
	Maryland State Department of Education <b>Technical Assistance Bulletin</b> Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services				
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## **Orientation and Mobility (O&M) ASSESSMENT GUIDELINES**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The ability to understand and move within one's physical and spatial environment is a fundamental skill for a student with a visual impairment to access the school, home, and community environments and, later, an essential skill for transition to work and independent living. The goal of Orientation & Mobility (O&M) instruction for persons who have visual impairments is safe travel in any environment, both familiar and unfamiliar, as independently as possible. O&M cannot be addressed as an isolated skill area but should be embedded in the student's overall educational environment.

***The goal of O&M instruction is safe travel in any environment as independently as possible.***

Students who receive quality O&M instruction are more independent and have higher postsecondary outcomes.

The term "Orientation and Mobility Services" is defined as services provided to blind or visually impaired students by qualified personnel to enable those students to attain systematic orientation to and safe movement within their environments in school, home, and community. O&M instruction must be considered for each blind or visually impaired child. The extent to which orientation and mobility services are necessary for an individual child and, if necessary, the amount and duration of those services that are required for a child to receive FAPE are decisions for the child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) team. IEP teams need to be aware of individual factors that would affect the nature and extent to which O&M instruction may be needed for a particular student.

Instruction may include teaching students the following, as appropriate:

- Spatial and environmental concepts and use of information received by the senses (such as sound, temperature, and vibrations) to establish, maintain, or regain orientation and line of travel (e.g., using sound at a traffic light to cross the street);
- Use of the long cane and other nonvisual techniques to supplement visual travel skills or as a tool for safely negotiating the environment for students with no available travel vision;
- Understanding and use of remaining vision and distance low vision aids; and
- Other concepts, techniques, and tools.

O&M instruction must be included in the IEP of a student who is blind or visually impaired, unless the IEP team determines that O&M instruction is not appropriate for the student

(Md. Code Ann., Educ. §8-408(c)(1)). If the IEP team determines that O&M instruction is not appropriate for the student, then the IEP team must order an O&M assessment. A child's need for O&M instruction and the appropriate method or methods for acquiring the requisite skills should be assessed. This is especially important because parents and organizations representing the interests of blind and visually impaired individuals have reported that, in some instances, these students are not receiving appropriate O&M instruction and that appropriate evaluations of their needs for these services are not being conducted. For some blind and visually impaired children, the inability to move around independently can be an obstacle to participating in school, family, and community life.

The assessment that is ordered must be conducted by a qualified individual (Md. Code Ann., Educ. §8-408(c)(2)). To be qualified, an individual must: i) hold a Bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university; and ii) have completed any one of the credentialing options listed in the regulation. To meet the credentialing requirement, an individual may:

- Hold a certificate as a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS) from the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP);
- Hold National Orientation and Mobility Certification (NOMC) from the National Blindness Professional Certification Board (NBPCB); or
- Complete all requirements of a university-based program in orientation and mobility, including a supervised internship or externship in orientation and mobility.

(COMAR 13A.05.01.08A(6)(c)-(d)).

These qualifications are not only required to conduct the required O&M assessment, but also to provide O&M instruction (Md. Code Ann., Educ. §8-408(c)(5)(i)).

Within thirty (30) days after the date of the receipt of an O&M assessment, the IEP team that ordered the assessment must meet to consider the results of the assessment and determine whether O&M instruction is appropriate for the student (Md. Code Ann., Educ. §8-408(c)(2)(ii)). If the IEP team still determines that O&M instruction is not appropriate for the student based on the assessment results, then it may not be included in the student's IEP (Md. Code Ann., Educ. §8-408(c)(2)(iii)). This determination is binding for the entire school year in which it is made, unless there are significant changes in the circumstances of the student (Md. Code Ann., Educ. §8-408(c)(2)(iv)).

It is very important that ALL children who are blind and visually impaired who need O&M instruction, including those with other disabilities, receive appropriate instruction in O&M. These travel skills enhance the ability of blind and visually impaired students to obtain employment, retain their jobs, and participate more fully in family and community life.

The O&M assessment guidelines are intended to assist families, staff members, and administrators to improve their effectiveness in understanding and meeting the unique educational needs of students with visual impairments. They also serve as a tool for improving the effectiveness of programs in meeting the needs of students with visual impairments.

## **THE O&M ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

During the assessment, the instructor observes the child's skills across a variety of settings. Parents should be notified and given a permission form for their child to be driven to various community locations (see Appendix A). The O&M assessment should incorporate interviews of parents and teachers. Questions to consider for the parent interview include asking about the child's travel needs, how the child gets around at home, in school, and in the community, any difficulties the child is having, how lighting affects the child's ability or willingness to travel, how the child reacts to new areas, and what the parent's travel goals are for the child (see Appendix B and C). The teacher interview should include questions that address such topics as challenges for the student and whether the child travels independently around the campus (see Appendix D).

The Orientation and Mobility Assessment Report (see Appendix E) should include the background referral information, a list of tests and/or procedures administered, assessment findings, and documentation of assessment validity. Assessment findings must include the following components:

- **Home and Community Environments** - the student's ability to safely locate functional destinations and areas of need and interest inside the home and outside in the neighborhood
- **School Environment** - the student's ability to safely locate functional daily classroom destinations, recreational areas, and miscellaneous areas of need and interest, travel in crowded hallways, safe travel on steps, elevators, and the cafeteria
- **Lighting Conditions** - the student's ability to safely deal with glare, transition from light to dark and from dark to light, travel in sunny, dim, and reduced lighting conditions (night travel)
- **Indoor Environments** - the student's ability to safely use self-protective techniques, landmarks, directions, sounds, and other clues for orientation, utilize systematic search patterns to explore the environment, cane skills, safe/efficient movement, and problem-solving strategies
- **Outdoor Environments** - the student's ability to use self-protective techniques, landmarks, sounds, directions, and other clues for orientation, systematic search patterns to explore the environment, cane skills, street crossing techniques (stop sign, interference, traffic light, etc.), safe/efficient movement, knowledge of where, when and how to solicit assistance, and problem-solving strategies
- **Familiar Environments** - the student's ability to use self-protective techniques, use of systematic search patterns to explore the environment, and safe/efficient movement
- **Unfamiliar Environments** - the student's ability to use self-protective techniques, safe/efficient movement, knowledge of where, when, and how to solicit assistance, and problem-solving strategies
- **Other skills that may be evaluated during the O&M assessment** - various forms of public transportation (e.g., taxi, ride services, public bus, light rail, subway, paratransit, etc.)

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **1. What is Orientation & Mobility?**

The concepts and skills necessary for students to travel safely and efficiently in their environment. Orientation skills enable people with visual impairments to use sensory information to know their location in different settings and mobility skills to travel in different areas. People travel to different locations using different techniques (such as sighted guide or trailing techniques) or by using assistive devices (like the long cane or wheelchair).

### **2. How are parents and guardians of children with visual impairments informed of O&M services?**

In accordance with Maryland state law, parents and guardians of students who are blind or visually impaired must be given verbal and written information on the availability of Orientation & Mobility (O&M) as a related service at least **one time each year** (Md. Code Ann., Educ. §8-408(c)(4)). A student may not be denied O&M instruction solely because the student has some remaining vision (Md. Code Ann., Educ. § 8-408(c)(1)(ii)).

### **3. Who should have the O&M assessment?**

All students with the identified disability of visual impairment in their IEP, which include those with multiple disabilities, must receive an O&M assessment. The assessment will determine if instruction in O&M is appropriate or substantiate if instruction is inappropriate.

### **4. Should students with multiple disabilities be considered for O&M instruction?**

If the student's multiple disabilities include a visual impairment, he or she should also be considered for an O&M assessment to determine the need for O&M instruction.

### **5. What is included in an O&M assessment process?**

- A review of the student's background information, which should include:
  - Eye report (diagnosis, prognosis, acuity, fields, and functional vision)
  - Medical reports
  - IEP and Related Services, as needed
  - Parent interview
- Teacher interview
- Student interview, as appropriate
- Observation
- Formal and informal tools individualized to the student's needs

The assessment report should address strengths, current travel needs, future travel needs, and recommendations.

### **6. Should O&M providers be present at IEP meetings for students who are blind or visually impaired?**

If an O&M assessment is being requested or an O&M assessment report is being presented at the IEP team meeting, the O&M provider must be present.

**7. Is it true that the IEP team must meet to consider the results of the O&M assessment within 30 days after the date of receipt of the O&M assessment?**

Yes. This is a State law that is specific to the O&M assessment and exceeds IDEA in its specificity. The 30-day timeline starts upon receipt of the O&M assessment, which is defined as the completion of the report and receipt by the team.

**8. Are O&M providers required to do assessments every year?**

The O&M determination is binding for the entire school year unless significant changes occur for the student. **Yearly assessment is not required by law; however, a re-assessment may be requested by the family or another member of the IEP team if a year or more has passed since the most recent assessment.** O&M should be considered as part of the required re-evaluation process every three years. As noted above, families should be informed at least annually of the availability of O&M as a related service.

**9. Why is community travel important for the blind and visually impaired student?**

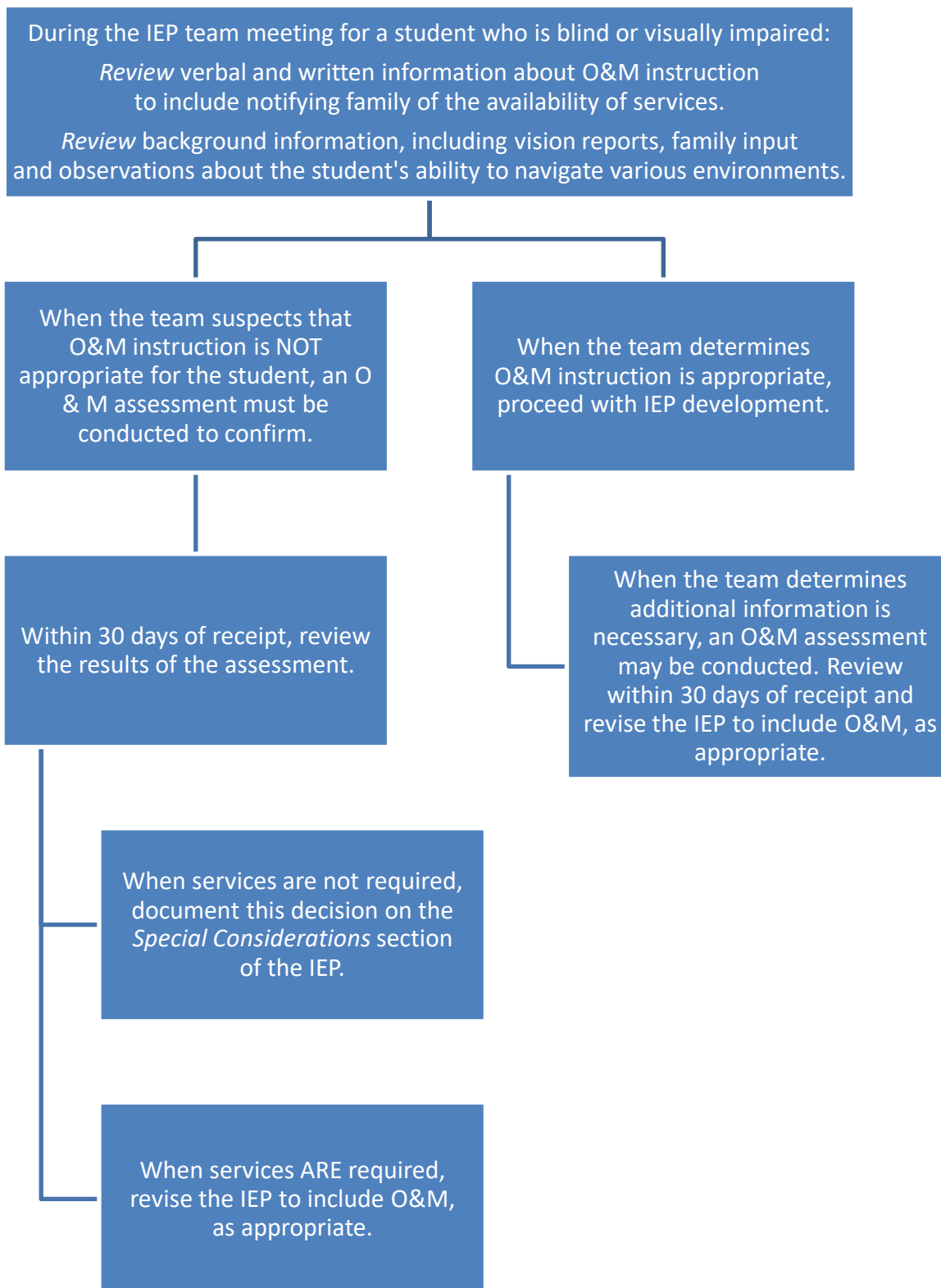
O&M providers stress the concept of responsible travel, encouraging students to do whatever they can on their own, safely, but helping them to recognize when they need assistance and teaching how to assertively obtain that assistance. Prior to going into the community, students work on prerequisite skills. They are placed in situations requiring problem solving. Lessons start in familiar surroundings and slowly move to more complex and challenging environments. Blind and visually impaired students can address their unique needs when traveling in the community. This includes, but is not limited to, learning to navigate crossing streets, crossing intersections, interacting in public, and making purchases at stores/shopping. Lessons should be appropriate to the student's age and capabilities.

**10. What should be taken into consideration when O&M providers travel in the community?**

Local school systems are required to transport students for community-based O&M instruction. Transportation could be provided by school buses, county or school owned vehicles, or the O&M providers' personal vehicles. If personal vehicles are used, consideration should be given to reimbursement of liability insurance and mileage.

### **STEPS FOR THE IEP TEAM**

#### **To Determine Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Assessment Needs**



**APPENDIX A**  
**Permission for Transportation O&M Assessment/Instruction**

The service of Orientation and Mobility (O&M) evaluates and teaches students with visual impairments to travel safely and efficiently throughout familiar and unfamiliar environments—home, school, and community. During the O&M assessment, the instructor will be observing your child’s **orientation skills**, including how well your child uses his/her physical environment and sensory clues (sound clues, tactual information, and landmarks) to find his or her way from one destination to another and how well your child follows directions and/or plans, returns, and alternates routes. The instructor will also be observing your child’s **mobility skills**, including how safely your child moves through his or her environment and how your child demonstrates protective methods of travel, such as protective techniques, cane skills, and functional use of vision.

Below is a *general* list of the basic components of an O&M assessment. These skills may or may not be evaluated during this O&M assessment – based on your child’s age and present level of functioning.

- Spatial and positional concept development
- Application of sensory information during travel, including various lighting conditions
- Understanding of environmental concepts
- Landmark usage and direction following
- Ability to plan, return, and alternate routes in school and community environments
- Indoor and outdoor travel skills
- Full range of street crossing procedures (stop sign, interference, traffic lights, etc.)
- Various forms of public transportation (taxi, Uber, public bus, light rail, subway, paratransit)

During the O&M assessment, the O&M instructor may need to **transport your child to community locations** to complete portions of the O&M assessment. O&M skills are an essential component of your child’s development. Efficient and safe travel skills enhance self-concept, encourage independence, and help to integrate your child into the world around him/her.

***By signing this form, you are giving permission for your child to participate in all O&M assessment/instruction activities and to be driven to various community locations.***

If you have any questions regarding your child’s O&M assessment/instruction, please feel free to contact \_\_\_\_\_, your O&M service provider.

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**Student Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**School:** \_\_\_\_\_

**O&M Instructor:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Parental Consent:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX B**

## **Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Parent/Guardian Questions to Consider**

- 1. Tell me about your child's travel needs.**
  - what kind of places does he/she go
  - does he/she like any specific place or kind of travel
  - indoor vs. outdoor travel
  
- 2. How is your child getting around at home?**
  - walk confidently, shuffles feet, posture, gait, speed of travel
  - does he/she travel alone or with someone
  - walk: Sighted Guide, alongside someone, in front or behind an adult, follow others
  - does he/she bump into or walk around objects
  - what is his/her reaction when he/she bumps objects
  - anticipate things in familiar areas
  - explores vs. remains stationary
  - how do you encourage him/her to move
  
- 3. Tell me about your neighborhood.**
  - residential neighborhood vs. city
  - travel alone to neighbors
  - sidewalks or no sidewalks
  - locate curbs safely
  - cross streets: quiet streets or traffic light streets
  - public bus travel
  
- 4. How is he/she traveling at school?**
  - member of the class group, with an aide, independently, visually supervised, etc.
  - are any travel expectations placed upon him/her at school
  
- 5. How does your child get around in the community?**
  - familiar areas vs. unfamiliar areas
  - ask for help if needed
  - learn new routes and understand what to do to meet new or changing conditions in the environment.
  - get around in stores
  - cross streets: quiet streets to traffic light streets
  
- 6. Can you think of any travel situations that are difficult for your child?**
  - busy areas
  - elevators, escalators, etc.
  - uneven surfaces, steps, ramps, grass, different surface textures, etc.
  - crowded areas, noisy areas



**7. How does your child react to new/unfamiliar area?**

- initiate exploration
- how long to get comfortable
- how long to learn the new area
- cling to you

**8. Have you noticed if lighting conditions affect your child's ability/willingness to travel?**

- bright vs. cloudy
- day vs. dusk vs. night
- find drop offs, bumps in sidewalk, steps, ramps, curbs, etc., in reduced lighting
- going from light to dark or going from dark to light

**9. What are your travel goals for your child?**

- current goal, for now
- long term goal for the future

**10. Is there anything I haven't asked that you think I should know about your child in order to work with him/her?**

**APPENDIX C**

**Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Parent/Guardian Interview**

**Student Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Age:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. Please describe how your child sees.
2. What indoor places or environments does your child have difficulty traveling? (Ex: home, steps, stores, other specific places)
3. What outdoor places or environments does your child have difficulty traveling? (Ex: curbs, sidewalks, parking lots, playgrounds, public transportation)
4. Does your child have difficulty in bright light? Dim lighting?
5. Where does your child travel independently?
6. If your child does not travel anywhere independently, why not?
7. Does your child bump into things or trip often?
8. Does your child know what to do if they get lost?
9. What is motivating for your child? What is their favorite toy/activity?
10. Does your child have any medical or physical conditions that would impact travel or walking? (asthma, temperatures, physical condition)
11. Do you have concerns for current/future travel?

**APPENDIX D**

**Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Teacher Interview**

**Student Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Teacher's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Subject:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. Does the student travel at a level of independence you would expect of any student at their age?

2. Does the student bump into/trip over obstacles or people?

3. Does the student seem to have difficulty in bright or dim light?

4. What does the student do if they are lost?

5. Does the student travel independently?

- Cafeteria
- Playground
- Bathroom
- On/off bus
- Drills/Emergency evacuations
- Field trips/Community-based instruction

## APPENDIX E

### **Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Report**

**Student Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **DOB:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Parent Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**School:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Grade:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Local School ID:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date of Assessment:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date of Report:** \_\_\_\_\_

**O&M Specialist:** \_\_\_\_\_

#### **BACKGROUND REFERRAL INFORMATION**

Orientation and Mobility (O&M) is a related service for blind or visually impaired students to attain systematic orientation to and safe movement within their environments in school, home, and community. The O&M assessment is required for all students in Maryland identified as visually impaired. The assessment will consider age/ability of individual child, current and future travel needs, travel in the home, school, and community, travel in different lighting conditions, travel in familiar and unfamiliar environments, and include input from the parent and the classroom teacher.

This assessment was conducted as:

- Part of initial eligibility to determine the impact of the student's vision on safe movement within school, home, and community environments and the need for related services in the area of Orientation and Mobility.
- or
- Part of the re-evaluation process to determine the continued impact of vision on safe movement within school, home, and community environments and the need for related services in the area of Orientation and Mobility.
- or
- An update due to a change in visual performance and needs.

#### **TESTS AND/OR PROCEDURES ADMINISTERED**

The O&M assessment incorporates a review of records, interviews, observations, as well as formal and informal tools, individualized to the student's needs.

- Teaching Age-Appropriate Purposeful Skills: An Orientation and Mobility Curriculum for Students with Visual Impairments (TAPS), 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, 2012.
- New Mexico Orientation and Mobility Inventory, New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, 2012.
- Orientation and Mobility Visual Impairment Scale of Service Intensity of Texas (O&M VISSIT) <http://www.tsbvi.edu/o-m-vissit>

#### **ASSESSMENT FINDINGS**

Description of student's overall performance in comparison to developmental and/or behavior patterns of typical peers.

**RECORD REVIEW**

**Medical**

Doctor Name and Title:

Affiliation:

Date of Last Eye Exam:

Vision Condition, Etiology, History, and Description:

Distance Visual Acuity Without Correction:

OD (Right) \_\_\_\_\_

OS (Left) \_\_\_\_\_

OU (Both) \_\_\_\_\_

Distance Visual Acuity with Correction:

OD (Right) \_\_\_\_\_

OS (Left) \_\_\_\_\_

OU (Both) \_\_\_\_\_

Refraction:

OD (Right) \_\_\_\_\_

OS (Left) \_\_\_\_\_

Glasses Prescribed:

Miscellaneous (Fields, Color, Stereopsis, Treatments, Limitations, etc.):

Prognosis:

**Academic**

School History:

IEP summary, other disabilities, services:

**INTERVIEW(S) SUMMARY**

Parent:

Teacher/Service Provider:

Student:

## **ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY ASSESSMENT**

Home:

School:

Community:

Lighting conditions:

Indoor environments:

Outdoor environments:

Familiar environments:

Unfamiliar Environments:

## **INSTRUCTIONAL IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDENT'S PARTICIPATION IN GENERAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM**

Medical Summary:

Strengths:

Needs:

Impact of vision on travel:

Current travel needs:

Future travel needs:

Recommendations:

## **DOCUMENTATION OF ASSESSMENT VALIDITY**

Does the student have Limited English Proficiency? Yes  No

If yes, what language or mode of communication was used for assessment?

In the opinion of the evaluator, is the assessment an accurate reflection of the student's performance at this time? Yes  No

Is this assessment felt to be culturally and linguistically valid for its intended purpose and for this student? Yes  No

Examiner's signature and credentials:

Title, Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist:

**FOR MORE INFORMATION  
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