

Supporting Children Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired as They Return to School

Going back to school can lead to feelings of anticipation and worry for students, parents, and teachers alike. As a parent, you are the “captain” of your child’s individualized education program (IEP) team! Preparing and communicating effectively with your child and teachers before the first day will provide a structured “game plan” to start the school year off right.

Prepare

Below are four ways you can prepare yourself and your child for the start of the school year.

Know your District’s Educational Options

Visit your district’s website to research your child’s program choices. What classroom options are being offered and how might each affect your child’s individual learning needs and access to the curriculum? Be sure to check your school’s website for additional information.

Demystify the Back-to-School Transition

Talk to your child about the upcoming year and what her school day might look like. Will she continue with distance learning, or will she head back to a classroom at school? What might be the same and what might change? What is she excited about? What worries does she have? What were the highs and lows from last spring?

Establish a Daily Routine

Talk with your child about bedtimes and implement them prior to the first day. Discuss routines that develop independence with dressing, packing lunches, and organizing backpacks. Help your child create a personal learning space where he can organize, easily find, and take care of his learning tools. Consider a location that has easy access to outlets for charging technology.

Review your Child’s IEP

What modifications and accommodations has the school agreed to provide? This list is your child’s “toolbox,” the supplies needed for accessing classwork. Are updates needed to address distance learning challenges? Which items do you need at home? What questions or concerns do you have regarding progress toward IEP goals? What ideas, tips, and tricks can you contribute?

- Resource: [Individualized Education Program: Parent’s Role \[PDF\]](#)

Action Items

Now that you have prepared for the school year, below are three ways you can take action.

Communicate with your child’s Teacher for the Visually Impaired (TVI)

Assemble your child’s “toolbox” (e.g., braille or large-print books, assistive technology, low-tech items, magnification devices). Make a list of what is needed and who will acquire each item. Review the progress made on goals and the priority for starting the year. Ask your TVI about the [Expanded Core Curriculum \(ECC\)](https://bit.ly/LIOECC) (bit.ly/LIOECC) and tips for working on skills at home. Confirm the specifics of direct service delivery: In-person or remote, days and times, delivery of materials, and parent involvement expectations.

Visit Your Child’s School

Drive, walk, or bike the route from home and explore the public schoolgrounds. Locate the bus and drop-off areas, front entry, playground, outdoor picnic tables, etc. If possible, coordinate with your orientation and mobility instructor to navigate inside. Identify classrooms, label your child’s locker, and walk the routes to community spaces (cafeteria, lunchroom, auditorium, library, bathrooms).

Meet Your Child’s Classroom Teacher

Participate in back-to-school programming and respond to school communications. Try scheduling a meeting with your child’s teacher(s). During the meeting, showcase your child’s strengths, interests, and needs with a personal “story,” letter, or video; provide a copy of the IEP; express any concerns you have; and share your ideas. Highlight the services, accommodations, and supports your child needs to succeed and offer to help where you can. Ask what classroom supplies will be needed and demonstrate some of the vision-specific items from your child’s “toolbox.” Be supportive and offer collaboration.

- Resource: [Student Report: What’s Your Story? \[PDF\]](#)

Additional Back-to-School Resources

Michigan Department of Education – Low Incidence Outreach:

- [Expanded Core Curriculum \(ECC\)](#) (bit.ly/LIOECC)
- [Individualized Education Program: Parent’s Role \[PDF\]](#)
- [Student Report: What’s Your Story? \[PDF\]](#)

Michigan Alliance for Families:

- [Return to School Conversations \[PDF\]](#) (bit.ly/3g1VoVf)
- Virtual parent support group: [Sharing Our Strengths and Struggles \[PDF\]](#) (bit.ly/3f5SCOO)

Lighthouse Guild:

- [Tele-Support for Parents](#) (bit.ly/3iTrCUt)

Perkins School for the Blind:

- [Back to School Checklist for Parents of a Child Who Is Blind or Visually Impaired](https://bit.ly/2FykeiV) (bit.ly/2FykeiV)

National Federation of the Blind - National Organization of Parents of Blind Children Division:

- [Blind Parents Connection Podcast](https://bit.ly/2CxYYbM) (bit.ly/2CxYYbM)
 - [Episode 6: Making Back to School Successful](https://bit.ly/3kTGX9q) (bit.ly/3kTGX9q)

Michigan Online Parent Support Groups

- [Michigan Parents of Blind Children \(MiPOBC\) Facebook Group](https://bit.ly/3ayqiDB) (bit.ly/3ayqiDB)
- [Michigan Parents of Children with Visual Impairments \(MPVI\) Facebook Group](https://bit.ly/2Q2KbZL) (bit.ly/2Q2KbZL)
- [Michigan NOAH \(National Organization for Albinism and Hypopigmentation\) Families Facebook Group](https://bit.ly/3kV1bPN) (bit.ly/3kV1bPN)