

PROGRAMS & SERVICES

For students who are blind or visually impaired

The Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority (APSEA) is an interprovincial co-operative agency established in 1975 by joint agreement among the Ministers of Education of New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island. APSEA serves children and youth from birth to 21 years of age who are deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind, blind and visually impaired and who reside in Atlantic Canada.

APSEA supports the philosophy of inclusion of students who are blind or visually impaired with their peers who are sighted in their community schools. School districts are recognized as the jurisdiction having responsibility for the education of all school-age children.

Programs and services offered by APSEA are designed to assist school districts in the provision of adaptations required for students who are blind or visually impaired. APSEA supports a service delivery system which makes it possible for each child to receive an appropriate educational program designed to meet the student's individual needs. The majority of services are provided to students in their local communities, however, short-term programs (one week to five months) are offered at the APSEA Centre in Halifax.

Programs and services are provided in cooperation with provincial Departments of Education and include:

- An integrated school program for students who are blind or visually impaired. Direct instruction is provided by APSEA itinerant teachers trained in the education of students with visual impairments. These teachers provide instruction in disability-specific skills (e.g., braille, development of visual efficiency, orientation and mobility, independent living skills, use of adaptive technology), work with classroom teachers to adapt the regular curricula, and participate as members of multidisciplinary school teams designed to address the needs of children with disabilities. Public school staff and parents are assisted in adapting programs, both educational and recreational, to ensure active participation of students who are blind or visually impaired in school, home, and community life. Itinerant teachers also provide preschool/parent education designed to service the individual needs of preschool children who are blind or visually impaired and their parents.
- A consultant service designed to assist school officials in providing appropriate programs for students who are blind or visually impaired. Each province has a supervisor responsible for supervising provincial programs and staff; assessing and recommending appropriate educational services; providing inservice training to educators; and co-ordinating the development and implementation of programs for the school-aged population who are blind or visually impaired.
- Parent education weekend workshops are held each year at the APSEA Centre in Halifax.
- A tutor program designed to assist students with specific content material, monitor practice of compensatory skills (e.g., keyboarding), or to provide additional direct service necessitated by special considerations (e.g., the needs of a newly blinded student).
- An orientation and mobility program designed to provide instruction to students so they may travel independently at home, at school, and in their community.
- A transition facilitator who begins working with students when they are 14 years of age to plan for future education, employment, and/or community living arrangements. The transition facilitator leads

a team comprised of parents, representatives from other agencies involved with the student (e.g., CNIB, Community Services), and the student as they investigate options available to the student after graduation from high school.

- A library service which provides and/or produces textbooks and recreational reading materials in braille, large print, and audio format; a variety of kits, educational materials and learning aids; a toy library; and a professional collection of texts on blindness, visual impairment, education of students with visual impairments and special education. The library maintains a large collection as well as having an interlibrary loan network across North America.
- Assessment and prescriptive programming for all children and youth from birth to 21 years of age who are blind or visually impaired.
- A technology, equipment, and materials loan service which provides such items as braille notetakers, tape recorders, low vision aids, laptop computers with speech or large print, electronic aids adapted for students who are blind or visually impaired, as well as dark lined paper, braille paper and a variety of adaptive aids, appliances, and models.
- Short-term programs at the APSEA Centre in Halifax designed to provide a comprehensive level of programming which may be difficult to incorporate in the public school. Short-term programs focus on mastery of specific skills such as orientation and mobility, use of a specific piece of technology, or addressing specific learning or behavioural difficulties. They vary in length from one week to five months. Parents and school based teams are involved in the design, implementation, and follow up to short-term programs.
- A family consultative service is provided by a consultant with training and experience in the education of students who are blind or visually impaired. Issues such as adjustment to blindness, raising a child who is visually impaired, and psycho-social issues that children and youth who are blind and visually impaired may experience are typically addressed by the family consultant. Collaboration with school districts/boards and other agencies to establish the necessary support to help the child function at home and at school.

Referrals for Services

- Referrals for preschool-age children can be made by ophthalmologists and/or eye care professionals, pediatricians, public health nurses, social workers, and parents.
- Referrals for school age children are made by the school district/board.

Follow-up Procedures

Following the initial contact, the provincial supervisor for students with visual impairments will ensure the recommended APSEA services are initiated. This might include:

- Instruction from a qualified teacher of students who are blind or visually impaired
- Provision of special equipment, technology, or adapted curriculum
- Materials in braille, large print, or audio format
- Further assessment or referral to other APSEA specialists

A written report with recommendations will be sent to the principal, teacher, and parents.

For further information, please contact:

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