

Back-to-School Checklist for Visually Impaired Students: Essential Tips and Resources for a Smooth Start

Essential Back-to-School Preparations for Visually Impaired Students



Preparing a comprehensive back-to-school checklist for visually impaired students is a vital part of ensuring a successful academic year. This checklist should go beyond standard school supplies to include personalized tools that support vision needs, accessible educational materials tailored to each student's learning style, and resources that foster daily independence both in and out of the classroom.

Personal Supplies Checklist

A well-planned list of supplies sets visually impaired students up for a confident and organized start. Key items include tactile and talking devices, accessible writing tools, and organizational aids.

Checklist:

- **Tactile Labeling:** Braille or tactile labels for backpacks, lunch boxes, notebooks, and devices help students easily identify their belongings.
- **Talking Calculators & Watches:** Speech-enabled devices support classroom participation and independent time management.
- **Organizational Tools:** Sectioned bags, folders with tactile tabs, and color-contrasted pouches help keep items easy to locate.

We also recommend reusable water bottles with tactile markings and sturdy storage containers to support independence and self-advocacy.

Braille and Large Print Material Requirements

Students with visual impairments benefit when all learning materials are provided in accessible formats. Coordinating with school staff before the school year starts is critical to ensure all materials are ready on day one.

Braille Users:

- Order required textbooks and handouts in Braille well ahead of time.
- Check that tactile graphics and diagrams are included, especially for math and science content.

Large Print Readers:

- Verify the availability of large print textbooks or digital versions with adjustable text.
- Use high-contrast paper and bold-lined notebooks for note-taking.

Accessible digital files, such as DAISY or accessible PDFs, also support engagement for students using screen readers or magnification software. We recommend confirming device compatibility with classroom technology for smooth integration.

Clothing and Daily Living Essentials

Daily living skills foster greater independence and self-confidence for visually impaired students. Clothing choices and daily care routines should support autonomy and classroom comfort.

Suggestions:

- Select clothing with minimal fasteners or those that are easy to manage independently.
- Use tactile tags, color-coded markers, or braille labels to help identify clothing items.
- Pack a kit with essential items: folding white cane, medication, sunscreen (if needed), and a portable magnifier.

Practice opening backpacks and lunch bags before the first day so students are comfortable at school. Encourage students to pack personal care items such as hand sanitizer or tissues in clearly labeled pouches for daily routines.

Organizing Educational Supports and Individualized Plans

Preparing for the new school year starts with reviewing the specific needs of each visually impaired student. Ensuring educational supports align with their Individualized Education Program (IEP) is essential for setting a foundation for their success.

Reviewing the Individualized Education Program

Each IEP acts as a personalized guide for addressing both academic and accessibility needs. We recommend working closely with Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVIs) and related service providers to check the accuracy and relevance of each IEP.

Start by confirming that accommodations, assistive technology, and service hours are documented and current. Verify the list of required devices, such as *refreshable Braille displays*, screen readers, or magnification tools, are included in the plan.

Use the chart below to track critical IEP elements:

IEP Component	Description	Current Year Status
Accommodations	Extended time, alternative formats, etc.	☐ Up to date
Assistive Technology	Devices/services listed, training provided	☐ Confirmed
Service Hours	Direct instruction, orientation, mobility	☐ Scheduled

Check for updates based on new assessments or changes in the student's vision status. Families should also be included during this process, as their input shapes appropriate supports.

Coordinating with School Teams

Strong collaboration with the full school team ensures consistent support. Hold meetings before classes resume to share updates on student needs, equipment, and any changes in accessibility requirements.

Establish clear points of contact for technology support, orientation, and classroom modifications. Ensure the classroom layout, materials, and routines accommodate the student's visual needs, such as assigned seating or labeled materials.

We provide training and advice to help educators select and set up leading-edge assistive technology.

Create a shared document or use a digital platform for team communication. This simplifies updates on devices, troubleshooting steps, or any new accessibility challenges that arise throughout the year.

Understanding IDEA and ADA Rights

Knowledge of legal protections is crucial for supporting visually impaired students. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) assures access to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment, including necessary assistive technology and services as outlined in the IEP.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) goes further by guaranteeing physical and digital accessibility across all school activities and environments.

We support teams in understanding these requirements, ensuring that classrooms, materials, and digital resources comply with legal standards.

It's important to monitor compliance and respond promptly to any barriers to access. Having a clear understanding of rights and responsibilities under IDEA and ADA empowers educators and families to advocate for effective, individualized supports.

Assistive Technology and Accessibility Tools for Back-to-School Checklist for Visually Impaired Students

Selecting the right assistive technology and accessibility tools is essential for supporting students with low vision or blindness as they return to school. By thoughtfully choosing, implementing, and maintaining these resources, we help ensure that every student is prepared for academic success and greater independence.

Selecting Appropriate Assistive Technology

When preparing visually impaired students for the new school year, we work closely with educational teams to assess each student's unique needs. This includes evaluating the learning environment, the specific tasks required, and the tools that could provide equitable access.

Using frameworks such as SETT (Student, Environment, Task, and Tools), we help ensure that the technology selected is not only functional but also fits the student's daily activities.

Common options include:

- Screen readers (e.g., JAWS, NVDA)
- Electronic braille displays
- Accessible educational software

- Refreshable braille notetakers

An effective assessment is ongoing and involves both students and their support teams. Updates may be required as curricula and classroom technology evolve.

Implementing Auditory Cues

Auditory cues are a vital component for students who are blind or have low vision. These cues help students independently access information, navigate physical spaces, and participate in classroom tasks.

Examples include:

- Screen reader voice outputs
- Audio alerts for calendar events or schedule changes
- Talking calculators
- Accessible alarms and timers

We also emphasize training students in using auditory feedback to maximize independence. This includes understanding different voices, speech rates, and how to customize sound options in both desktop and mobile devices. Regular practice helps students respond to cues quickly and effectively.

Magnification and Low Vision Devices

For students with low vision, the proper magnification tools make a significant difference in accessing print and visual materials. Solutions range from hand-held magnifiers to advanced electronic video magnifiers and wearable devices.

Benefits of these tools include the ability to:

Device Type	Key Benefit
Hand-held optical magnifiers	Quick enlargement for reading short print tasks
Video magnifiers (CCTV)	Adjustable magnification, color, and contrast
Screen magnification software	Enlargement of digital content on computers/devices
Wearable magnifiers	Hands-free magnification for mobility and reading

We educate both students and educators on device maintenance, classroom positioning, and lighting. Training sessions highlight how to switch between devices as needed for different

environments or tasks. Our assistive technology specialists provide this tailored support to help students succeed.

Navigating and Adapting to School Environments

Supporting visually impaired students as they adapt to a new school requires careful planning around orientation, navigation, and personal organization. These efforts can help foster a sense of independence and confidence as students make important transitions throughout the school environment.

Orientation and Mobility Skills

Orientation and mobility skills provide the foundation for safe and independent travel at school. We focus on teaching students to use their remaining vision effectively, as well as other senses like hearing and touch, to interpret their surroundings.

Students benefit from explicit instruction and practice using long canes or other mobility devices, when appropriate. Tactile maps, environmental cues such as floor textures, and auditory signals equip students to move confidently between classrooms, cafeterias, and restrooms.

Collaborating with Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists, we support Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVIs) to ensure each student develops age-appropriate mobility skills. Timely skill-building lets students safely manage daily transitions and respond to unexpected changes in routine.

Familiarization with School Routes and Layouts

Acclimating to campus layouts is crucial for visually impaired students. We encourage guided tours at the start of each year, focusing on frequently traveled routes—classrooms, entrances, exits, restrooms, and the nurse's office.

During these tours, we use tactile floor plans and turn-by-turn verbal descriptions. Repeated walkthroughs, paired with consistent, calm feedback, help students internalize important landmarks and paths.

Tips for Effective Route Familiarization:

- Practice transitions at various times of day
- Use consistent language for directions
- Introduce environmental cues (smells, sounds, texture changes)
- Revisit new or altered paths after schedule changes

A clear mental map helps students move with greater self-assurance and can lower stress related to changes in routine.

Labeling and Identifying Personal Spaces

Clearly labeled lockers, desks, and personal storage areas are vital for organization and access. We recommend a combination of tactile, large-print, and Braille labels depending on each student's needs and reading medium.

Personal areas should stay as consistent as possible throughout the year. Label placement should be predictable and at an accessible height. For school supplies, consider using *bold-lined boxes*, *color-contrasted folders*, and organizers with tactile features, such as raised symbols or embossed tags.

By systematically labeling key spaces and materials, students can find what they need more independently, reducing reliance on peers or staff. This independence is key to navigating the school environment effectively and supports daily transitions.

Developing Self-Advocacy and Independence

Building self-advocacy and independence is essential for visually impaired students as they return to school. By focusing on skill-building, effective communication, and practical daily routines, we help students gain the confidence and tools needed for academic and personal success.

Encouraging Self-Advocacy Skills

Self-advocacy is the ability to understand one's needs and communicate them clearly. We emphasize teaching students how to identify their own strengths, challenges, and preferred learning methods. This process starts with self-awareness and expands to making informed decisions about their education and daily life.

Students benefit by practicing how to request specific accommodations, explain their visual impairment to others, and recognize situations where support is needed. Interactive exercises such as role-playing or using checklists can help reinforce these skills. Consistent guidance from both educators and assistive technology specialists supports lasting growth in self-advocacy.

Self-advocacy not only prepares students for independent learning but also allows them to take charge of their progress throughout the year.

Communicating Needs to Educators

Clear communication is a cornerstone of independence for visually impaired students. It's essential for students to feel comfortable sharing their needs with teachers, support staff, and peers. We recommend regular meetings or check-ins where students can express what works best for them, whether it involves seating arrangements, accessible materials, or the use of specific assistive technology.

A simple table can help students organize their preferences and needs:

Need/Accommodation	Who to Contact	How to Request
Large-print books	Classroom Teacher	Email/Note in Planner
Braille materials	TVI	Schedule Meeting
Magnification device	Tech Specialist	Verbal Request

We also suggest encouraging students to ask questions about their educational environment. Practicing specific phrases or scripts can make these conversations easier to start, especially early in the school year.

Fostering Independence in Daily Routines

Establishing independent daily routines is key to long-term self-confidence. We support students in setting up strategies such as using tactile markers to identify personal items, organizing backpacks with consistent layouts, and setting reminders for school assignments or appointments using accessible apps or devices.

Encourage students to manage their schedules independently wherever possible. This may involve using a tactile or digital calendar, labeling materials with braille or large print, and preparing lunch or personal belongings the night before school. Small adjustments can make transitions between home, class, and extracurriculars smoother.

Reinforcing these routines at the start of the school year helps visually impaired students develop habits that support independence in all aspects of their lives. Active participation in daily planning leads to stronger skills and increased self-confidence as students navigate new challenges.

Fostering Social and Emotional Well-Being

Back-to-school readiness for visually impaired students involves more than academic preparation. Supporting students' social and emotional well-being helps build meaningful relationships and promotes active engagement in school life.

Building Peer Relationships

Visually impaired children often face barriers when forming connections with classmates, especially during transitional periods like the start of a new school year. To help foster friendships, it's important to create intentional opportunities for structured group activities. Assigning group projects and using *buddy systems* encourage natural interaction.

We suggest using *circle time* or peer discussion groups where all voices are valued equally, reducing the need for eye contact or visual cues. Teachers can promote inclusive games by describing actions out loud, so everyone understands and can participate fully.

Some students may benefit from direct coaching on social skills, such as how to *initiate a conversation*, respond to greetings, or interpret tone of voice. Using tactile materials or auditory games helps create shared experiences and lowers barriers to participation. When everyone feels included, trust and connection grow naturally.

Promoting Confidence and Self-Esteem

A strong sense of belonging and self-confidence helps visually impaired students thrive. Early in the school year, we work with educators to identify each child's strengths, interests, and preferred learning tools. Celebrating achievements—big and small—reinforces a positive self-image.

Providing access to leading-edge assistive technology allows students to participate independently in lessons and extracurriculars. Regular opportunities for choice in assignments or activities can empower students to take ownership of their learning.

We recommend setting up clear expectations with feedback focused on effort and progress, rather than just outcomes. Self-advocacy skills—like communicating needs or preferences—should be encouraged and supported. Our approach emphasizes creating a safe environment where students feel respected, valued, and prepared to take on challenges with confidence.

Frequently Asked Questions

We know that preparing for the school year requires careful coordination, the right tools, and an emphasis on accessibility. Supporting visually impaired students means addressing classroom materials, technology, assessments, collaboration, and available resources for a truly effective learning experience.

What are essential items to include on a back-to-school checklist for a visually impaired student?

It's important to start with adaptive tools tailored to the student's needs. This may include braille or large print books, magnifiers, accessible writing tools, tactile markers, and organization systems for supplies.

Assistive technology devices such as video magnifiers or screen readers should be tested beforehand. We also recommend durable backpacks with easy-to-use zippers and labeled school supplies for easier identification.

How can I ensure that classroom materials are accessible for a student with visual impairments?

All printed materials should be available in accessible formats such as braille, large print, or digital files compatible with screen readers. Diagrams, charts, and images must include tactile graphics or descriptive audio.

Labels on classroom items and handouts should have high contrast and large fonts as appropriate. Collaboration with assistive technology specialists can help identify any additional adaptations needed.

What types of technology should be considered for a visually impaired student's educational needs?

Devices that convert print to speech, digital magnifiers, and refreshable braille displays can be critical. Tablets and laptops should have accessibility features enabled, such as screen readers or magnification software.

Selecting the right device depends on each student's vision level and comfort with technology. We recommend hands-on training for students and teachers to ensure confidence with each tool.

What accommodations should be made for visually impaired students during assessments and exams?

Assessments should be provided in accessible formats, including braille or digital versions compatible with assistive tech. Extended time may be appropriate, along with a distraction-free environment and access to devices such as magnifiers or audio recording tools.

Instructions should be clear and available in the student's preferred accessible format. Proctors or support staff may be utilized when necessary.

How can educators and parents collaborate on a functional vision assessment for a student?

Collaboration starts by sharing observations about the student's visual skills across environments, such as at home and in the classroom. Scheduling meetings to discuss concerns, strengths, and needed supports helps create a complete picture of the student's needs.

We encourage working together with the student, parents, TVIs, and specialists to conduct and review assessments. Clear documentation supports the development of effective educational plans.

What resources are available for creating a supportive learning environment for students with visual impairments?

Accessible instructional materials, specialized consulting services, and leading-edge assistive technology can all contribute. Our team provides resources and hands-on training for educators and parents to maximize independence and self-advocacy.

Low vision clinics, regional support networks, and online communities offer educational materials and best practices. Proactive communication between families, teachers, and specialists enhances the learning environment.

Empower Your Classroom with Inclusive Strategies

Are you ready to transform your classroom for students with low vision?

Explore practical training, proven adaptations, and the latest assistive technologies to ensure every student thrives. Whether you're an educator, school administrator, or support professional, our tailored **Education & Training Services** equip you with the tools and confidence to create a truly inclusive learning environment.

👉 **Learn more and schedule your customized training today:**
nelowvision.com/training-services/education-training-services/

About This Document

This white paper was created by New England Low Vision and Blindness. Portions of the content were generated using AI technology and reviewed for accuracy. However, the information is provided “as is” and is not intended as a substitute for professional advice or a comprehensive product assessment.

About New England Low Vision and Blindness

New England Low Vision and Blindness is a leading provider of assistive technology, training, and support for people who are blind or visually impaired. We serve individuals, schools, and organizations across the Northeast with personalized solutions that empower independence and improve quality of life. To learn more or schedule a no-obligation consultation, visit NELowVision.com or call 888-211-6933. You can also email us at info@NELowVision.com.