

**Governing Iowa's public  
universities and special schools**

University of Iowa  
Iowa State University  
University of Northern Iowa  
Iowa School for the Deaf  
Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School  
Lakeside Laboratory  
Quad-Cities Graduate Center  
Southwest Iowa Regents Resource Center  
Tri-State Graduate Center



**BOARD OF  
REGENTS**  
STATE OF IOWA

Michael G. Gartner, President, *Des Moines*  
Robert N. Downer, Pro Tem, *Iowa City*  
Amir I. Arbisser, M.D., *Davenport*  
Mary Ellen Becker, Ph.D., *Oskaloosa*  
Tom W. Bedell, *Spirit Lake*  
Ruth R. Harkin, *Cumming*  
Jenny L. Rokes, *Dike*  
Rose A. Vasquez, *Des Moines*  
Teresa A. Wahlert, *Waukee*

Gary W. Steinke, *Executive Director*

TO: Members of the Press in Iowa

FROM: Michael Gartner  
Mary Ellen Becker

DATE: March 30, 2006

SUBJECT: Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School

**Good news! No plans to close the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School!**

It is with the most sincere pleasure that the Board of Regents would like to announce that the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School, which was founded in 1852, will continue to provide services to students who are blind or visually impaired through its school program in Vinton, Iowa, as well as through off-campus statewide services.

The Board's first and foremost concern has always been with the educational needs of all students in Iowa who are blind or visually impaired. For this reason, during the 2004 school year, the Board asked a group of citizens, including parents of students who are blind or visually impaired, former students, educators, the Department of Education, and health and service providers to undertake an in-depth study of the educational services provided to all students in Iowa – those who are in the school program in Vinton and those who are served through their local school district. During the current school year, the Board of Regents and the Department of Education committed themselves to coordinating services for all students who are blind or visually impaired.

Unfortunately, during the past few months, there have been misunderstandings and misrepresentations about the School's continued operation. These misunderstandings and misrepresentations have fueled fears and intense emotions about the imminent closure of the School and the dislocation of its current resident students. Nothing could be further from the truth!

The Board's commitment to the School is stated in the Board's policy manual, "the purpose of the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School is to enable Iowa's students who are blind or visually impaired to function as independently as possible in all aspects of life by providing appropriate education opportunities, resources, and support services. The educational programs of the School shall be consistent with the philosophy, reflected in federal and state legislation, that children and youth with disabilities will be educated together with non-disabled peers, to the greatest extent possible. Among options available for students are direct services in their local school; consultative services in their local schools; summer school opportunities on campus in Vinton; extended school year services in local schools; and short-term placement, day placement, and residential placement on campus in Vinton."

“All programs and services provided by the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School are consistent with and support the need for instruction for children who are blind in the following extended core curriculum skill areas:

1. Skills necessary to attain literacy in reading and writing, including appropriate instructional methods;
2. Skills for acquiring information, including appropriate use of technological devices and services;
3. Orientation and mobility instruction;
4. Independent living skills;
5. Social interaction skills;
6. Transition services;
7. Recreation and leisure activities; and
8. Career education.”

#### **If the School isn't going to close, will there be any changes at the School?**

We know that about the same amount of money is spent per pupil on plant operations as on instruction. So, one of the changes that is likely to occur is to build some efficiencies into plant operations. One way to accomplish this might be to consolidate all dormitory and educational services in one or two buildings. Buildings that would not be needed could be closed or rented.

We also know that approximately 60% of the School's budget is allocated to about 6% of the total population of students served by the School. Furthermore, we know that many of the off-campus students are not reading at grade level because they have limited Braille instruction. Therefore, another improvement strategy might involve a realignment/redistribution of resources, including staff, to provide increased off-campus services. This realignment could result in the elimination or reassignment of staff positions on the Vinton campus, including reducing the position of superintendent to a half-time position. A study of staffing patterns in all areas of the school will assist in determining what positions would not be needed and what positions could be redesigned to address the expanded services that the School will provide. The misrepresentation that 40-50 staff will lose their jobs is highly unlikely.

#### **What will be the benefits of these realignments?**

The realignments would allow the School to address a number of issues that have surfaced during the last 18 months of study, by:

- ◆ Working with the AEAs and the Department of Education to combine resources to develop a more unified service delivery model in which IBSSS would take a leadership role in assuring equitable access to services across the state.
- ◆ Improving academic opportunities especially in math and science areas for secondary students which would include providing opportunities for secondary subject area teachers to develop technical expertise so that academically oriented blind and visually disabled students can be successful in these content areas.

- ◇ Offering short-term, targeted learning opportunities for students in regional settings as well as on the Vinton campus. These could occur during the school year, on weekends, and during the summer. Sports camps, technology training, and independent living skills are examples of classes that might be offered.
- ◇ Developing a strong early childhood network that would connect families and young children to resources for blind and visually impaired at the earliest possible moment in their lives.
- ◇ Developing systematic, regional professional development opportunities that would provide teachers and administrators with on-time, in-time skills and information to support blind and visually impaired students in their school district and AEA.

While many of the specific details of these programs and activities have yet to be worked out, the IBSSS staff will continue to provide services to all students who are blind or visually impaired. The School's administrative team is committed to providing services that support the needs of all students in Iowa who are blind or visually impaired, regardless of the geographic locations of students.

The Board of Regents would like to re-assure the students and parents who rely on the services of the Iowa Braille and Sight School that it is committed to the continued operation of the School and, in particular, to meeting the unique needs of all students who are blind or visually impaired. The Board would also like to re-assure the students who are currently enrolled and their parents that students will be able to continue attending the educational program with access to dormitory accommodations in Vinton during the 2006-07 school year.