Observation Guidelines
(Developed by C. Cowan, Region XIII Education Service Center)

Observing Classroom Functions

- Organization of materials, furniture, extra work-space, walkways, desk layouts, maps, placement of educational “prompts” (e.g.: alphabet, number line, colors, periodic chart of elements), class rules, placement of chalkboards, overhead screen.

- Discipline: are rules clearly posted, does teacher have a system of discipline, does teacher follow the system with all students, particularly the VI student, are students respectful of the system.

- Classroom (group) behaviors: are students on task, can most keep up, are more than just a few “fooling around” when they shouldn’t be, do students get up to turn in papers, get materials, go to the bathroom, do they wait for cues from the teacher to move from one activity to another or do they do so independently, are most attentive during the teacher’s presentations, is the activity in the room constructive?

Observing an Activity

- Does the teacher present or introduce lessons or is there an established routine the children perform automatically?

- Are tangible objects used to demonstrate concepts where applicable?

- Does everyone need to follow along in a book?

- Does the activity involve a concept, which is very visual in nature, e.g.: adding with carrying?

- Are visual materials used, e.g.: maps, charts, diagrams?

- Is the chalkboard or overhead screen used frequently?

- Is a dictionary used by students?

- Is the pace fast, slow, medium?

- What do students do when the activity is completed?

- Are materials Brailled for an activity?
Observing Student Functioning

- Is student on task?
- Does student look in teacher’s general direction?
- Is student able to get out all materials on time?
- Is student using low vision devices, or other necessary apparatus she/he has been taught to use?
- In what condition is the student’s desk?
- Does the student know how to access the educational “prompts” posted around the room?
- Is the student organized?
- Can the student maintain the pace of the lesson presented?
- Does the student get up to get his/her own material?
- Do other students help the student in any way?
- Could the student be acting more independently that she/he is?
- Does the student raise his/her hand to participate and ask questions?
- Does the student interrupt inappropriately?
- Does the student have any distracting mannerisms?
- How does the student ask for and accept assistance from peers and others?
- Is the student displaying age-appropriate skills?
- Does the student use his/her time wisely?
- What does she/he do when work is finished?
- Does the student interact appropriately with peers in the room, on the playground, in the cafeteria?
- How does the student get around?
- How does the student go through the cafeteria line and to the table?
What are the student’s eating skills?

Does the student’s appearance blend with the group?

Does the student have friends?

What does the student do during free time and on the playground?

Does the student speak before the class, such as in show and tell?

If the student fails to complete his/her seat work, is it due to lack of understanding, poor work habits, or inability to keep up with the pace?

How does the general quality of the student’s work compare to peers?

Does the student talk too much to neighbors?

Are the student materials placed so as to be accessible to him?

Are games, toys, materials available for the student to use in interactive play during free time?

Are lighting and desk location appropriate?

Are any of the student’s materials or equipment inconveniencing another student?

Can the student fully operate any equipment given to him/her?

Is a system in place for the student to correct malfunctioning equipment?

Can the student manage equipment and/or materials through class changes?

Observing Teacher Behaviors

Does the teacher move about the room or remain fairly stationary?

Does the teacher’s voice carry well?

Are chalkboard/overhead screen/charts used frequently; does the teacher read aloud what she’s writing?

Will a student teacher be taking the class?
How does the teacher handle misbehavior and off-task behavior?

Does the teacher check for understanding and how does she do this with the VI student?

If Brailled materials are to be handed out, does the teacher have the materials ready?

Observation Tips

At the initial conference with the teacher, generally during the first week of school, give her a sheet with your schedule, telephone number, objectives for the student, and a statement on why you will be observing (e.g.: “Observations will be scheduled so that I can see how Nathan functions in a variety of situations and also to determine if my objectives are transferring to your classroom.”).

Always call or send a letter a few days in advance with the message that you will be coming to observe at a particular date and time. The teacher should call if the date and time are not convenient.

Observe entire activity; don’t arrive late and leave early.

Sit quietly and unobtrusively, away from the student. This is not an instructional opportunity.

Take notes.

Do not interact with the students. If they ask for your assistance, shake your head “no” and act as if you’re writing.

Be sure to write down problems you see with your VI student, so you can address them later. Also write down any ideas you may have on supplementing a concept if it seems particularly visual and difficult for the VI student.

If students are given time to complete a written assignment independently, get up and slowly circulate through the room looking at all the students’ work. Avoid the temptation to stop too long at the VI student’s desk, as this may be embarrassing to them.

Resist any urge you may have to make remarks to the teacher concerning her lesson or presentation. Keep remarks focused on student’s behaviors, e.g.: expectations the teacher has, is the student’s behavior typical of his normal behavior, what problems does the teacher see, etc.

Never interrupt a teacher when you are coming or going.
Keep in mind the fact that many teachers are unclear as to your role and that the act observing can be uncomfortable to them. You want to assure the teacher by your actions before, during, and after an observation that you are there as a partner in an effort to help the VI student perform successfully in the classroom and school.

- If something needs to be discussed, leave a message on the teacher’s desk or in her box on your way out.

- If the teacher has been complaining about your VI student’s behavior, observe that behavior as well as what the other students are doing. Observe how the teacher applies behavioral methods to see if she applies the same methods to the VI child.

- If you see a concept being taught for which you have tangible learning materials, offer to loan these to the teacher—leave a note.

- Save your notes as documentation.

- Discuss your observations with the student during your next visit with him/her, then see if together you can come up with some solutions to problem areas, if applicable.

- Don’t discuss your observations with other school staff.

- If you’re concerned about a teacher behavior, think it through carefully before discussing it first with the teacher, and if necessary the principal. When talking with a principal, it is beneficial to avoid blame or criticism. You may start by saying, “I’m having difficulty communicating with Ms. X, could you give me some suggestions on how I can best work with the situation?” Keep your comments focused on your student and the problem(s) she/he’s having with the classroom.