

Contact: Diana Gonzalez

**STATUS REPORT OF PLANNING FOR A PILOT REGIONAL PROGRAM TO SERVE
STUDENTS WHO ARE DEAF OR BLIND**

Action Requested: Receive the status report.

Executive Summary: In February 2013, the Board of Regents approved, in concept, the recommendations submitted by the Feasibility Study and Planning Committee regarding its examination of the administrative and programmatic functions of the Iowa Education Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Iowa School for the Deaf as required by Iowa Code §270.10. One of the recommendations included the development of regional programs to extend the continuum of services and provide equitable services statewide. In order to more fully understand the implications of the regional programming concept, the Board directed the Superintendent to develop a proposal for a pilot program which would include one regional center at a determined location. The proposal was expected to describe the operation of the regional center, including the value of the site selected, financial implications, and funding sources available for the center. The Board requested that the proposal be presented no later than September 2013 for potential implementation in FY 2015.

This report addresses the Board of Regents Strategic Plan priorities to provide “educational excellence and impact; and economic development and vitality.” It also addresses Goal #8 of the Board’s Strategic Plan – “Iowa’s public universities and special schools shall be increasingly efficient and productive.”

Background: As directed by the Board, the Superintendent combined the Management Team for Vision Services and the Executive Team for Hearing Services to create a Leadership Team for Deaf and Blind. The purpose of the team is to advise the Superintendent regarding the planning and implementation of recommended proposals. The Leadership Team has met monthly since February 2013. A progress update was presented to the Board of Regents’ Education and Student Affairs Committee in October 2013. This status report is intended to provide an update on the progress since that date including the selection and agreement of a pilot center with the Charles City Community School District.

The Leadership Team identified the Charles City Community School District as the first regional center for the following reasons:

- It has a history of supporting special education programs.
- It currently has a limited amount of educational options for students who are blind or deaf.
- It is located in an area where students can commute to the school in under an hour.
- It has space for additional classrooms.
- There is a community college to offer classes for transitioning students.
- There is commerce and industry to provide job training for transitioning students.

Administrators from the Charles City Community School District and Area Education Agency 267 met with leadership committee representatives to examine the possibilities of establishing the center, housed in existing space of the district. The Charles City Board of Education approved an agreement with the Board of Regents to start services in Charles City as soon as funding can be secured. Some services will begin as early as Fall 2014 with full program implementation planned for Fall 2015.

Some of the essential next steps in planning for this pilot program include the following:

- Additional input will be sought from personnel currently serving the special needs of blind or deaf students in the area.
- Work will continue with legislators to pursue funding for the regional center. Appropriations will be sought in the 2015 Legislative Session to partially fund the program.
- The Leadership Team will work with the Charles City Community School District to distribute information and surveys to families of students who are blind or deaf.
- The Leadership Team will continue to work with school administrators in the one-hour radius and broader region.
- An evaluation plan has been developed; steps toward implementation need to be finalized.

The Leadership Team has considered and recommended that the regional programs be identified as “academies” instead of programs. The rationale is that a program may be seen as a site whereas the primary purpose is broader based on services throughout the geographic area. The title “academy” better conveys the service function instead of a specific place.

Dr. Daniel Cox was appointed superintendent of the Charles City School District in 2013. Dr. Cox is a native of Westgate. He received his bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the University of Northern Iowa and a doctorate in education from Iowa State University. He taught Spanish and social studies at Essex Community Schools and West Marshall High School in State Center. He was an administrator at Valley Lutheran Schools in Cedar Falls, East High School, and Hoover Middle School prior to assuming the superintendent position in Charles City.

