

**MEMORANDUM**

**To:** Board of Regents

**From:** Board Office

**Subject:** Reorganization of the Structure of the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School

**Date:** March 6, 2000

**Recommended Action:**

Approve the reorganization of the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School and the following positions:

- ✓ State consultant for visual impairments
- ✓ Education program coordinator
- ✓ Vision consultant - multiple disabilities
- ✓ Vision consultant - daily living skills

**Executive Summary:**

The reorganization of the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School was presented to the Board on February 16, 2000. At that time, the Board deferred action on the proposal. Since then, the School has held staff meetings to explain the plan further and to listen and respond to staff concerns. On March 6, 2000, the School will hold a statewide meeting on the ICN to provide an opportunity for parents of students, teachers of the visually impaired, AEA special education directors and supervisors of vision programs, the advisory committee, the Board Office staff, and Regents to listen to the reorganization plan and to have an open discussion about all possible concerns. Furthermore, the School has clarified that one position which had been listed under Outreach services (itinerant teacher of the visually impaired) was, in fact, going to be assigned to Center-based services (teacher of the visually impaired/multiple disabilities).

The School intends to continue to serve students needing comprehensive services on campus. A strong Center-based educational program will be available for any student whose IEP team has determined that placement on-campus offers the student the best opportunity to learn and grow. The School also recognizes that the majority of students who are visually impaired attend their local public schools. These students require many services that the Outreach staff can provide in local school settings. A strong Outreach Services program will be available for any student whose IEP team has determined that

placement in the local school offers the student the best opportunity to learn and grow.

The intent of the organizational structure being presented is to enable the School to continue to serve more students with a much broader array of program offerings including the following:

- \* Programs offered on-campus in Vinton through the Center-based services, including school year programs and short-term placement programs;
- \* Programs, such as orientation and mobility, vision itinerant services, low vision clinics, and consultation, offered in local communities during the school year;
- \* Program, such as summer school, extended school year services, OWOW (Orientation to the World of Work) and similar programs, and parent and professional training opportunities, offered during the summer months in Vinton and throughout the State.

This organizational structure recognizes that services are provided on a 24-hour a day basis in Center-based programs and that there is a tremendous need for program development and coordination throughout the State. The School will continue to examine the needs of students with visual impairments and will always strive to focus its structure in the best way possible to serve those needs.

The School appreciates the concerns of those who are interested in its future. IBSSS understands that there is a continuing need to develop ways to inform those who need services about the availability of the services and will continue to work cooperatively with the AEAs, the local school districts, the parents, and the Iowa Department of Education to ensure that the citizens of Iowa are aware of the opportunities available for students who are blind or visually impaired. The School will continue to focus resources which will best meet the needs of all of Iowa's children who are blind or visually impaired, including those with multiple disabilities.

For a number of years, IBSSS has been analyzing the appropriate mix of residential and outreach services that need to be provided in order to serve the greatest number of visually impaired children in the state with its existing resources. The School has provided information to the Board regarding these analyses on a continuing basis through its reports on strategic planning and through its budgeting process.

In May 1998, the Board approved the 1998-2002 Strategic Plan of the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School. An important feature of the plan was that the School wanted to design a more focused residential program. IBSSS expected to accomplish this by (1) reviewing and revising the admissions guidelines and

(2) reallocating resources to serve a greater number of students throughout the twelve-month period.

In Spring 1999, the Board approved the School's revised admission guidelines and they became operational in Fall 1999. Also in Spring 1999, the School took steps to develop new staff assignments which would ensure that faculty would be available at the Vinton campus throughout the year. In Fall 1999, the School updated its strategic plan by adding strategy 1.1.4 - continue to develop comprehensive services to students throughout Iowa. This addition was based on continuing requests from the area education agencies (AEAs) that the School needed to provide additional community-based services for the unserved population of visually impaired children throughout the state.

Also during this timeframe, the School's administration studied the needs of the children in Iowa who are blind and visually impaired; studied the trends in education and special education; and reviewed the financial aspects of serving children who are blind and visually impaired.

On the basis of its data gathering and the personnel changes which have occurred in the past two years, the School concluded that it needs to develop an organizational structure which will best serve the children of Iowa with the School's current resources. In particular, the structure needs to support the Board-approved changes which the School has already begun through its strategic planning process - year-round services at Vinton and more extensive outreach services throughout the State.

The School is proposing a new department of education which will consolidate a number of areas that currently report to the Superintendent. The new department will oversee School-based educational and residential services as well as outreach services. This approach is intended to provide a continuum of services to the children of Iowa who are blind or visually impaired in an efficient and effective manner.

In order to accomplish this objective, the School intends to create the following new positions: State Consultant for Visual Impairment, Program Coordinator, Vision Consultant - Multiple Disabilities, and Vision Consultant - Daily Living Skills. The School expects to fund the new positions through a reallocation of existing funds. The proposed organizational chart is included with this docket memorandum on page 12.

**Background:**

The School serves more than 500 children in Iowa who are blind or visually impaired or who have multiple disabilities including a visual impairment. Some students receive very comprehensive Center-based services at the School in Vinton, some students receive regular direct services through outreach efforts in

their home communities, while other students are served through resources and consultations provided by the School. Currently, the School's structure has five departments, including administrative services, residential services, educational services, outreach services, and planning/personnel services. However, the School has determined that this structure does not adequately reflect the service levels which are identified in the Strategic Plan.

In the new structure, the only "department" will be that of Education. The School's focus will be centered on educational programs and services, wherever they are offered. Facilities, human resources, administrative services, and information technology will all serve in support roles to assist the educational staff to carry out needed programs and services. The State Consultant for Visual Impairment and the Deaf/Blind Consultant will work closely with the Superintendent and the State Department of Education. The School's Education Department will focus on Center-based programs and on Outreach programs. Staff in both programs will be responsible for communicating and functioning laterally with one another. The full expertise of both groups will be available to each other and to all students who are served by the School regardless of where that service may take place. This structure will allow for sharing of resources among all faculty. Departmental boundaries will be eliminated to allow teams to form around specific students, needs, planning, or programs at any time necessary.

The proposed organizational structure will allow the School to reallocate its resources to serve students throughout the state. Eighty per cent of the Iowa Braille School faculty will have full or partial roles in the School's continuing effort to provide services to students in their local communities. Prior to this change, about 50% of the School's faculty were assigned to serving students in their local communities. In 1988, less than 15% of the faculty were involved in statewide services.

### **Analysis:**

By reallocating and shifting resources, the School's Summer 1999 programs served 148 students on-campus and off-campus. The intent of the proposed organizational changes is to enable the School to continue to serve more students with a much broader array of program offerings in its residential programs during the school year and the summer months and in the students' local communities.

The admission guidelines ensure that students who are enrolled in the residential program have an identified need requiring the expertise of vision teachers. These needs must be related to the student's visual impairment and must be in one of the following areas: skills necessary to attain literacy in reading and writing, including appropriate instructional methods; skills for acquiring information, including appropriate use of technological devices and services;

orientation and mobility instruction; daily (independent) living skills; social interacting skills; recreation and leisure skills; and career education. In addition, the IEP team must determine that the School is the best option for meeting those needs.

If a student is not admitted to the School, that student's program must be provided by the local school district. The School staff is available to provide technical assistance to support students with visual impairments whose most appropriate placement is in their local school district. In addition, the outreach staff can provide many services in local school settings.

The proposed changes have been reviewed by the Board Office and by the Advisory Committee. It is recommended that the proposed organizational structure, including the new positions, submitted by Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School be approved. No additional funds will be required to implement the phased-in organizational structure changes.

Board approval of the School's request means approval of the following specific items:

- ✓ Organizational structure of the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School
- ✓ State consultant for visual impairments position
- ✓ Education program coordinator position
- ✓ Vision consultant - multiple disabilities
- ✓ Vision consultant - daily living skills

A copy of the full reorganization plan, as requested by the School, is included with this docket memo on pages 6-10. The strikethroughs identify the deleted items and the underlines identify new language. The current organization chart is on page 11. The proposed organization chart is on page 12. The job descriptions for the four proposed positions are included on pages 13 - 23.

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Diana Gonzalez

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Frank J. Stork