,
- Job coaching,
- On-the-job training supported employment,
- Assistive technology and devices,
- Time-limited medical treatment,
- Psychological treatment, and
- Both time-limited medical treatment and psychological treatment.

**Are all students with disabilities eligible for VR services?**

Any student with a disability may be eligible for VR services, including those who are not eligible for ESE. Contact the local VR office to apply. To locate the nearest VR office, go to

<http://www.rehabworks.org> and click on the VR Office Directory. There is a VR counselor assigned to every public high school and charter school in Florida.

### **Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind (FSDB)**

207 N. San Marco Avenue  
St. Augustine, FL 32084  
Voice/TDD: 904-827-2200  
<http://www.fsdb.k12.fl.us/>

FSDB in St. Augustine is the state's public school for eligible deaf or hard-of-hearing, blind or low vision, and deaf-blind PreK through 12th grade (PreK-12) students. FSDB also offers a continuing education program. Tuition is at no cost to families for eligible Florida residents.

FSDB offers comprehensive academic educational, career educational and extra-curricular programs for PreK-12. The school has an early learning center that includes a toddler and PreK program. The kindergarten through Grade 12 (K-12) program complies with all state curriculum and assessment requirements and students work toward achieving state and national standards. Additional continuing education services include programs to prepare students for independent living and to pursue employment or postsecondary options.

The campus is approximately 80 acres including 45 major buildings. Facilities include a swimming pool, two auditoriums, student activity centers and a state-of-the-art music center. The outdoor athletic complex consists of a football field, baseball diamond, track, fitness course and tennis courts. FSDB students may participate in varsity and junior varsity teams in a variety of sports: football, basketball, swimming, wrestling, volleyball, goalball, cross country, track and field, tennis, soccer, and cheerleading.

Interested parents may contact the school's Parent Services Office for information regarding admission Voice/Text at 800-344-3732.

### **Deaf Service Centers**

There are a number of independently operated deaf service centers across Florida. These centers provide a variety of services that include interpreting services, informational resources and assisting individuals in making appointments with agencies and individuals who do not have telecommunication devices for the deaf. Centers will often provide advocacy services, employment assistance, sign language classes, reading programs and community education programs.

These centers are known both as deaf service centers and independent living centers. To find one in your area, simply look in the local phone book or search on the Internet.

### **Described and Captioned Media Project (DCMP)**

General Interest Videos National Association of the Deaf  
1477 E. Main Street  
Spartanburg, SC 29307  
Voice: 800-237-6213  
TTY: 800-237-6819  
<http://www.dcmp.org>

DCMP houses the national library of accessible educational materials. These materials are available to teachers, parents and guardians of K-12 students who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, visually impaired or deaf-blind.

From DCMP's website, a person can register to borrow from the library. The materials are loaned at no cost to registered individuals.

### **Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Program (EHDI)**

Florida Newborn Screening Program Department of Health  
Children's Medical Services

Mailing address:

4052 Bald Cypress Way  
Bin A-06  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1707  
850-245-4673  
Fax: 850-245-4049

Overnight address:

4025 Esplanade Way  
Room 235-N  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1707

<http://www.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/childrens-health/newborn-screening/nbs-hear.html>

EHDI is a statewide program designed to ensure that the hearing of all newborns is tested at the time of birth. This process allows families to identify the status of their newborn's hearing before leaving the hospital to go home. This is important because it allows the family and the doctor to know if any conditions exist related to hearing that may need to be followed.

Early detection will allow the family to begin taking steps to prevent or minimize the impact that hearing loss can have on their child's language development, future academic performance and cognitive development as soon as possible, and help ensure that the family and child will have access to early intervention services.

There are two kinds of screenings the child may receive at the hospital. Both screenings are painless. If hearing is normal, no follow up is needed. If the child does not pass the screenings, then the hospital will make recommendations to the family for follow up. It is important that the families follow those recommendations.

### **Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System (FDLRS)**

Local, regional and statewide contact information for FDLRS may be found at <http://www.fdlrs.org/>. Contact your local FDLRS associate center for more information on services in your area. FDLRS is a discretionary project of FDOE, BEESS.

The purpose of the FDLRS associate centers is to provide the following programs and services for individuals working with students with disabilities, their families and support agencies. The FDLRS associate centers do this by:

- Assisting in the location, identification and evaluation of all children and youth, birth through 21 years of age, who have or are at-risk of developing special or unique needs and are not enrolled in public school;

- Planning collaboratively with school districts, ESE departments, staff development offices and other professional development entities to provide information, professional development and technical assistance and follow-up about effective instructional strategies and service delivery models for the education of children and youth who are exceptional or have unique needs;
- Assisting districts and families who have children who are exceptional or have special or unique needs to develop effective partnerships allowing shared responsibility to improve the education of all children and youth; and
- Assisting and supporting district professional staff and families of students who are exceptional or have special or unique needs in the appropriate uses of assistive technology, assistive technology related services, universal design principles and technology that enhance learning and communication.

### **Florida Instructional Materials Center for the Visually Impaired (FIMC-VI)**

4210 W. Bay Villa Avenue  
 Tampa, FL 33611-1206  
 813-837-7826  
 800-282-9193  
 Fax: (813) 837-7979  
<http://www.fimcvi.org>

Established in 1972 by the Florida Legislature, FIMC-VI is a discretionary project of FDOE, BEESS, through a grant agreement with Hillsborough County public schools.

FIMC-VI is a statewide resource center that provides instructional materials to students with visual impairments and/or print disabilities enrolled in Florida's local school districts and private schools. Provided in a timely manner, these academic materials allow eligible students to participate in the curriculum offered throughout their district.

FIMC-VI offers textbooks and support ancillaries in braille, large-print, digital audio and electronic formats. Through Florida's participation in the Federal Quota Program, FIMC-VI also provides instructional materials and products that allow students to access the Florida Standards and the expanded core curriculum (ECC). Materials and products that support the teaching of the ECC include communication modes and literacy, visual efficiency and low vision, orientation and mobility, assistive technology and electronics, career education and transition, self-determination, social skills, and recreation and leisure. In addition, assessment instruments and early childhood materials are also supplied to districts in accessible formats. FIMC-VI is extensively involved in the item review and proofreading of the braille versions of Florida's standardized assessments to ensure students receive unbiased, high-quality error-free braille tests. Another area of focus for FIMC-VI is the provision of trainings, webinars and workshops specific for teachers of PreK-12 students who are blind, visually impaired and deaf-blind.

On the FIMC-VI website, users can discover the following and much more:

- Information regarding the following statewide student-centered competitions provided by FIMC-VI:
  - The “Florida Braille Challenge,”
  - "Florida Cane Quest" and
  - Goalball;
- An extensive array of professional learning opportunities for teachers, paraprofessionals, state and private agency staff, and families:
  - Face-to-face meetings such as Working with the Experts—visually impaired and regional workshops,
  - Webinars and
  - Online modules;
- Eligibility requirements for FIMC-VI;
- Professional loan library materials such as books, assessment kits, teaching materials and assistive technology;
- Resources regarding the education of students with visual impairments, which include links to other state and national agencies; and
- Continuous updates implemented to the FIMC-VI website to ensure teachers, agency personnel, paraprofessionals and families of students with visual impairments receive current information regarding the education of Florida’s students who are visually impaired, visit often to see the latest information.

Connect with FIMC-VI on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/FIMCVI>) and Twitter (@FIMCVI).

### **Resource Materials Technology Center for the Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing (RMTC)**

Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind

207 N. San Marco Avenue

St. Augustine, FL 32084

Voice/TDD: 904-827-2663

800-356-6731

<http://rmtcosbd.org>

[hollingswoc@fsdb.k12.fl.us](mailto:hollingswoc@fsdb.k12.fl.us)

RMTC is a discretionary project of FDOE, BEESS and a statewide specialized FDLRS center. RMTC serves as the coordinating unit for accessible materials for the deaf and hard-of-hearing, including captioned and signed videos, professional development books, and other reference materials. RMTC staff provides on-site training and assistance to all school districts, families and discretionary projects by offering information and referral services, as well as by collaborating with other state and federal agencies in order to meet the unique needs of students with hearing loss, their parents and the professionals working with them. RMTC’s media library provides captioned and signed videos and books for loan at no cost to educators, parents, interpreters and other professionals serving students in Florida who have sensory loss. To borrow materials go to <http://dhh.materials.florida-ese.org/>.

RMTC also provides on-site observation and support to districts, including assistance in implementing Florida's Communication Plan, curriculum integration, correlation with the Florida Standards and support for state and national initiatives. In addition, RMTC coordinates a number of statewide initiatives and professional development opportunities, both face-to-face and online, including Working With the Experts: Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing and the Language Reading Connections: Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing.

### **Outreach Services for the Blind/Visually Impaired and Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing (OSBD)**

Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind  
207 N. San Marco Avenue  
St. Augustine, FL 32084  
800-356-6731  
(904) 827-2663  
<http://rmtcosbd.org>  
[c.hollingsworth@rmtcosbd.org](mailto:c.hollingsworth@rmtcosbd.org)

OSBD is a statewide discretionary project of FDOE, BEESS. OSBD provides assistance to school districts with a focus on small-sized, mid-sized, and rural districts. These services assist children who are blind, visually impaired, deaf, hard-of-hearing or dual sensory impaired, and the district staff supporting them. OSBD also provides related parent support services to school districts and parent groups. Information and referral services, including a database of national, state and local agencies are also available.

OSBD provides expert advice and on-site support by providing information, identifying resources, sharing ideas and assisting with the IEP. OSBD staff can conduct observations and file reviews to provide recommendations for classroom modifications, accommodations and teaching strategies. OSBD can also provide the following student assessments and evaluations: functional vision evaluations, learning media assessments, orientation and mobility assessments, functional listening assessments in the educational environment, speech and language evaluations, and language assessments (American Sign Language, spoken English, signed English). Training and workshops are offered to school district staff and families on critical issues related to sensory loss including awareness, learning implications, classroom considerations and parent issues.

### **The Educational Interpreter Project (EIP)**

University of North Florida  
1 UNF Drive  
Building 57, Suite 3500  
Jacksonville, FL 32224  
(904) 620-1386  
(866) 697-7150  
<http://www.unf.edu/interpreterproject/eip@unf.edu>

EIP is a discretionary project of FDOE, BEESS. The goal of EIP is to increase the number of qualified, screened, evaluated and nationally certified sign language interpreters and oral

transliterators, or other service providers working with students who are deaf or hard-of-hearing in Florida's school or who may become part of this specialized service provider workforce in the state's K-20 education system.

EIP provides a variety of professional development opportunities to interpreters and service providers working with students who are deaf or hard-of-hearing such as:

- Face-to-face Saturday workshops and seminars;
- Intensive educational and skill development during the annual Summer Institute (3½ days);
- Online knowledge, mentoring and skill development modules; and
- All activities provided by EIP have been approved for continuing education units for nationally certified interpreters or pre-certified members of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, thus providing opportunities to maintain their national certification.

EIP administers both the written and performance portions of the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment, a tool specifically developed to assess the skills of interpreters in K-12 educational settings. EIP assists in proctoring the national interpreter performance evaluations. Financial assistance is provided for educational interpreters (K-12) with the fees for these performance assessments. EIP also financially assist interpreters who are working toward college degrees.

EIP responds to district requests for specific "in-district" professional development or technical assistance regarding service providers working with students who are deaf or hard-of-hearing.

### **Learning Through Listening Project (LTL)**

Learning Ally—National Office

20 Roszel Road

Princeton, NJ 05840

800-221-4792

<http://www.learningally.org/florida/>

LTL's fiscal agent is Learning Ally. Learning Ally, formerly Recording for the Blind & Dyslexic, is the nation's largest library of accessible educational materials for students who are blind, visually impaired, dyslexic or physically disabled. Audiobooks are available in all K-12 curriculum areas from the top U.S. school publishers to help struggling readers achieve their personal best. State funding helps support access for students in Florida's public school programs and individual memberships are available for at-home use.

### **Critical Initiatives in Visual Impairment Project (CIVI) Florida Low Vision Initiative (FLVI)**

Florida State University

850-445-4353

850-644-9258

Fax: 813-856-0559

[kmroberts@fsu.edu](mailto:kmroberts@fsu.edu)

The FLVI is a research grant that is a part of the CIVI discretionary project. FLVI provides comprehensive low vision evaluations and prescribed optical aids (glasses, contacts, sunglasses, magnifiers and monocular) at no cost to eligible school-age children with low vision.

Students in kindergarten through age 22 who are receiving direct services from a teacher of students with visual impairments (TVI) as documented on an IEP are eligible for the program. Qualifying students have an identified low vision need (i.e., the student may have difficulty accessing printed material or may be using large-print materials) or may have difficulty accessing the whiteboard from the student's seat in the classroom.

FLVI may be contacted to request a referral packet. The TVI initiates the referral and the student is typically accepted in the spring to allow the FLVI time to plan for services for the next school year.

The IEP team, including the student, TVI and parents, work together to support the following:

- Use of the low vision devices,
- Reduction of large print and
- Instruction to enable the student to become proficient with the tool(s).

### **Florida and Virgin Islands Deaf-Blind Collaborative (FAVI)**

University of Florida

P.O. Box 100234

Gainesville, FL 32610

352-273-7530

800-667-4052

Fax: 352-273-8539

[info@deafblind.ufl.edu](mailto:info@deafblind.ufl.edu)

[www.deafblind.ufl.edu](http://www.deafblind.ufl.edu)

FAVI is funded through the U.S. Department of Education for the purpose of providing technical assistance to families and educational teams who support students with deaf-blindness. The project is designed to build the capacity of the local school districts to serve these students. A person-centered teaming approach is used and strengths of staff and students are used in designing strategies. Specific services include the following:

- Technical assistance and support (on-site visits with follow-up);
- Lending library (books, videos, and manuals);
- Training for staff and families (locally or at statewide conferences);
- Mentor teacher program; and
- Identification of eligible students.



Florida Department of Education  
Pam Stewart, Commissioner  
306280