

**Identification of Statewide Services and Best Educational Practices for  
Washington State Students Who are Blind, Visually Impaired, and with  
Multiple Disabilities: A Study of the Washington State School for the  
Blind and Related Statewide Services**

**Final Report**

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## INTRODUCTION

Educational changes have taken place over the last three decades for children with exceptional needs. As times have changed, so have the needs of these special students. For students who are blind or visually impaired, changes in education have primarily focused on technological advancements that help level the educational progress of children in educational settings. Yet, not necessarily providing the full-spectrum of services some students may require.

This is not the case for all children with visual impairments. As initially mandated in 1975 in the *Education of All Handicapped Children's Act* (PL 94-142) and reaffirmed in 1990 with the reauthorization and expansion of education services and responsibilities in the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*, the need for a full-continuum of educational services needs to be available for students with special needs. Included in these mandates are specialized placements. These placements might be due to the presence of additional disabilities that create complex educational programming or might just be the preference of the student's family to meet their child's needs.

Around the United States, specialized schools of the blind use short-term placements for students with visual impairments who require specific skill development such as learning to read braille, orientation and mobility travel skills, or becoming familiar with assistive technology. This placement option is especially important after a student experiences a sudden vision loss or decrease in residual vision and needs an intensive training to learn adaptive skills. Almost every specialized school in the nation offers extended day programming and off-school year programs (extended school year) such as summer training programs, summer transition programs leading to employment, and community-based services in the student's home district. This provides students with visual impairments the opportunity to socialize with peers and help the student and parents develop an understanding their visual limitation and how they can succeed in life (Council for Exceptional Children, 2006)

In mid-year 2006 VI RehaB Consulting was contacted by the Schumann Trust to examine educational services and programs for students who were blind, visually impaired, and multiply disabled in the state of Washington. The purpose of the study was to more fully examine services and programs delivered in the K-12 educational setting and provide comparisons with other service delivery models and programs in the United States.

The research project examined data from various federal and state sources, in addition to surveying Washington state educators, service delivery providers for infant, toddlers, and students who are blind and visually impaired, and from consumers who are blind and visually impaired.

In the 2005, the state of Washington's Office of State Public Instruction (OSPI) Child Count identified 310 children and youth who are blind or visually impaired. Using other data sources, the numbers identified through the state Child Count are not entirely representative of the actual number of students needing vision services in the state. Comparing data from the American Printing House (APH) for the Blind, the difference in numbers reported by state Child Count and APH Federal Quota data show that about 1300 students who are blind or visually impaired are identified and should be receiving services. Thus, only about 24 percent of the

students who are blind and visually impaired need or receiving services in Washington are captured by the OSPI Child Count data and are not indicative of the numbers of students who are blind or visually impaired needing vision-related services through their formal IEP or services under 504 accommodations. The study also compared various factors evaluating the level of services currently being provided and the need for future services. The research project also surveyed educators and vision professionals currently working with students who are blind or visually impaired in Washington to gauge their perceived needs of identifying best educational practices and improving educational programs and services in Washington.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES**

In 2005-2006, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) conducted a study examining the educational programs for the Washington State School for the Blind and the Washington State School for the Deaf. The study conducted an intensive investigation of the programs currently offered to individuals who are receiving services from both these specialized schools. The Washington State Legislature commissioned the study with WSIPP to:

- Compare governance, finance, and service delivery
- Recommend how the two schools could configure service delivery to complement the local education agencies
- Examine the appropriate state agency that should have governance and oversight responsibilities over the two schools.

The findings of the WSIPP study focused on specific issues for two diametrically different educational programs for students with sensory disabilities. There are major educational, communication, and life skill differences in programs for students who are blind and visually impaired and students who are deaf and hard of hearing. The overall findings of the study provided a brief overview of the programs and presented information that in some cases were contradictory in nature and not statistically sound.

The purpose of this research project focuses solely on the educational, outreach, and related-service programs for students who are blind and visually within the state of Washington and specifically, those offered by state agencies and primarily the Washington State School for the Blind. The study also provides comparative national data with other specialized schools and programs for the blind and visually impaired around the United States.

### **Research Methods**

The scope of the project required collecting data from new and existing resources. Data were collected from several Washington state resources. The various sources of data came from the:

- Washington State School for the Blind
- State Department of Education – Washington Office of State Public Instruction
- Washington Instructional Resource Library of the Blind
- Washington Sensory Disabilities Services
- Washington Educational School Districts and Local Education Agencies
- Specialized Schools of the Blind around the United States
- Washington State Department Services for the Blind

## **Data Collection**

Data were collected from various sources. A survey instrument was designed to collect data from special educators and vision professionals in the state of Washington. Data were also collected from educational programs for the blind around the United States and Canada. Comparative analyses were utilized to assess services provided in Washington and compared the findings with best educational practices and educational placements from a nationally representative sample of specialized schools for the blind and visually impaired. The report examined the efficacy and efficiency of educational programming, highly qualified personnel, and state oversight agencies serving students who are blind and visually impaired.

VI RehaB conducted an extensive literature search on educational programming and services for students who are blind or visually impaired. Web-based and library literature searches were conducted through various libraries that have specialized undergraduate and graduate programs for teachers of the visually impaired, rehabilitation counselors, orientation & mobility specialists, and rehabilitation teachers. The library sources include: Florida State University, Auburn University, the city of Auburn Public Library, the state of Alabama Public Library Service system, and the Internet. Parts of the literature review were conducted with the help of three graduate students in the Vision Teacher Training Program at Florida State University.

## **Data Sources**

Data were collected from existing databases from the Washington State School for the Blind (WSSB), Washington State Department of Education – (Office of State Public Instruction-OSPI), Washington State Department of Services for the Blind (DSB), U.S. Department of Education/Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, U.S. Department of Education/Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Council of Schools for the Blind (COSB), the American Printing House for the Blind (APH), American Foundation for the Blind (AFB), National Federation for the Blind (NFB), and Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER). Data were also collected from surveys of parents, educators, and staff who have or who work with children who are blind, visually impaired, or multiply disabled. Data were compiled from a national survey of specialized schools for the blind and from data collected in previous research studies and projects.

## **Terminology Used in the Literature Review**

Terms used in the literature search include: state and federal legislation for the blind and visually impaired, Education of All Handicapped Children's Act, Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, standardized tests, parent and advocacy organizations for the blind and visually impaired, visual impairment, blind, blindness, visually impaired, multiply disabled, deaf-blind, deaf-blindness, specialized schools, schools for the blind, residential schools, specialized programs for the blind, educational setting, educational placement, teachers of the visually impaired, orientation and mobility specialists, orientation and mobility instructors, vocational rehabilitation counselors, transition, independent living skills, employment for the blind, employment for the visually impaired, outreach programs, itinerant teachers, vision professionals, personnel shortages, inclusion, and mainstreaming. Other terms or combination of terms were used to complete the literature search.

# **SPECIALIZED EDUCATION FOR THE BLIND**

## **Overview of Specialized Education for the Blind**

For over 175 years, specialized schools have served students with visual impairments in this country until the early 1970s when public schools began implementing programs to handle an unexpected increase in the number of students who are visually impaired entering school. Since the implementation of the Education of All Handicapped Children's Act (PL 94-142), educational entities, as well as governmental agencies, politicians, educators, and parents have debated which educational setting was best suited to meet the needs of students who are blind or visually impaired. With the further passage of additional educational legislation for special needs students (the Individuals with Disabilities Act and part of No Child Left Behind), specialized schools and public school systems both offer a continuum of placement options for students with visual impairments to meet the special needs of the students.

In the United States, children who are visually impaired have a variety of educational options available to them from living and attending classes at a specialized school for the blind to attending general education classes at a local school in their community (Mann, 2006). Since the first specialized schools for the blind were opened in this country in the 1830's, there has been debate over the issue of whether public school education or specialized residential school education was best for students with visual impairments.

For over 100 years, specialized schools for the blind solely provided the education of children who were blind or visually impaired until the mid-1950s, when an epidemic of rubella (German Measles) resulted in an increase of deaf, blind, and deafblind children. This increase of children with visual impairments compelled public schools to implement programs to serve the needs of these children. During this time, schools for the blind and public schools vied with each other for students and argued over which institution could provide the best instructional programs for students with visual impairments.

In the following years, public school systems would become the primary educational service provider for the blind, backed by federal laws that demanded children with disabilities receive a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. It was thought that specialized residential schools, considered to be the more restrictive environments, would be left with the primary role of educating the students who were most severely multiply impaired (Masoodi, 2004). These legislative developments further widened the gap between public school systems and schools for the blind, creating the perception that specialized schools were no longer an appropriate educational setting for academic students with visual impairments (Masoodi, 2004).

Today, schools for the blind have redefined themselves to offer a continuum of placement options to students with multiple impairments, blindness, and visual impairments. The following pages will review the laws and policies supporting the education of the visually impaired in the United States, and examine the history of both specialized school programs and mainstream public school programs. Additionally, educational placement options offered by both institutions will be discussed, along with the advantages and disadvantages of each option. While one placement option that meets all the needs of every student probably does not exist, it is

important to remember that any placement that "*enhances a student's understanding of the world and creates an environment in which intended learning occurs, then it should be considered appropriate for the student*" (Lewis & Allman, 2000, p. 236).

## **Federal Laws and Policies**

The following provides an overview of the major laws that have affected educational policies for the visually impaired. It also includes a brief review of the *National Agenda for the Education of Children and Youths with Visual Impairments, Including Those with Multiple Disabilities*.

One of the first laws to benefit children who were visually impaired was the Act to Promote the Education of the Blind, passed by Congress in 1879, which established the American Printing House for the Blind (APH). This law allocated funds for the production of textbooks in braille, large print, and recorded form and to develop or adapt instructional materials for use by students who were blind. It also provided funds to schools to purchase these items for their students' use (Hatlen, 2000).

The Pratt-Smoot Act passed in 1931 led to the establishment of the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS). This act provided \$100,000 in funds annually to the Library of Congress for the production of tactile books for distribution to patrons through 27 regional depository libraries (Perkins School for the Blind, n.d.).

In 1935, the Social Security Act was passed providing a definition of blindness that would be used by educators to determine the placement of students. The definition is as follows:

*Central visual acuity of 20/22 or less in the better eye with corrective glasses or central visual acuity of more than 20/200 if there is a visual field defect in which the peripheral field is contracted to such an extent that the widest diameter of the visual field subtends an angular distance no greater than 20 degrees in the better eye* (Koestler, 1976).

For educational purposes, this definition was later modified, and today, most educators use a definition that pertains to the impact of a student's vision loss on daily living activities and educational performance (Hatlen, 2000).

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibited discrimination against people with disabilities. Under Section 504, discrimination is any unequal treatment solely on the basis of a disability. Students who are protected under Section 504, have the right to equal opportunity to benefit from their education, and that schools must make every effort to provide the necessary aids and services to ensure equal opportunity exists (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Perhaps the most important piece of federal legislation to impact the lives of children with visual disabilities was the Education for All Handicapped Children Act passed by Congress in 1975. Also known as Public Law 94-142 (PL94-142), this law mandated that all handicapped children were entitled to a free and appropriate education, and were entitled to an education in the least restrictive environment (LRE). The LRE is based on a continuum of educational settings with the most restrictive settings being those of hospitals and residential schools, and the least restrictive settings being those of general education classrooms (Mann, 2006). The

act was reauthorized in 1990 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), again in 1997, and again in 2002 to realign the mandate - No Child Left Behind Act. The 2004 reauthorization includes the Instructional Materials Accessibility Act (IMAA), which requires that educational materials for students with visual impairments be provided at the same time those materials are provided to sighted students (Beadles, 2005).

The *National Agenda* began as a grassroots effort by parents, educators, and consumers to improve the quality of education for students with visual impairments. The objective of the group was to develop a set of goals which were considered attainable and measurable, and would address a variety of problems that existed within the profession. The eight goals were established by the group to encompass a variety of issues including parental participation, the preparation of teachers, referral and assessment of students, access to instructional materials, educational services and placement options, and a disability-specific core curriculum (also known as the Expanded Core Curriculum). The original intent of the *National Agenda* was to meet these goals nationwide by the year 2000. Though that was not fully accomplished, efforts continue throughout the profession to attain these goals (Hatlen, 2000).

### **Historical Establishment of the Education of the Visually Impaired**

The first residential schools for the blind began operating in this country over 170 years ago when the Perkins School for the Blind opened its doors in Watertown, Massachusetts in 1832. Samuel Gridley Howe, the director at Perkin School, based the school's educational program on his belief that each child was an individual and must be educated with his or her interests and abilities in mind; the curriculum of the school should follow as closely as possible the curriculum of public day schools with additional emphasis on music and crafts; and that students must be prepared to take their place in society (Lowenfeld, 1973). Howe's intention was to create a school that would be on equal ground with public schools academically, but also offer vocational and living skills critical to students with visual impairments (Masoodi, 2004). Though Howe strongly believed that all children should live at home and be educated in their local schools, he realized that schools for the blind were necessary because of the low incidence of the disability and the lack of availability of highly trained teachers (Hatlen, 2003). Nevertheless, Howe traveled the country encouraging other states to begin residential programs for the blind as well, and by 1900, 42 states had opened their own residential schools for the blind (Roberts, 1986).

In the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, residential schools for the blind remained the status quo for educating the majority of visually impaired students. However, it was during this time that public day schools in larger urban areas began to offer programs for the visually impaired as well.

The first of these integration programs began in Chicago in 1900 (Hatlen, 2003). The "Chicago Experiment" as it had come to be known, established students with visual impairments in separate classrooms for the majority of the day, but allowed them to spend some part of the day in classes with sighted students (Erin, 2006). The success of the program in Chicago encouraged other urban areas to begin programs, and by 1915, as many as 15 cities were offering day school programs (Hatlen, 2003). These public programs had relatively little impact on schools for the blind, which still had more applicants than they could admit, and until about

1935, continued to educate 90 to 95 percent of all students who are blind and visually impaired in the U.S. (Masoodi, 2004).

However, in the early 1950s, the role of these schools began to change drastically when the populations of school-age children with visual impairments suddenly increased by more than 150% (Ferrell, 2003). This impetus was brought about by an epidemic of retrolental fibroplasias (RLF), now known as retinopathy of prematurity (ROP), caused by administering too much oxygen to premature babies at birth. It was "the largest single cause of blindness ever recorded" (Lowenfeld, 1956, p.8).

Prior to the RLF epidemic, very few communities had no more than one or two children with a visual impairment, and therefore, local school systems could not justify hiring teachers or establishing programs; the children were sent to residential schools to be educated. Now with the RLF epidemic, many communities had a large number of children needing services. And so, with most state residential schools unable to handle the large influx of RLF children, and parents pushing to keep their children at home, local elementary schools began implementing programs to meet the needs of these children (Hatlen, 2000).

The rapid growth and success of public day school programs in response to the RLF epidemic, caused the population of students in schools for the blind to decline, and by 1960, only 46% of children who are visually impaired were educated in schools for the blind (Ferrell, 2003, as cited in Taylor, 2005). With dwindling enrollment, residential schools, which had previously only admitted "academic" students, were forced to begin accepting students with multiple disabilities who, only a few years earlier, would not have been considered acceptable applicants (Masoodi, 2004). This drop in enrollment paired with the increase in students with multiple impairments, marked a major transition for schools for the blind. In just a few short years, state schools went from almost entirely academic institutions to almost entirely multiply handicapped populations (Masoodi, 2004).

Now, with plenty of public school programs to choose from, parents no longer had to send their children hundreds of miles away to residential schools. By 1975, approximately 93% of all students who were blind or visually impaired were being educated in their local school systems (Bina, 1999). Also in 1975, the U.S. Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL94-142) which guaranteed students with disabilities a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. This created additional problems for residential schools which were considered to be one of the most restrictive environments (Mann, 2006).

If schools for the blind were to survive, changes in programming would have to take place. Some became institutions whose sole population was multiply impaired, while others moved to an outreach model where, in addition to providing residential and day school services, they also offered a variety of specialized services to the local community and around their state (Masoodi, 2004).

During the RLF epidemic, most public school programs were inclusive. Students who were visually impaired spent their day in the general education classroom. Public school programs generally had a resource room and a resource teacher who spent a portion of the day working with classroom teachers, ensuring students had the appropriate materials and that each

teacher knew what adaptations were needed to engage the children in classroom activities. The other portion of the day was spent providing direct instruction to children in Braille reading and writing (Hatlen, 2000).

As the RLF epidemic subsided, the number of visually impaired children in the public school system began to diminish. Local districts began to scale back services by eliminating the majority of their resource rooms and moving to an itinerant model in which one vision teacher provided training and support to students at several schools within a district (Masoodi, 2004).

During this same period, schools for the blind continued to operate their outreach, day school, and residential programs, but they also embraced a new role. In the past, the options for students were an either/or choice—either public school or residential school. Now, schools for the blind were advocating time for students in both settings. The idea behind this new agenda was this: sometimes children in public school settings can benefit from spending some time in the residential school setting as well (Bina, 1999). Often times, residential schools were better equipped to offer instructional programs in some academic areas such as braille, math, and the use of assistive technology and social areas than public schools. Additionally, self-esteem and self-confidence of students often burgeoned in a residential setting where children with similar disabilities and common experiences were able to spend time with one another (Hatlen, 2003).

In the last 20 years, public schools and schools for the blind have come to understand that neither setting is better than the other, but more so, that both offer valuable learning opportunities that can benefit students with visual impairments can benefit (Hatlen, 2003). Today in the reauthorization of IDEA, schools for the blind are now referred to as “specialized schools,” offering a wide variety of services in which residential education is only a small part. Specialized school programs often include a variety of long-term and short-term training for students both on and off campus, day school for preschoolers, residential programs for kindergarten through grade 12, and training for adult students (Erin, 1993). Public schools continue to serve mainstreamed students through the itinerant model and the use of resource rooms, which serve as secondary classrooms and house resources such as computers with adaptive software, braille embossers, braille books, and other equipment (Mann, 2006).

### **Historical Perspective of the Washington State School for the Blind**

The Washington State School for the Blind (WSSB) has a rich history of providing quality services to blind and visually impaired children from throughout the state. The school was established in 1886 as a territorial school and has provided leadership and direction in the development of services to the blind and visually impaired for over 115 years.

In 2004, the WSSB was nationally re-accredited by the *Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges* (NACS) and serves as a statewide demonstration and resource center providing direct and indirect services to students both on campus and in the child’s local community. Services are provided to children, families, educators, blind consumers and others interested in assisting visually impaired youth in becoming independent and contributing citizens. Independence is probably the best single word to describe the school and the services it provides.

As philosophical views have changed over the years, so has the school of the blind. Over the past 12 years, the school has continued to change service delivery models from one of

primarily a residential model to one that meets children, parents, and local school districts needs not only on the campus, but also throughout the state. Since 1990, WSSB the school of the Blind has increased the number of children being served by over 600% through a diversification of service delivery models and providing a menu of service options to local school districts and parents of children with visual impairments.

### **Washington State Educational Code**

(Chapter 72.40 RCW) Since 1886, the Washington State School for the Blind, established by Territorial and State Authority, has provided comprehensive educational programs for students whose vision loss required special education programs.

RCW 43,06A	Safety of Children (ADD as per SSB 6361)
RCW 72.40	Safety of Children (ADD as per SSB 6361)
RCW 72.40.010	School Established - Purpose
RCW 72.40.022	Superintendent - Powers and Duties (AMD -SSB 6361)
RCW 72.40.024	Superintendent - Additional Powers and Duties
RCW 72.40.028	Teachers' Qualification - Salaries
RCW 72.40.031	School year - School term - Legal holidays Use of School
RCW 72.40.040	Admission (AMD - SSB 6361)
RCW 72.40.050	Admission of Non-residents (AMD-SSB - 6361)
RCW 72.40.090	Transportation
RCW 72.41.040	Safety of Children (AMD - SSB-6361)
RCW 72.41.070	Safety of Children (AMD - SSB-6361)
RCW 72.42.040	Safety of Children (AMD - SSB-6361)
RCW 72.28.A.13	Special Education
PL 100-297	Federal Education for all Handicapped Children (State Programs)
PL IDEA	Formerly PL 94-142
PL 99-457	Federal Education of Handicapped Children (Birth – six years old)

### **Service Needs as Defined by the Washington State Code**

During the past nine years, efforts were made to increase service delivery to students with visual impairments within the state, but this population of students is still receiving marginal services. This is mostly due to the low incidence of the disability with factors like state geography, the wide distribution of students needing services, and shortages of qualified, university trained teachers to work with the blind. There is a perceived lack of cooperative resource sharing, which if improved could significantly improve services in an efficient and effective manner. Students who are blind and visually impaired are entitled, under RCW 72.A.13, to an *equal educational opportunity*. RCW 28A.150.200 states it is "*the paramount duty of the state to make ample provision for the education of all children within its borders.*"

The Washington state educational definition of blind/visually impaired is stated as "*Children/youth with a visual impairment that, even with correction, adversely affects their educational performance and requires specially designed instruction.*"

## **PLACEMENT OPTIONS FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED**

Educational placement options for students with visual impairments have evolved over the past 35 years to include a continuum of services offered by both public school systems and specialized schools for the blind. Public schools offer services based on two delivery models: the itinerant/consultant model and the resource room model. Specialized schools offer residential programs, day schools, outreach programs, short-term placements, and summer camps. While neither placement option is without its drawbacks, both have suitable options for meeting the needs of students with visual impairments.

### **Public Schools**

#### ***Itinerant Model***

According to Erin (2003), 90% of all students with visual impairments across the nation are educated in the public school system, and most are mainstreamed for a large portion of their day. Though the public school system has a variety of placement options available, the majority of students are served through the itinerant teacher model. With the itinerant model, students with visual impairments attend their local schools while receiving special services from a teacher of students with visual impairments (TVI) who travels between multiple schools in the district. Students served under the itinerant model receive instruction for a specified amount of time daily, weekly, or monthly depending on the needs of the student (Swenson, 1995).

The advantages of the itinerant model for students with visual impairments mainly revolve around the students' ability to remain at home where they can develop friendships with peers that live in the same community, attend school with their siblings, participate in "normal" academic, social, and recreational experiences, and have shorter bus rides to and from school (Swenson, 1995). Lewis and Allman (2000) suggested that this model may help students become better self-advocates since they must often rely on their own resources for locating assistance, solving problems, and managing their daily school activities.

The most common service delivery model used within local school systems is the use of the consultant or itinerant TVI in an inclusive setting. The primary responsibility of the TVI focuses on support of the core academic curriculum through adaptation of materials and provision of appropriate learning media. The TVI may also provide consultative services to educational personnel working with the student.

Mann (2006) cites advantages of the local school itinerant model that might include:

- the ability for the students with visual impairments to live at home, allowing for parent-child bonding and family support,
- opportunities to attend local neighborhood schools and to have more typical school experiences and possibly allowing parents to have the child attend schools where their siblings might also be attending
- opportunities to develop friendships with peers who live in close proximity to the school
- opportunities to use public bus transportation to school, riding with peers and neighborhood acquaintances as well as shortening length of the bus ride of attending a specialized school

Mann (2006) also identified a variety of disadvantages for students with visual impairments receiving itinerant services. These might include:

- excessive caseloads for the itinerant TVIs
- scheduling inflexibility of the itinerant TVI due to caseload size, traveling time needed to travel between schools, and student classroom schedules
- lack of time to provide the level or intensity of instruction needed for some students on skills such as Braille or O&M -social isolation, and
- receiving instruction from paraprofessionals not TVIs

Beyond the disadvantages identified by Mann (2006) are concerns regarding students with visual impairments receiving the majority of their literacy instruction from paraprofessionals within the local school instead of from a TVI (Forster & Holbrook, 2005). Assigning a paraprofessional to students with visual impairments has become routine procedure within the inclusive setting, perhaps as a reaction to the shortage of TVIs and large student caseloads. Concerns are growing, as the role of the paraprofessional is becoming one of providing direct instruction to the students with a visual impairment when the paraprofessional is not a trained or qualified vision professional in the field. Additional concerns arise with increasing lack of supervision, since the TVI may not even be within the building for the paraprofessional to consult when questions arise regarding appropriate best practices.

The role of the itinerant TVI within the local school system is a challenging one with itinerant TVI's reporting only about 50% of their time spent in direct instruction (Mandell, 2000). Mann (2006) cites that an itinerant TVI may be responsible for:

- Providing academic support for the core curriculum
- Teaching braille reading, writing, and math
- Implementing and teaching the expanded core curriculum
- Facilitating collaboration among local school personnel
- Providing disability awareness training to a student's sighted peers
- Meeting with classroom teachers to assess and evaluate student progress
- Advocate for the students with visual impairments and their families
- Ensure that the educational team members understand the needs of the students with visual impairments
- Act as a parent/family resource
- Serve as a liaison between the local school and the family
- Provide learning media assessments for students
- Provide assessment for newly entering students with visual impairments

Clearly, the responsibilities of the itinerant TVI within an inclusive setting have become overwhelming. Add an ever-growing caseload to the TVI and the position can become frustrating and unproductive. The Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) Division 16 position paper for *Itinerant Personnel on Caseload Analysis* (n.d.) recommended an annual analysis of caseloads to be done jointly by the TVIs and their supervisors to ensure a manageable number of students. The goals of the annual caseload analysis should provide for more consistent and quality services to students with visual impairments.

Social skills are another area of concern regarding inclusion of students with visual impairments into public schools. Because of the inability to use visual cues necessary for learning and understanding social interactions, students with visual impairments are frequently delayed in their social skills. McGaha and Farran (2001) found children with visual impairments had to be taught social interaction skills. Placing children in close proximity and increasing opportunities of socializing with typical peers did not result in better social skills. Lack of vision affects incidental learning in this skill area as well as others.

Hence, the need for direct teaching of social interaction skills is needed in order to promote and develop social competence (George & Duquette, 2006; Huurre, et al., 1999; Kef, 2002). The current philosophy that prevails for students with visual impairments is that the students require the same type of social interaction and communication skills that sighted children need. However, Hatlen (2004) proposes that perhaps visual impairment causes differences in this aspect of development and that teaching social skills typical for sighted children may not be best practice for this population. There may be a need to include a different variety of learning experiences, games, and activities when teaching expanded core curriculum social interactions.

The inclusive setting does not result in providing a student with visual impairments a network of friends comparable in size to sighted peers. The students with visual impairments remain isolated with fewer friends regardless of the inclusion setting and tend to rely more on adult and parent support compared to their sighted peers (George & Duquette, 2006; Hatlen, 2004; Huurre, 1999; Mann, 2006; Kef, 2002). Also leading to isolation is the situation that the inclusive setting offers few, if any, opportunities for interactions with other students with similar impairments. Interactions of this type allow for sharing of experiences from a similar perspective that are interactions and relationships typically occurring in the regular setting among sighted peers.

Phillips and Corn (2003) conducted a study of perceptions of students with visual impairments regarding their placement within a specialized school. Results of this study indicated that the students felt their attendance at the specialized school for the visually impaired afforded them higher academic support than in the local school setting. They felt this was due to larger classes, which they perceived would allow for less attention available from teachers. They felt their ability to function independently was affected by the larger setting and they perceived a lack of trained personnel and resources compared to their placement in the specialized school for the visually impaired.

Socially, however, they were unhappy with the small number of students with whom to socialize and felt they might be missing real world experiences. Although they communicated that attending their local school would allow them better social lives, they enjoyed being around other students with visual impairments. The appreciation of socializing with other peers with similar impairment is also evident as reported by Mitchell (2001). Students with visual impairments participated in a summer transition program for blind and visually impaired adolescents. Students who were involved reported benefiting from meeting peers with similar visual impairments and being able to discuss issues of concern.

While there are advantages to this model, there are also disadvantages to itinerant teaching. The itinerant model is intended to serve those students with few educational needs who can

function in their educational environment with limited support from a TVI (Lewis & Allman, 2000). Due to the critical shortage of qualified teachers of students with visual impairments, many students do not receive adequate training (American Foundation for the Blind, n.d.). Many itinerant teachers carry heavy caseloads, some serving 40 to 50 children in 20 different schools (Mandell, 2000), leaving little time for in-depth training of disability-specific skills such as social interaction, daily living, or compensatory skills such as braille (Spungin, 2003).

Additionally, students served by itinerant teachers may be the only students who are visually impaired at their school, creating a situation that can lead to feelings of social isolation. According to Sacks and Wolfe (1992), students with visual impairments who are educated solely in a mainstream setting can lead isolated lives, especially adolescents whose peers are engaged in activities that require vision such as driving or playing contact sports. These students have few, if any, opportunities in the mainstream setting to interact with other students with visual impairments.

### ***Resource Room Model***

In larger metropolitan areas, mainstreamed students with severe visual impairments or often receive services in a resource room which offers more intensive support. A resource room usually is housed at a specific school within a district. Visually impaired students in that district, who require more comprehensive support, are transported to that school, regardless of where they reside. Though these children attend regular education classes, they also spend time each day in the resource room with a TVI for direct instruction in disability-specific skills.

The resource room model allows students to receive the services of a TVI on a daily basis and to have ready access to specialized equipment and materials needed for successful participation in the regular education classroom. The resource room also provides a place where these students can interact with each other socially (Swenson, 1995). Additionally, the resource model provides opportunities for the TVI to observe students in a variety of settings to identify possible areas of needed instruction. It also provides classroom teachers with daily access to the TVI for guidance with instructional techniques and material adaptations (Lewis & Allman, 2000).

A drawback to the resource model is that students often do not attend their home school, and therefore do not go to school with their siblings or friends from their neighborhoods. Additionally, if the child's home is far away from the school, it may be difficult to attend after-school activities such as club meetings or sporting events, limiting students' participation in extracurricular social activities (Lewis & Allman, 2000).

### **Specialized Schools for the Blind and Visually Impaired**

According to the most recent statistics on children with visual impairments published by Lighthouse International, only eight percent of students with visual impairments are educated in residential programs at specialized schools (Viisola, 2000).

Lewis and Allman (2000) found that specialized schools provide a valuable learning experience to students because they offer an environment in which everyone involved understands the unique learning style of the population. Therefore, instruction is tailored to accommodate that style, resulting in students actively engaged in learning. Additionally, specialized schools

provide opportunities for infused instruction of disability-specific skills after school hours in dormitories and community-based settings. The specialized school setting also provides students with the opportunity for social interaction with other visually impaired students and adults, helping students to develop self-confidence, self-determination, and social interaction skills (Hatlen, 2004).

In this day and age, students typically do not attend a specialized school for their entire academic career. According to McMahon (1994), the average stay for students is 5.5 years. Many specialized schools offer short-term placement options for students who may be struggling academically in the public school, or need intensive training in a particular skill such as braille or orientation and mobility (Bina, 1999).

As specialized schools and public schools have developed a more collaborative relationship, mainstreaming opportunities have been made more readily available to students in residential programs, particularly in grades 9-12 (McMahon, 1994), when students are preparing for postgraduate life. Students spend a portion of their day in general education classes at a local school, and a portion of their day in classes at the specialized school (Lewis & Allman, 2000). This provides students with the opportunity for social interaction with non disabled peers, and the option to take courses not offered at the specialized school.

The primary disadvantage of specialized school programs is that students must live away from home for extended periods of time. However, most schools provide transportation for students to return home frequently to help alleviate the impact of this separation for both parents and students (Lewis & Allman, 2000).

In recent years, specialized schools for the blind have expanded their educational placement options to include day schools and outreach programs in addition to their residential programs (Lewis & Allman, 2000). Day schools are typically for preschool children or students that live in the local area. Students attend school in the day time on the school's campus for the same number of hours as regular education public school students (McMahon, 1994). The same services are available to day school students that are available to residential students.

Outreach services are those services provided to students in the broader community and may include orientation and mobility programs, assistive technology training, braille instruction, independent living skills, adaptive physical education, visual efficiency training, vocational training, supervised employment opportunities, recreation and leisure activities, study and listening skills, counseling, speech therapy, and physical therapy. Outreach programs offer this training both on their campuses and in public schools (McMahon, 1994). Additionally, many of these schools provide training to educators and parents on the unique learning needs of children with visual impairments (DeMario & Caruso, 2001).

Although outreach programs are developed and implemented by specialized schools, they tend to serve the population of mainstreamed students in public school systems, providing instruction to fill gaps in skill areas that traditionally have been difficult for itinerant teachers to cover sufficiently (DeMario & Caruso, 2001).

Spungin (1997) reiterates the fact that students with visual impairments in public school settings risk leaving high school ill prepared for life. This article points out that specialized schools not only function as residential schools, but also act as a reference for public schools within their state for information and materials for students who are visually impaired (Spungin, 1997). Specialized schools provide assessments for school systems who suspect a student may be visually impaired, they provide outreach services for teachers and parents, they provide summer programs for students throughout the state, and at times, run low vision clinics (Spungin, 1997).

Bina (1999) outlines the benefits of specialized schools for the visually impaired. Bina (1999) discusses how rural areas, without access to a teacher of the visually impaired, serve its students with visual impairments. For this school district, the specialized school for the blind might be the least restrictive environment. The special education director quoted in this article has been unable to recruit a qualified teacher of the visually impaired after trying for five years (Bina, 1999). Two former students of specialized schools tell their stories of success in those school settings. The residential school provided both of them the opportunity to independently shop, be responsible for cleaning up after themselves, and exposure to the community. Bina (1999) also points out that the cost per student to educate students at specialized schools is misleading. The services provided at specialized schools could not be replicated locally any more efficiently. The nature of visual impairments being a low incidence disability, the author believes that educating students would cost much more locally than in a centralized setting (Bina, 1999).

Public school programs and specialized schools both offer services to meet the needs of children with visual impairments. Each setting has a variety of placement options designed to meet the needs of a diverse population of students with visual impairments. While each program has its own distinct advantages and disadvantages, one does not necessarily have to preclude the other. Students with visual impairments can benefit from both. Students who are mainstreamed in public schools may benefit from short-term placements at a specialized school for intensive training in a particular skill area such as daily living skills or assistive technology. Students in specialized schools, especially teen-agers, may benefit from mainstream experiences in local high schools to help improve social interaction and career skills.

No longer are educational placement options for students with visual impairments an either/or decision. Some students with visual impairments will require the intense instruction offered by specialized schools, while other students' needs will be met in the mainstream classroom with appropriate adaptations and modifications. Today, specialized schools and public school systems can work together cooperatively to ensure the unique needs of students with visual impairments are met to the fullest extent possible in an effort to provide these students with the tools necessary to lead full lives as capable, productive citizens.

### ***Outreach Services offered by Specialized Schools***

Collaboration, the interaction between a local school and the specialized school for the blind or visually impaired, determines the frequency and types of outreach services offered by the specialized school. The degree or level of collaboration between the local schools and the specialized schools is an important aspect of the effectiveness of the outreach service the student with visual impairments receives before, during and after the receipt of the service

(Zebehazy & Whitten, 2003). The majority of the schools surveyed in the Zebehazy and Whitten study (2003) thought collaboration to be good, but identified a need for solutions to the following problems:

- distance between the local school and the specialized school
- a lack of qualified vision professional staff
- conduct a better follow-up and follow-through with students needing services
- Provide a better understanding by the local school system of the outreach services available
- promote less territorialism and more collaboration
- more opportunities for personal contacts
- establish a better system for fiscal resource sharing

# NATIONAL AND STATE DISABILITY INCIDENCE DATA

## National Numbers of Children and Youth with Visual Impairments

Students who are blind, visually impaired, deaf, hard of hearing, and multiply disabled are considered low incidence disability categories. Less than 0.04 percent of children with disabilities are students who are identified with visual impairments. (US Department of Education, 2005).

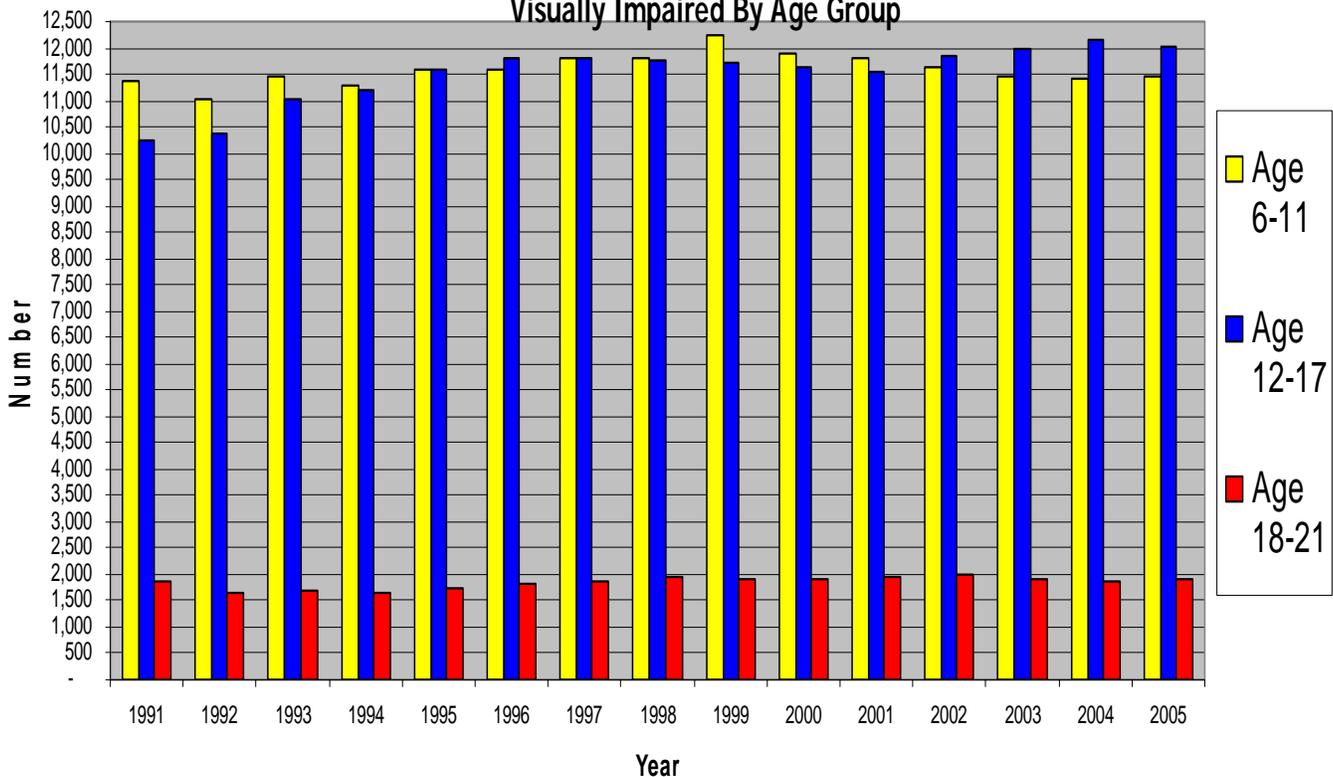
According to the American Printing House for the Blind, for the fiscal year 2005, only 9% of 57,199 students are attending a residential school for the blind and visually impaired (American Printing House for the Blind). With the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975 (Schaeffer, 2002, p. 4), IDEA (1990), and its reauthorization in 1997, parents were made aware of their children's rights to a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment.

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990 (Schaeffer, 2002, p. 5). To most parents, the least restrictive environment meant their local public school. The following table provides a longitudinal portrayal of the numbers of children ages 6-21 who are blind or visually impaired as identified by IDEA (1991-2005). National incidence data show that the majority of visually impaired students are between the ages of 6-17. These data (numbers of students) have remained fairly static over the past 15 years.

### National Special Education Data

#### IDEA, Part B, (Ages 6-21)

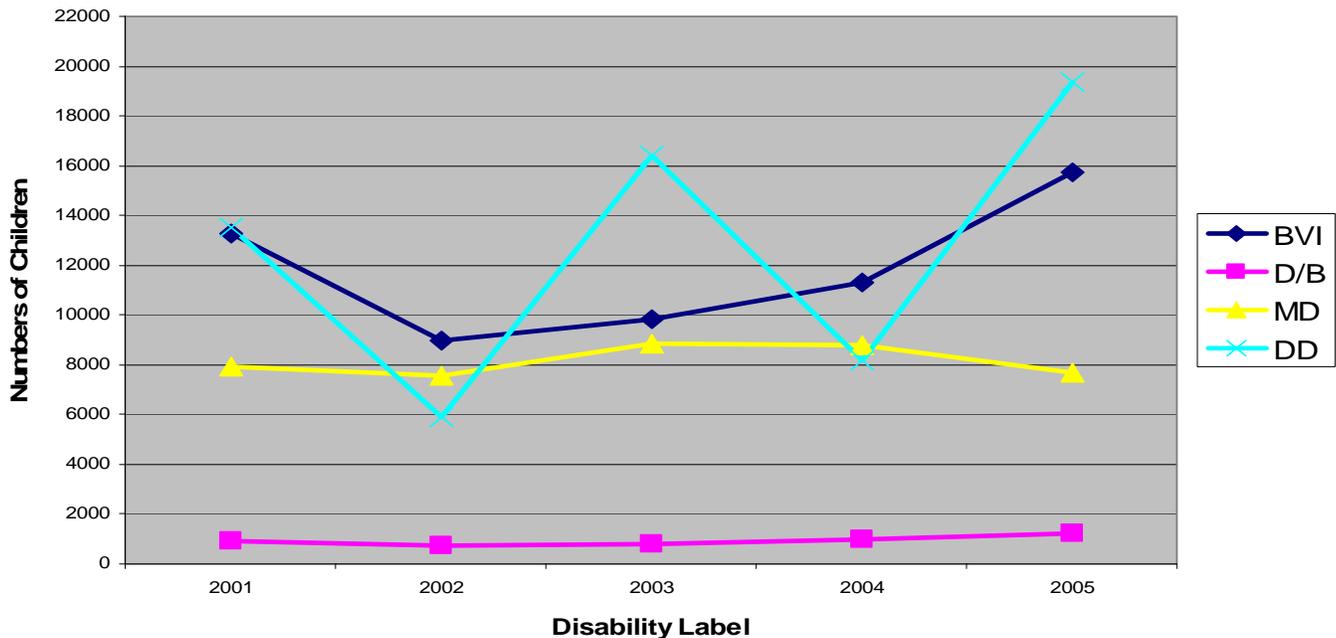
#### Visually Impaired By Age Group



## Specialized Schools Numbers of Students with Visual Impairments

The following chart provides an examination of specialized schools reporting of the numbers of children with visual impairments and multiple disabilities within their respective states from annual IDEA state Child Count Data. These data show that the numbers of students identified as blind or visually impaired (BVI) has increased in the past five years while those identified as developmentally disabled (DD) has significantly increased. The number of deafblind (DB) and multiply disabled (MD) have remained static over this time period.

**Longitudinal Data by Disability from Child Count  
(2001-2005)  
[n= 11]**

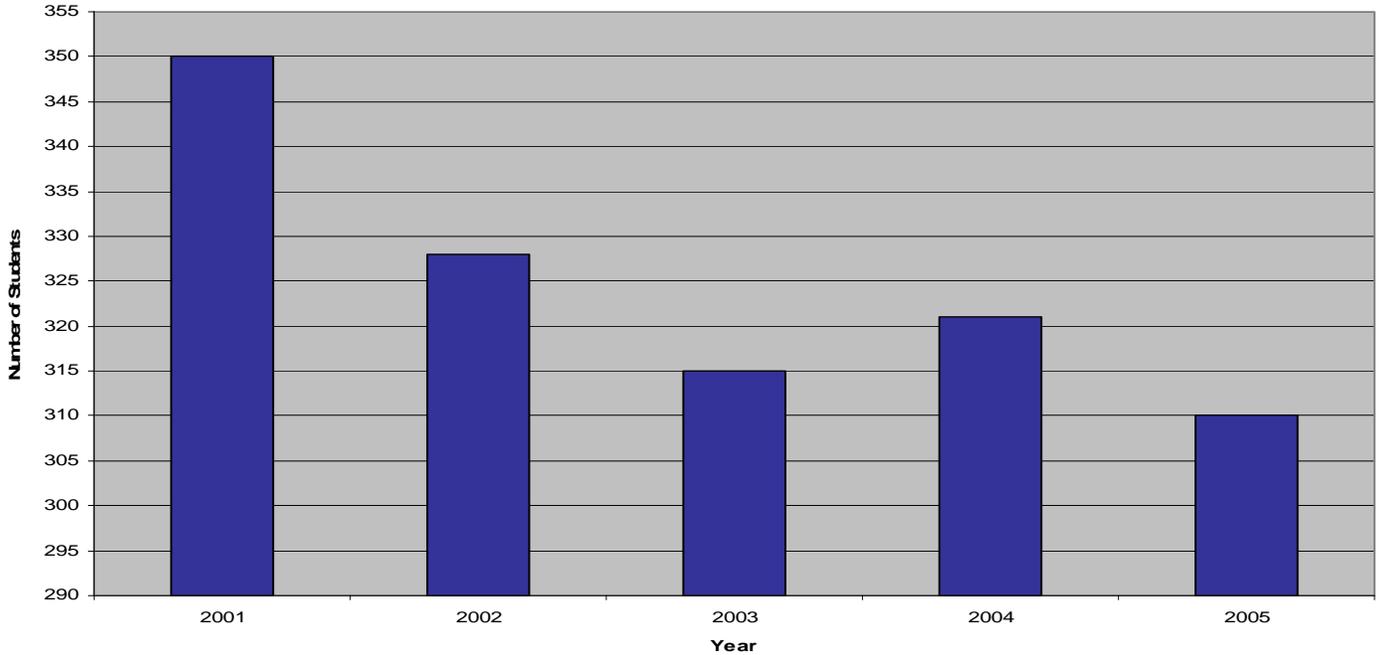


## Washington State Numbers of Students with Visual Impairments

Comparing the number of students who are blind or visually impaired in Washington, the data portray a difference from the incidence level with that from the national data. In the figure on page 25, a five-year examination of Washington state numbers of students who are blind and visually impaired (BVI) in Washington (as reported by OSPI) show about a ten percent decrease in the numbers of BVI students identified through the annual IDEA Child Count.

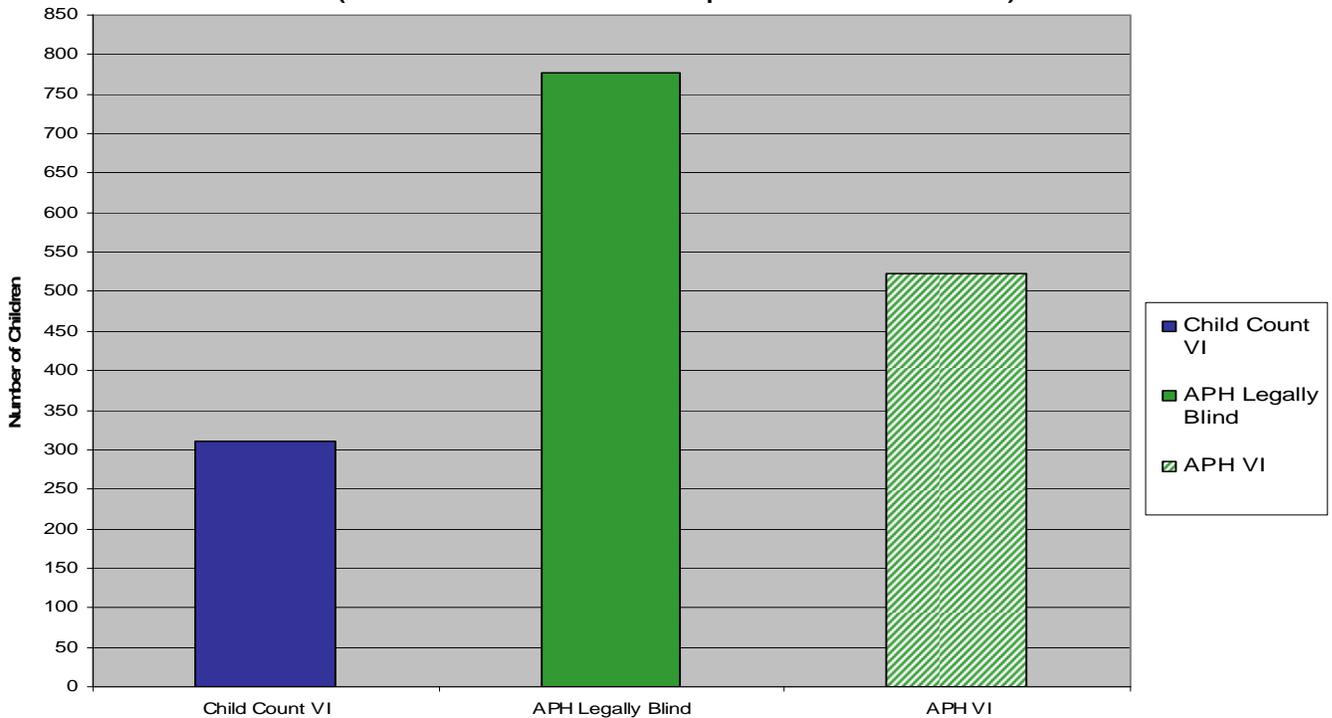
The following two graphs illustrate the numbers of students served through the IRCB who are considered legally blind or visually impaired by APH and the data reported by OSPI. The second graph shows the percentages of students identified by the APH data and the difference in the percentage based upon the OSPI Annual Child Count data.

**Washington State Child Count  
Visual Impairments  
(2001-2005) (OSPI Data)**



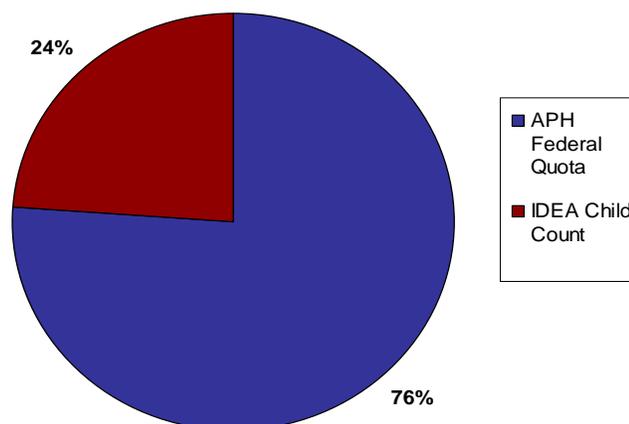
Data on the numbers of students differ significantly based upon the data sources used in determining the exact number of students who are blind or visually impaired. One of the most reliable sources of actual numbers of IDEA and 504 students who have visual impairments in any state comes from the American Printing House for the Blind from the state Instructional Resource Library for the Blind (IRCB).

**2005 WA State Numbers of VI Students  
(Federal Child Count Data compared to APH Quota Data)**



## WA Differences in 2005 Child Count and APH Quota for Blind and Visually Impaired

(n=1298 [APH=1298-ChildCount=310])



Nationally numbers of students who are blind, visually impaired, or deaf-blind vary significantly by who counts the students and how the students are counted. National numbers of students who are blind and visually impaired have ranged from almost 43,000 (ages birth through twenty-one) to 100,000 (ages birth through twenty-one). The disparity in numbers varies on how children are counted and what disability label they are considered under for special education services. One of the best indicators of children with visual impairments is those provided by the American Printing House for the Blind through state Instructional Resource Centers/Libraries for the Blind. The data shows that for the state of Washington that the OSPI child count numbers only account for 24% of the total number of blind and visually impaired students as are provided services and reading materials through the IRCB (n=1,230). Thus, only one-fourth of the students identified in Washington are identified as Blind or Visually Impaired which does not portray the entire picture of numbers of students needing services from vision professionals in the state. The data in the table below provides a count of visually impaired students by ESD in Washington from data collected by the IRCB.

### Washington Students who are Blind or Visually Impaired Provided Services through the IRCB (n=1,230)

Educational School District	# of Students who are BVI
<b>101 (Spokane/Northeast)</b>	<b>151</b>
<b>105 (Yakima Valley)</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>112 (Vancouver/Southwest)</b>	<b>159</b>
<b>113 (Grays Harbor/Central)</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>114 (Northwest Peninsula)</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>121 (Seattle/Central Puget Sound)</b>	<b>436</b>
<b>123 (Walla Wall Area)</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>171 (Northeast/Central WA)</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>189 (North Puget Sound)</b>	<b>178</b>

# COMPARISONS OF SPECIALIZED SCHOOLS FOR THE BLIND

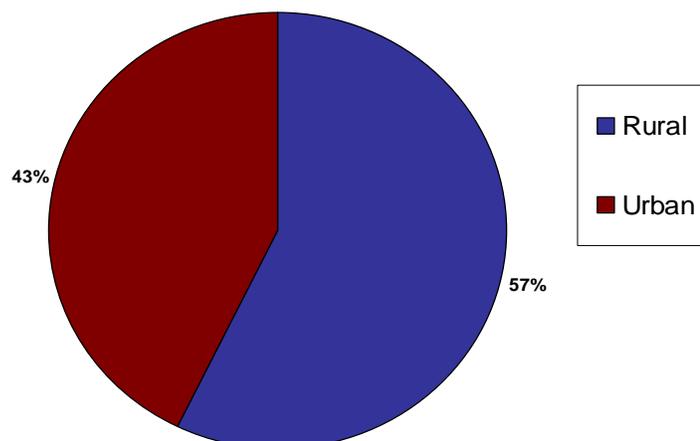
Since the mid-1990s, several comparative studies have been conducted on specialized schools for the deaf and blind in regards to the scope of services provided by these state-administered schools. In the past, studies were conducted through the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind Foundation, Council of Schools for the Blind, the Mississippi Legislative Committee, and the American Institute for Research. A summary of these research findings are presented to show the various scopes and role of specialized schools for the blind and how the Washington State School for the Blind compares to similar educational programs.

## State Characteristics – Rural versus Urban

The United States Department of Labor – Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) classifies states based upon two important criteria derived from the U.S. Census data. These criteria are important in service delivery to students who are blind, visually impaired, and multiply disabled. Every decade the BLS conducts the U.S. Census. From these data, states are classified by location of the state’s population density as either being rural or urban. Nationally, in a survey of specialized schools for the blind, approximately 60 percent of the specialized schools are located in rural states. Washington State is classified as a rural state according to the U. S Census. Service delivery in public schools for students who are blind and visually impaired in rural states is dependent upon itinerant teachers and outreach services provided by specialized schools.

Why is this important? In rural states, students who are blind and visually impaired are located in remote or rural regions scattered throughout their state. This translates into fewer vision professionals available to adequately serve students who live in these remote areas. With the national shortage of vision professionals many students are either not receiving or are receiving infrequent services in their educational programs. Some rural states have tried to address the shortage of teachers in remote locations by establishing regional centers to provide itinerant services so that students receive services on a more consistent basis.

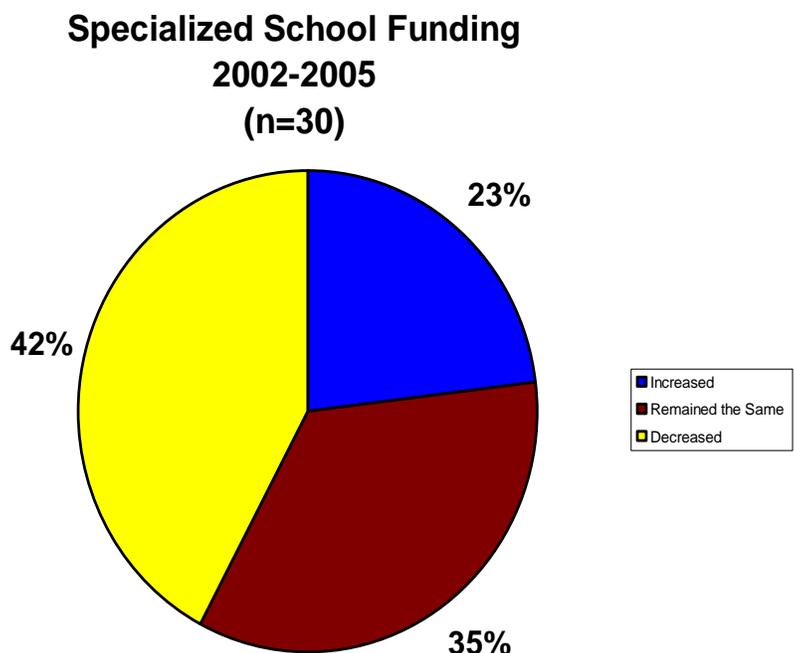
**Specialized Schools for the Blind  
State Census Classification  
(n=30)**



Washington is considered a rural state according to the BLS and thus, services for the students who are visually impaired are usually clustered around highly populated areas. Examples of the remote areas in Washington, ESD 171 and ESD 123 combined have approximately 117 students who are blind or visually impaired. In these two ESDs, some of the areas region are hard to reach during certain times of the year, so that it is probably the case that if these students are receiving itinerant services that they are not always receiving services on a timely or consistent basis due to factors outside the control of the outreach vision professionals.

### **State Funding**

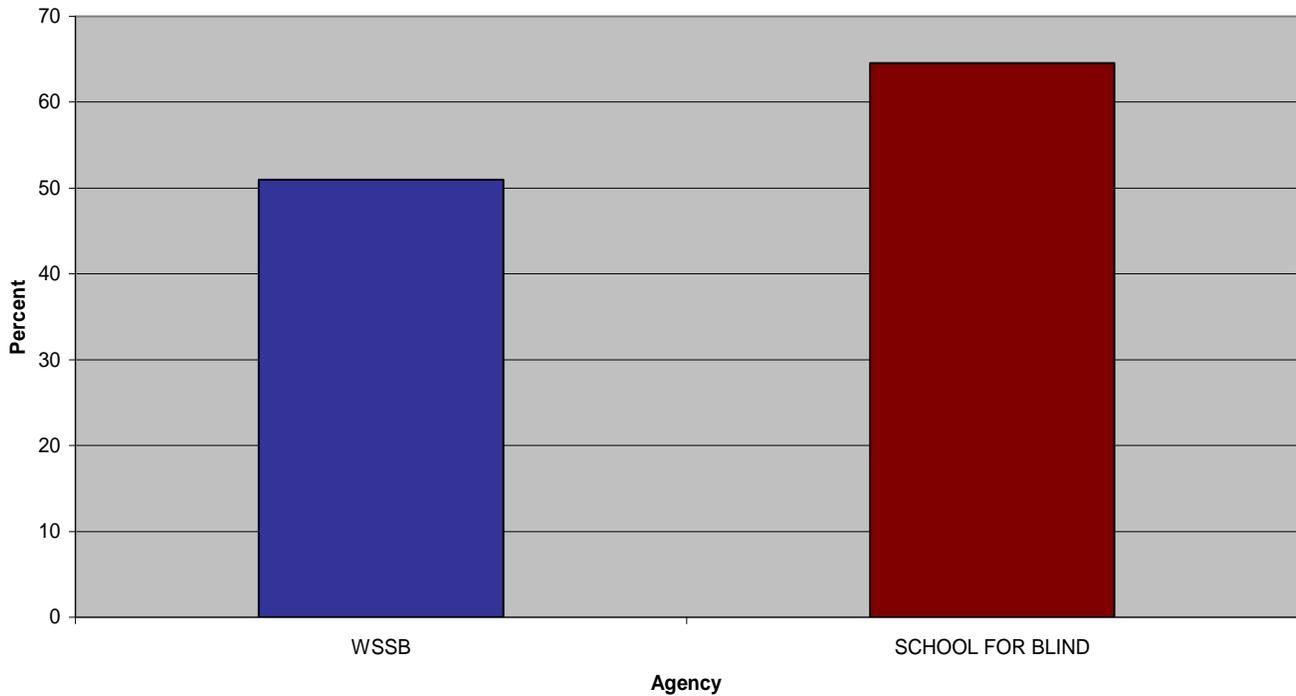
Examining state funding levels of for specialized schools for the blind for a three-year period (2002-2005), specialized school administrators were asked to identify states-supported funding for their school. Funding levels have remained the same or have increased. Approximately 40 percent of the specialized schools reported a reduction in state funding, many due to declining enrollment in their states or as a result of national economy and educational funding support.



### **Free and Reduced Lunch – Socioeconomic Indicator**

Free and reduced lunches are a good indicator of the socioeconomic status of families who have their children educated as a specialized school for the blind. Another good indicator of family socioeconomic status is Medicaid eligibility for the student. In some states, students who attend residential programs automatically qualify for free or reduced lunches. The following chart compares the Washington State School for the Blind with a national representative sample of specialized schools for the blind. Approximately 51% of the children attending the WSSB receive free or reduced lunches compared to almost 65% attending specialized schools for the blind. A number of variables can influence the data, but as an indicator it illustrates that almost half the children attending the WSSB come from families with middle to higher incomes.

**Free and Reduced Lunches**  
**(Socio-economic Indicator)**  
**Comparison of WSSB and Specialized Schools for the Blind**  
**(n=30)**



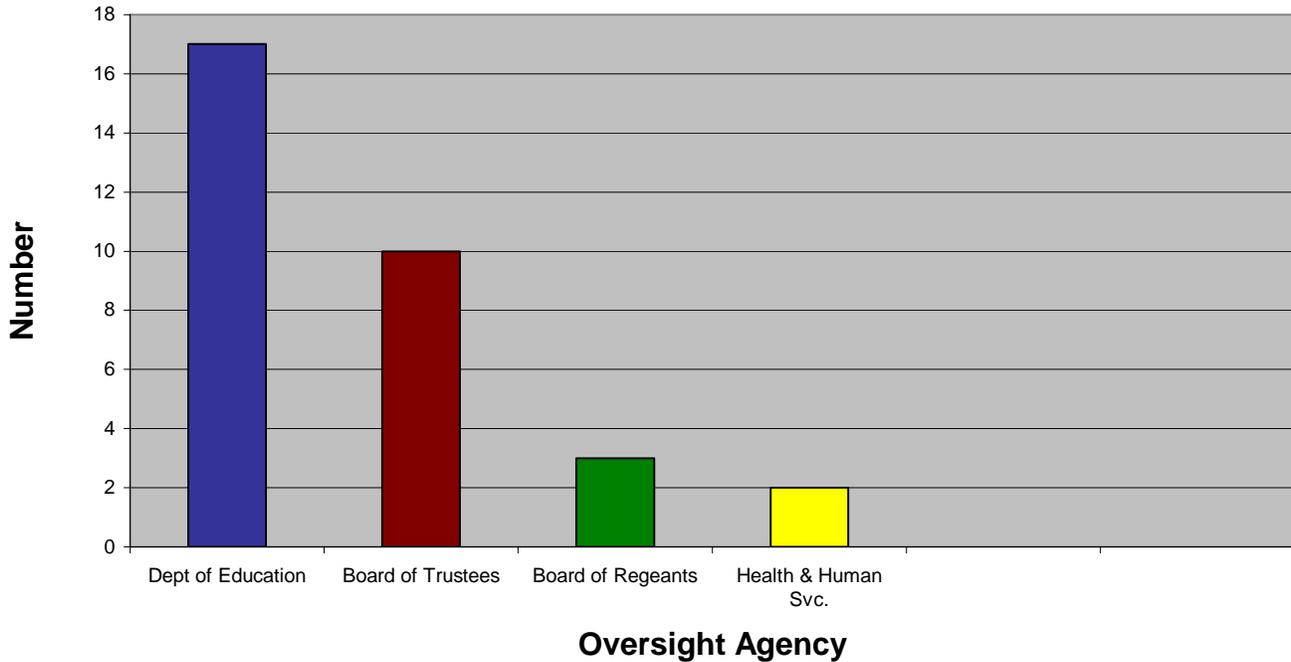
**School Characteristics or Administrative Oversight**

Nationally, there are approximately 46 specialized schools for the blind and a similar number of schools for the deaf. In some states, some specialized schools are considered dual-schools in that they have share administrative and campus service programs for both the deaf and blind. In the United States, there are nine states that are considered dual school programs. These states include Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Montana, South Carolina, Utah, and Virginia. There are both pros and cons of the dual school structure. Historically dual schools systems were established by special state legislation which led to their establishment.

Specialized schools for the blind have over a 175-year history of providing specialized services for the blind and visually impaired. The administrative oversight arranges from what would be classified as state schools for the blind to private schools for the blind. There are approximately six private schools (Perkins School for the Blind, New York Institute for Special Education, Overbrook School for the Blind, Maryland School for the Blind, Western Pennsylvania School for the Blind, and St. Joseph’s School for the Blind). These schools are supported by private foundations and supported by state funds on a per enrolled student basis. Approximately forty specialized schools for the blind should be considered as some sort of state agency. The majority are considered either a stand alone school district as part of their respective State Department of Education or as a separate agency. Approximately thirteen schools are governed by a Board of Trustees that are either appointed by the state Governor or are chosen as board member by the school administration. Two specialized schools are under the umbrella of the

state higher education agency (South Dakota and Iowa). Two fall under other state agencies such as the Department of Health and Human Services (Illinois and North Carolina).

### School for the Blind Agency Oversight (n=32)



### **Student Enrollment**

Student enrollment at specialized schools for the deaf and blind had peak enrollments in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and again in the early to mid 1960s-1980s. Enrollment peaks are attributed to the rubella (German Measles) outbreak and hypoxia (low oxygen levels for premature babies). Since the rubella vaccine has been introduced and changes have been made in the use of oxygen with premature babies, the incidence rate in the United States has decreased. Since 2000, student enrollment at specialized schools has remained stable. In some states, numbers of students receiving services has actually increased.

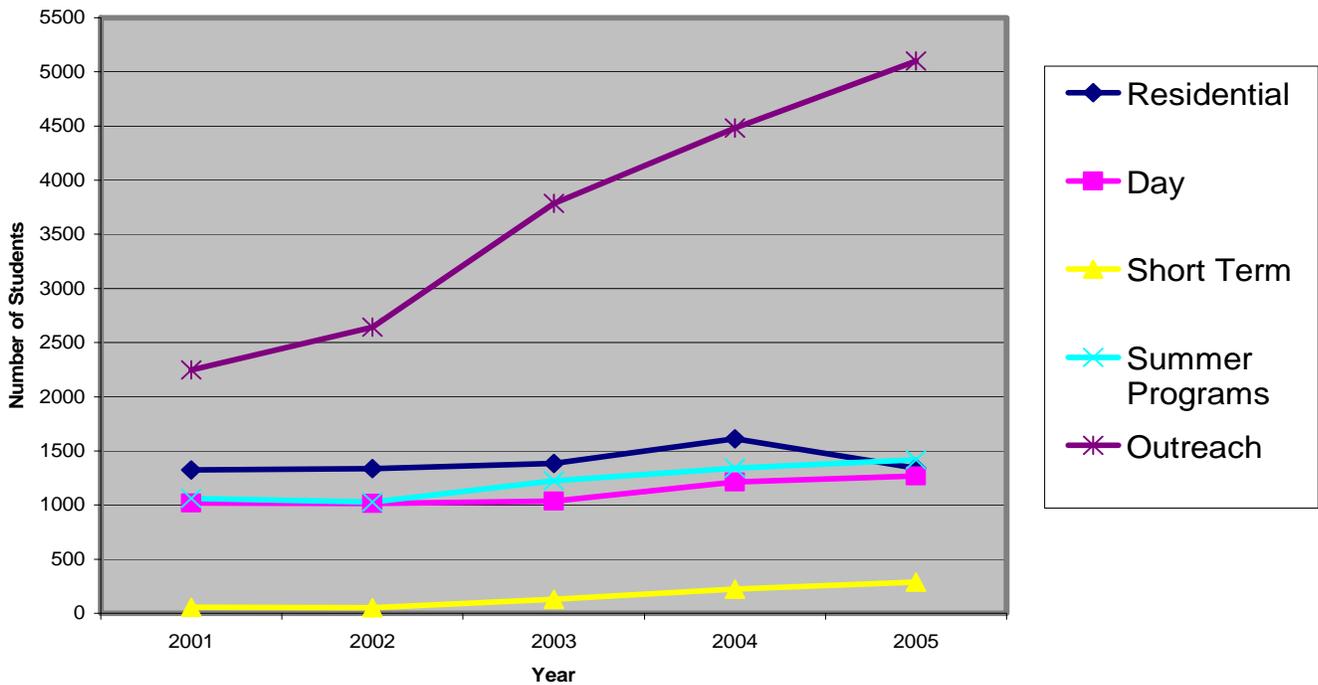
### ***Specialized Schools for the Blind***

Specialized schools provide educational programs to residential, day, and outreach students. Other programs options available to students are both short-term placement and summer programs. Examining longitudinal data over the five-year period, residential student enrollment has remained static. Day student and summer program enrollment increased slightly over this same time period. The most significant increase in student enrollment is that outreach services have almost tripled over the five-year period. The passage of *No Child Left Behind* Act (NCLB) and the reauthorization of IDEA have lead to an increased effort in identifying students who are blind and visually impaired.

Nationally, specialized schools provide educational services to residential, day, outreach, or short-term placement students. The interesting note is that the passage of NCLB has

significantly increased the numbers of students who are provided outreach services by specialized school staff and an increase in the number of outreach staff employed by specialized schools for the blind.

**Longitudinal Comparison of Students Served by Specialized Schools  
(2001-2005)  
(n=30)**



Data from the U.S. Department of Education (IDEA, 2005) over this same time period show that residential schools served almost 37,000 students (this is a duplicative count as individual student data were not disaggregated). It shows that over the five-year period, almost half of the students served by specialized schools were those served by Outreach services (almost 50 percent). Of the numbers of students receiving services almost 19 percent of the students served by specialized schools are residential students. Fifteen percent are day students and two percent are short-term placement. Nationally, specialized schools serve almost half of their students through outreach services to public school students.

These data illustrate the change in role and scope of specialized schools in the United States. No longer considered just as a residential program for the blind and visually impaired, specialized schools for the blind have expanded their educational role and serve as the “hub” of vision services and itinerant personnel in many states.

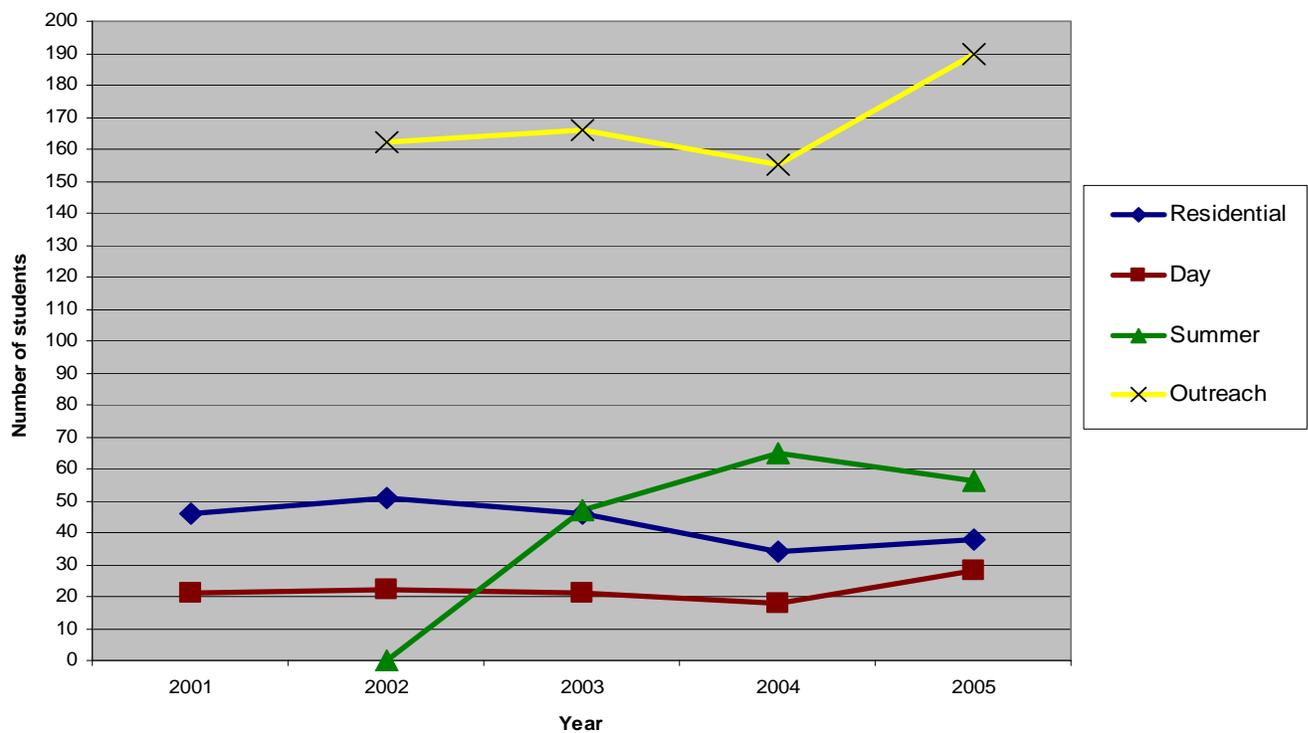
***Washington State School for the Blind***

Student enrollment at the Washington state School for the Blind has remained level over a five-year period. The number of residential or on-campus students has dropped slightly since 2001. Examining the data presented in the WSIPP (2006), student enrollment at the WSSB has remained at the same level (less than 80 students) since 1980.

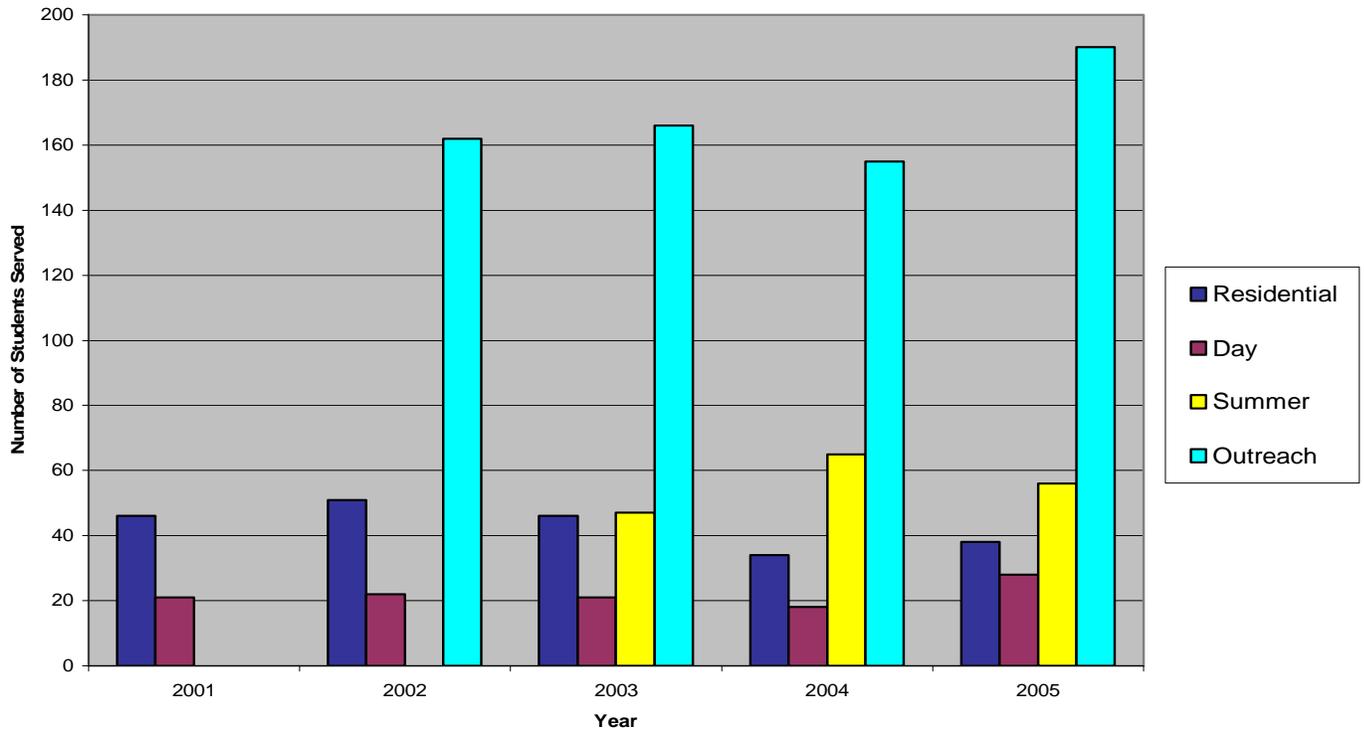
Yet, over this same time, there has been a slight increase in the number of day students and a significant increase in the number of summer program students. The number of off-campus students served through Outreach Services has increased significantly. The 2005-2006 data from the WSSB show that on a monthly basis, Outreach Services provide itinerant TVI and O&M services to over 600 students. These data also include student teaching in assistive and adaptive technology.

The following graph depicts the trends of residential, day, summer, and outreach students served by the Washington State School for the Blind between 2001-2006. The Outreach students in the graph only include those students served directly from WSSB on-campus staff. The total number of outreach students served on a monthly basis is reported to be around 600 students.

### Longitudinal Data of Students Served by WSSB (2001-2005)



## Student Enrollment Washington State School for the Blind (2001-2005)



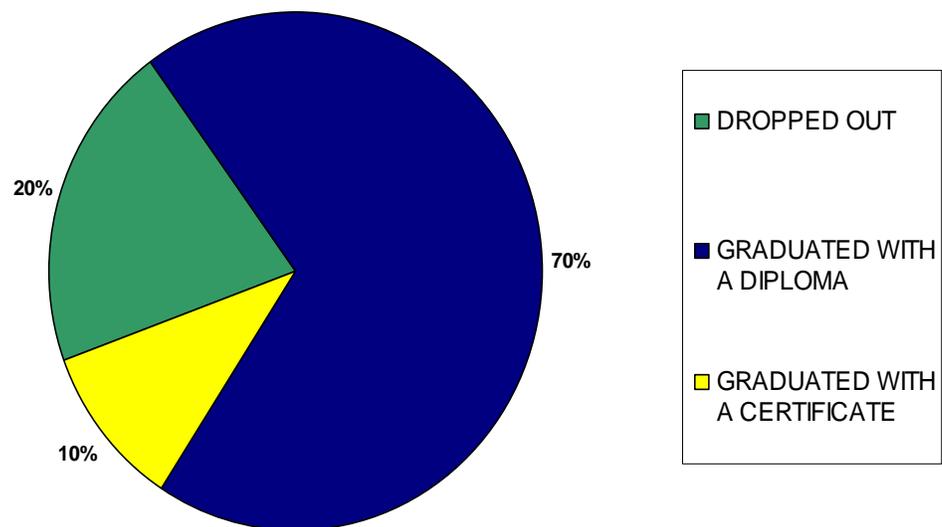
The graph above provides a similar depiction of the number of students served through the various residential, day, summer camp, and outreach programs. On-campus student enrollment has been kept to a steady number to ensure that the student-teacher ratios are kept within the state standards. Students attending the residential component at the WSSB on average spend approximately three years on campus and are returned to their local school district. The residential enrollment has remained fairly static while the number of day students has increased about 20 percent. This increase in 2005 is attributed to the fact that seven families moved to the greater Vancouver area, some from other states, so that their child could attend the WSSB.

## Student Completion Rates

### ***National Outcomes Data for Students with Visual Impairments***

Nationally IDEA school completion outcomes, as compiled from OSEP data over a thirteen year period for students who are blind or visually impaired, shows that almost two-thirds of the students are graduating high school with a diploma and only ten percent are completing school with a certificate of attendance. It was surprising to find that twenty percent of the students who are blind or visually impaired drop out of school. This data includes all students who are blind or visually impaired placed in any kind of educational setting.

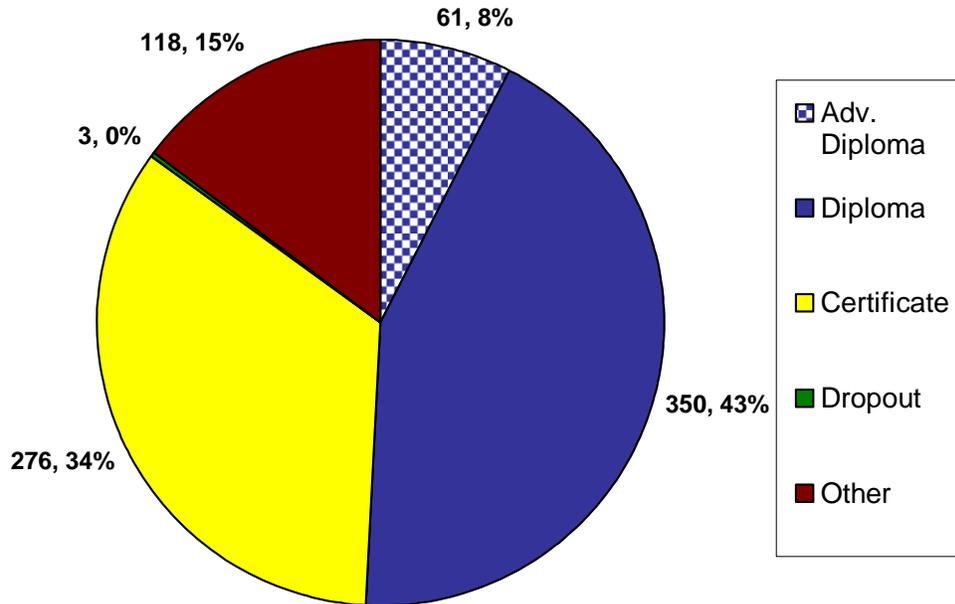
**IDEA Part B  
School Completion Status  
1992-2005 for Students with Visual Impairments (ages 14-21)**



### ***Specialized Schools for the Blind***

The five-year data compilation of specialized schools for the blind shows 808 students attending specialized schools for the blind and their school completion outcomes. The data shows that 51 percent have completed schools with an advanced or regular high school diploma. Thirty-four percent finished school with a certificate of attendance and only three students officially dropped out of school which is significantly lower than the reported national data. Students who attend specialized schools are far more likely to complete school than to drop out. As one specialized school leader stated "Once we get a student we will not let them drop out and become a statistic. We hang on to them to give them a chance to achieve full independence."

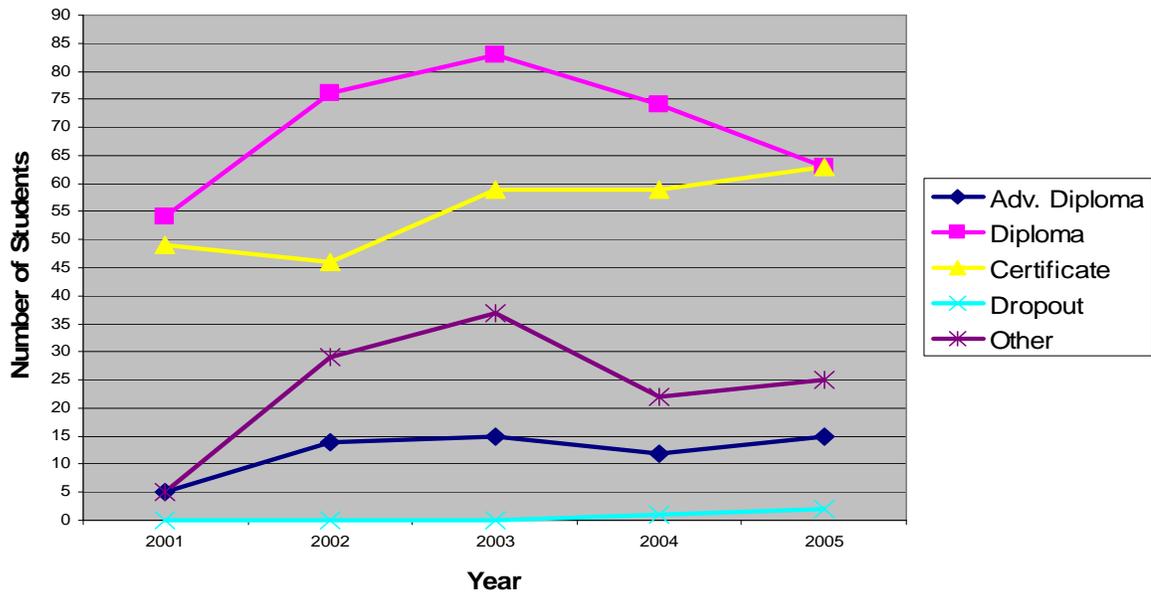
**Specialized School for the Blind  
School Completion Outcomes  
(2001-2005)  
(n=708 students)**



A five-year summary of school completion outcomes for students attending specialized schools shows that there has not been a significant change in school completion outcomes. It has shown that in 2005 that just as many students received academic diplomas as did students receiving certificates of attendance. The category of Other included students who had not completed school for various medical, personal, or family reasons.

During the five year period, there was a peak in the number of students completing school with a high school diploma, but the addition of high stakes assessments to measure school performance has resulted in a decrease in students completing school with a high school diploma. The issue of high stakes assessments have had an impact on student completion rates because of the rigors of some of the tests and the lack of accessibility accommodations by several state departments of education. In some states, some parts of the assessment instruments are not produced such that facilitate ease of understanding, especially with tactile graphics. Another issue with high stakes testing is the time limit that is allowed in taking the written component. Students who are blind or visually impaired have to read alternative format tests, respond using braille or by having another method of test recording. In some cases, students who are blind can use a calculator, but special permission on any deviation from a standard assessment application must be approved by individual state departments of education.

## Longitudinal Data on School Outcomes (2001-2005) [n= 22]



### ***Washington State School for the Blind***

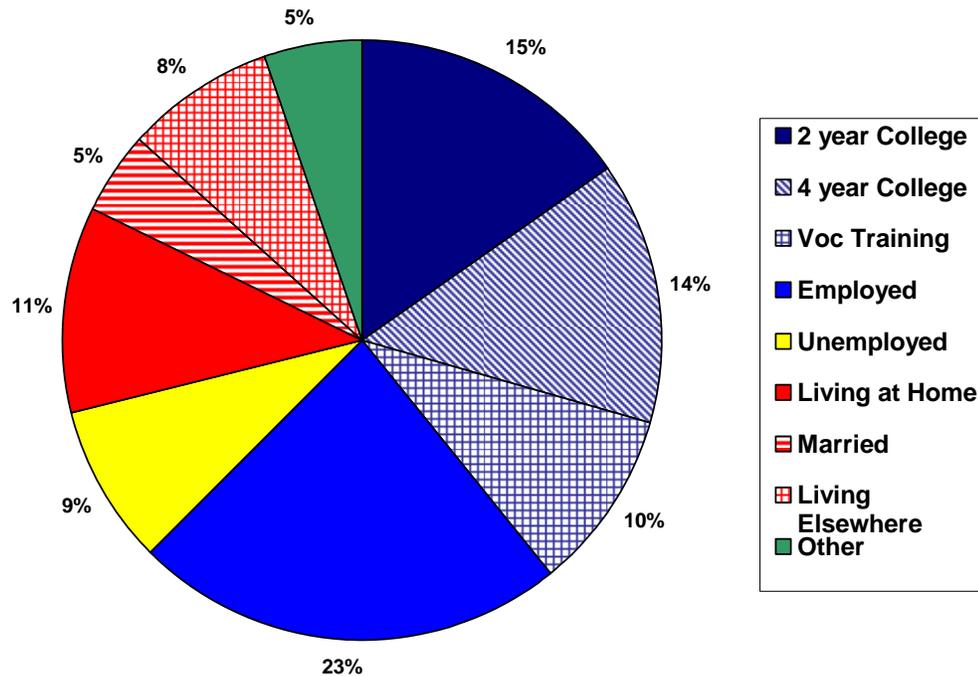
Over the period of 2001-2005, the Washington State School for the Blind had 35 students graduate with a high school diploma. These data may not be indicative for comparative purposes as the state of Washington does not provide certificates of attendance and all high school students complete school with a diploma or a certificate of academic achievement. This may also be an indicator that WSSB only accepts students with academic abilities to complete the rigors of exiting high school with a diploma. All WSSB receive the same diploma, the transcript determines the type of program. This was done in an attempt to not discriminate against any student based upon IDEA and the fact that the IEP becomes the driving force for each student. The school diploma is worded such that the graduating student has completed their prescribe course of study and is therefore awarded a diploma from the WSSB.

### **School Completion Follow-up**

#### ***Specialized Schools for the Blind***

Many specialized schools conduct follow-up studies of school completers. The following data compiled over a five-year period of tracking 376 students, shows that almost 30 percent of the students have either completed or were in the process of competing a post-secondary degree. Ten percent were attending some sort of vocational training. The data showed that 23 percent were currently employed and that nine percent were unemployed. These data illustrate that the majority of the students attending a specialized school for the blind go on to complete postsecondary education and /or employed once completing high school .

## School Completion Follow-up (2001-2005) [376 students from 14 COSB schools]

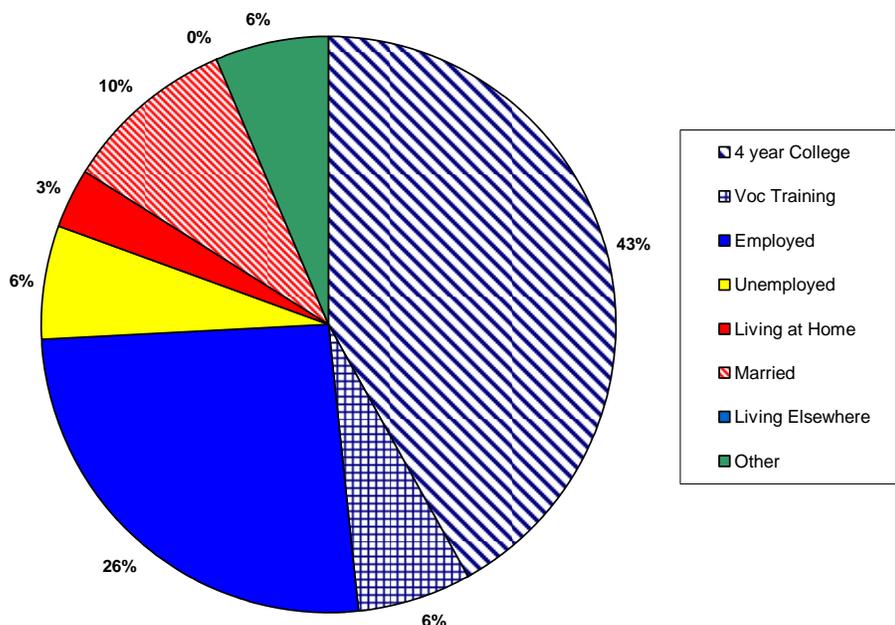


### ***Washington State School for the Blind***

The Washington State School for the Blind does an outstanding job in tracking and following graduates. In comparison to a representative national sample of specialized schools for the blind, 75 percent of WSSB graduates are either employed or in a post secondary educational setting. In other specialized schools, 62 percent are either employed or in a post secondary educational setting. Other specialized schools also might have students with severe cognitive disabilities or who are multiply disabled that might impact the post-school outcomes comparison.

The Washington State School for the Blind has an added benefit that might add to outstanding student outcomes. Project LIFTT, a joint program between the WSSB and the Washington State Department of Services for the Blind (DSB), provides additional support in the transition from high school to post secondary opportunities. Project LIFTT allows any blind and/or visually impaired student in the state to attend a fifth year program, which is located on the campus, with a focus Expanded CORE Competencies (blindness related skill development), work experience and post secondary transition. Most of the students enrolled in this program are students who have not attended WSSB, but need additional training to be successful. This project is unique in that on campus is a project coordinator who works closely with the DSB Rehabilitation Counselor. Not many schools, either public or specialized, have an arrangement like this that directly helps graduates in a specialized on-campus program. The uniqueness of this program should be duplicated in other specialized schools for the blind because it makes the collaborative interagency effort more seamless and directly benefits the graduate.

**Washington State School for the Blind  
School Completion Follow-up  
(2001-2005)  
[n=31]**



## **Personnel Shortages**

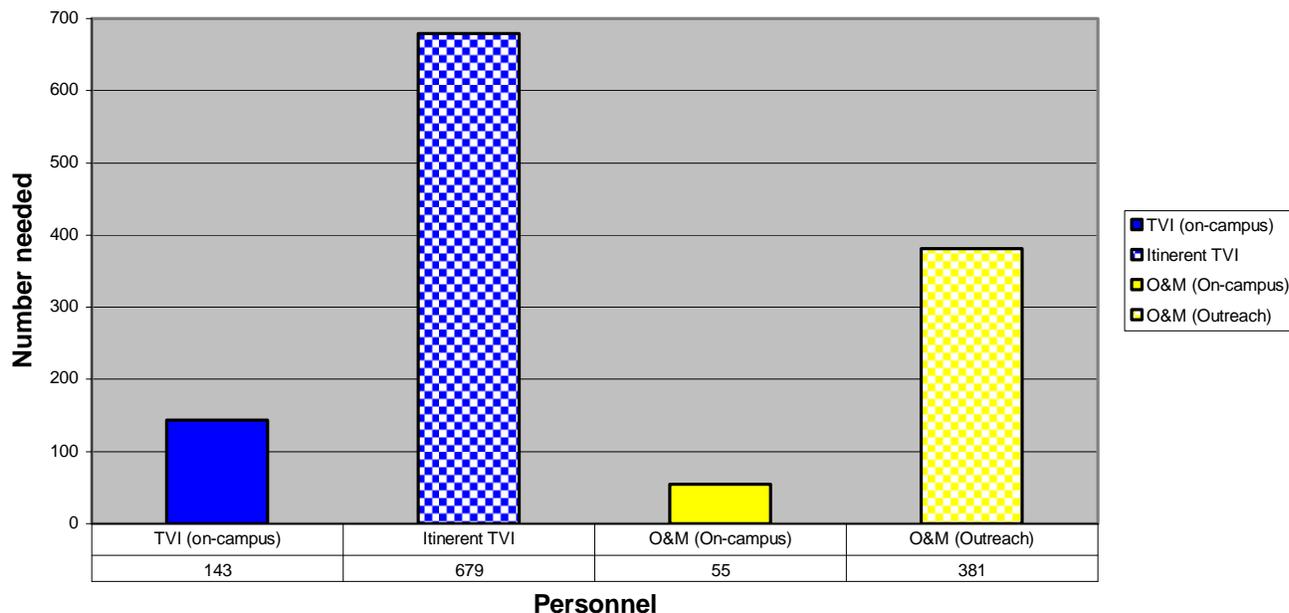
### ***National***

Personnel shortages are a national issue facing all states in regards to qualified vision professionals available to provide services to children and youth who are blind, visually impaired, or multiply disabled. There are only 6,700 teachers of the visually impaired (TVIs) and approximately 1800 orientation and mobility specialists (O&Ms) working with over 100,000 children who are blind or visually impaired. (Hatlen, 2000). College and university programs are not producing enough graduates to replace the numbers of TVIs and O&Ms retiring or moving on to working with older-aged individuals who are blind or visually impaired. There is a critical shortage of vision professionals providing services in an educational setting. Meeting an individual state's need is a national problem in which colleges and universities with vision professional programs are trying to address through teacher preparation programs offering dual certification as TVIs and O&M and by offering distance education programs to bring the classroom to potential students via the internet.

### ***Specialized Schools for the Blind***

In a survey of 30 specialized school administrators, the projected shortages within their respective states are estimated at almost 700 TVIs and almost 400 O&Ms in that are providing itinerant services. At specialized schools for the blind, administrators estimated that they will need to replace 143 TVIs and 55 O&Ms due to retirement in the next five years. These numbers illustrate the severity of the vision professional shortage in educational settings.

**Specialized Schools for the Blind  
Projected TVI and O&M Personnel Shortages within the next five years**



***The State of Washington***

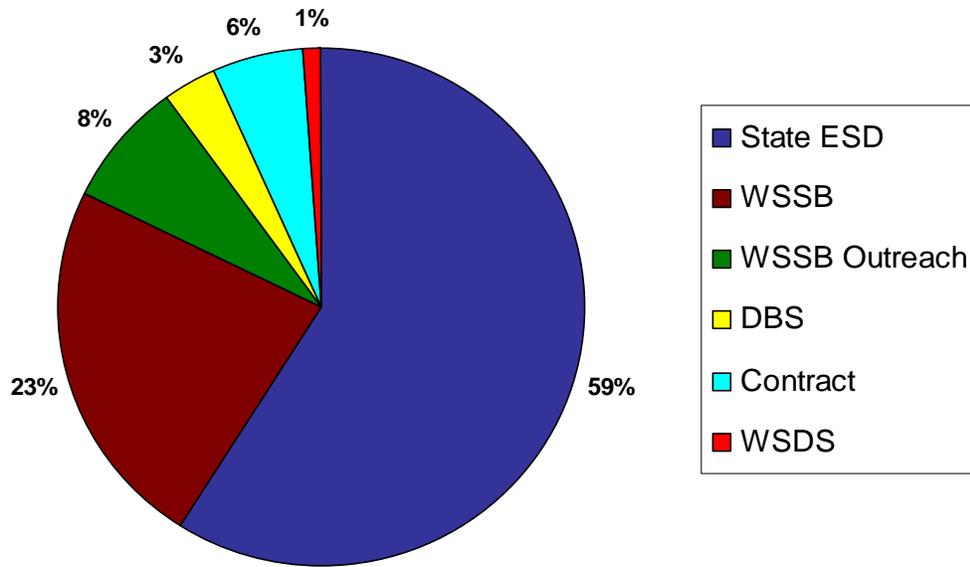
The state of Washington is no different than a lot of other states around the United States. Highly qualified vision professionals are scarce and many are not interested in working in rural areas of some states.

In data collected from the Washington Instructional Resource Center for the Blind (IRCB), the IRCB works closely with all in-state vision professionals. According to the date, the state of Washington has approximately 90 vision professionals (TVIs and O&Ms). The ESDs and LEAs employ approximately 53 vision professionals to serve students in public schools.

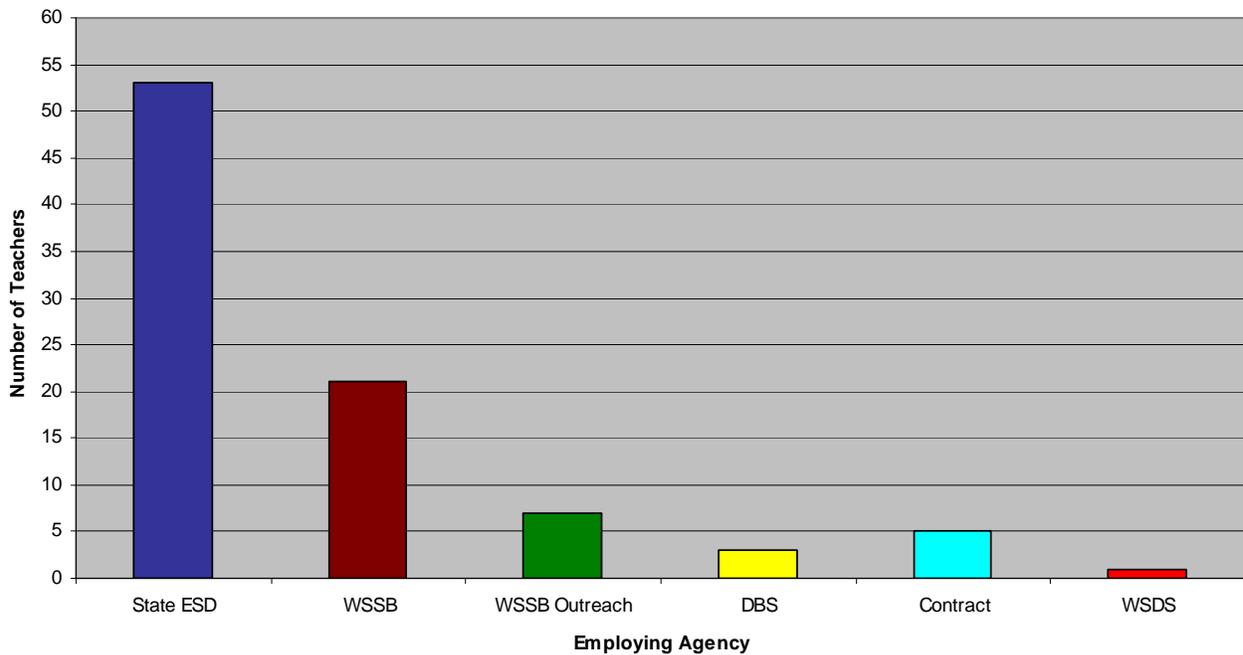
WSSB employs about 21 TVIs and O&Ms to work in the educational programs at the specialized school. The eleven WSSB Outreach staff members provide statewide services to approximately 600 blind or visually impaired students on a monthly basis. The WSSB Outreach caseload varies from thirty to fifty students served on a consistent basis per vision professional.

The Washington Sensory Disability Service (WSDS) has one staff member that works with students who are blind and visually impaired. The following two graphs illustrate the number of vision professionals and the agency under which they are employed. Another five TVIs and O&Ms work on contractual basis with various ESDs and LEAs.

### Education Vision Professionals by Employing Agency (n=90)



### Number of TVIs and O&Ms in the State of Washington (n=90)

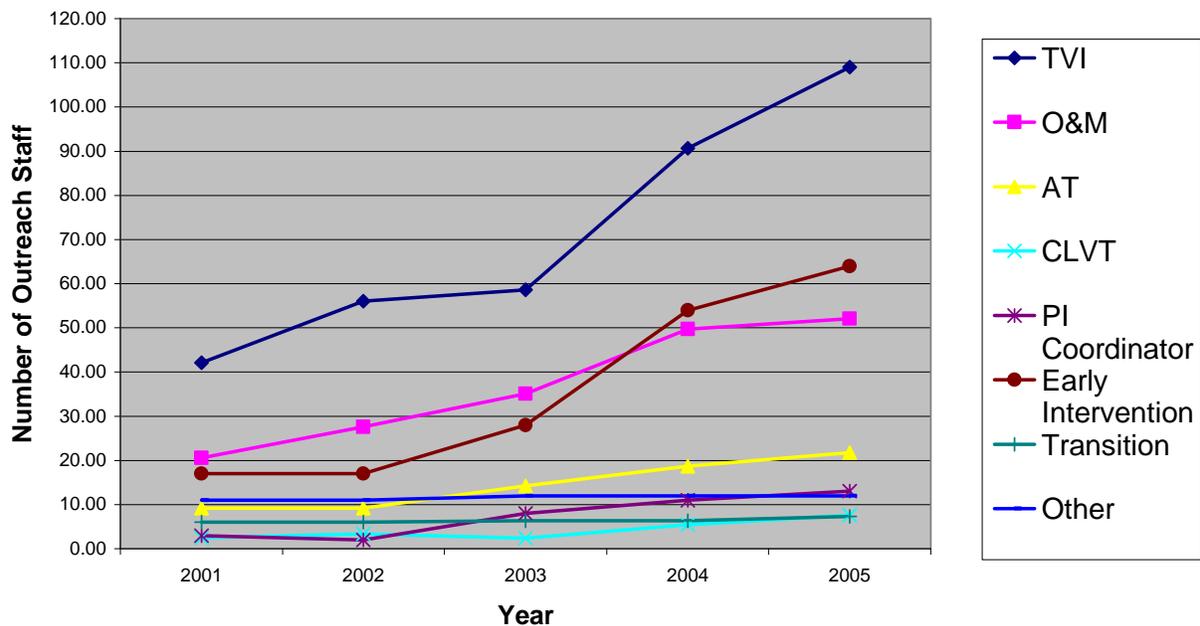


## Outreach Programs

### *Specialized Schools for the Blind*

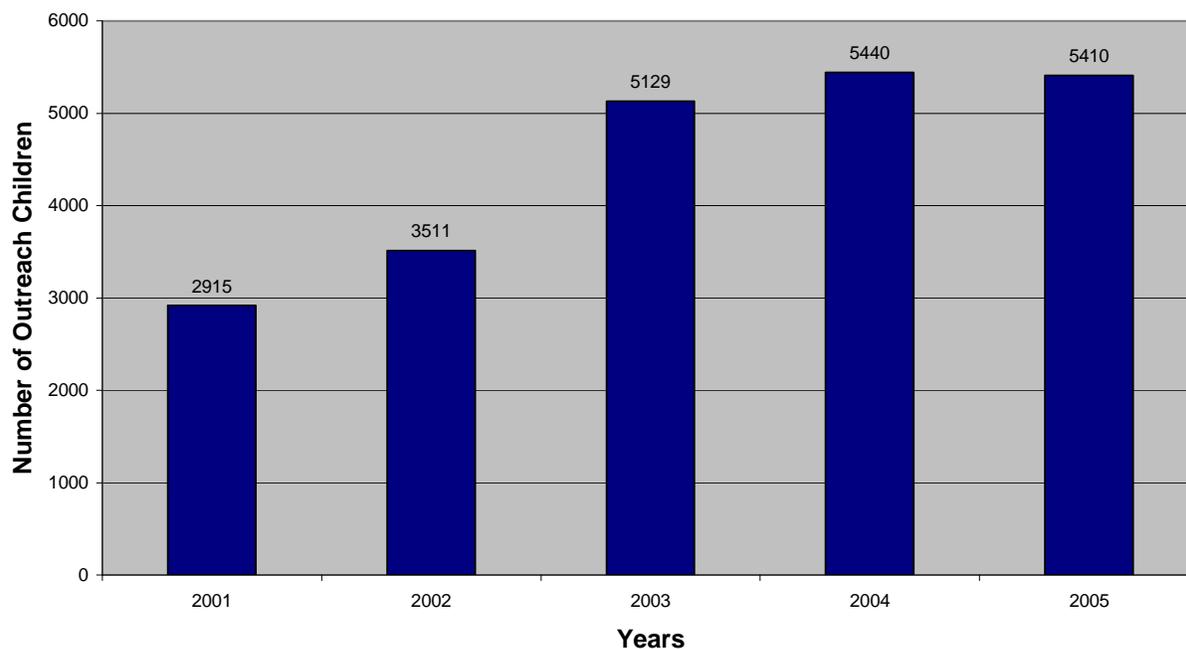
Specialized schools for the blind have been expanding services to student who are blind and visually impaired. The traditional residential school model has moved more to a more diverse educational model where more services are being provided in the child's local public school. Several specialized schools for the blind have hired almost three times more outreach (itinerant) vision professionals since 2001. Several factors that can be attributed to the increase in outreach professionals are the reauthorization of IDEA and the passage of No Child Left Behind. Specialized schools have also changed in regards to expanding services to reach all children of visual impairments within their state. The need to leave no child behind has resulted in some states establishing regional centers or programs around the state or by hiring more vision professionals to work within the local educational agencies. Vision professionals working as Early Interventionists have increase three-fold over the five year period with specialized schools hiring 40 additional staff to work with Early Intervention Programs for early identification of service needs for infants and toddlers who are blind or visually impaired.

**Longitudinal Data on Specialized School Outreach Staff (2001-2005)**



The following chart shows the increase in the number of students who are being served through Outreach services provided by specialized schools in the United States. The number of students served by specialized schools for the blind has increased two-fold. Through specialized schools for the blind, there has been an increase in about 2,500 additional student receiving services through outreach programs. For every student who is blind or visually impaired served in on-campus programs, two public students are also served through the outreach vision professionals from the specialized school.

## Longitudinal Data on Children/Student Outreach Services (2001-2005)



### ***Washington State School for the Blind***

Outreach Services at the WSSB provides itinerant TVI and O&M services to approximately 600 students throughout the state of Washington. WSSB Outreach staff are located throughout state and work with local ESDs and public schools to provide services in their local communities. Also under the Outreach Services is the Low Vision Clinic which provides low vision evaluations for almost 200 children on an annual basis.

### **Braille Proficiency Requirement**

#### ***Specialized Schools for the Blind***

The No Child Left Behind Act focuses in on several important issues for Specialized Schools for the Blind. The term "highly qualified personnel" is paramount, not only in that educators have to have educational training in the core subject matter courses they teach, but in specialized schools for the blind they also have to understand the educational challenges presented by teaching students who are blind or visually impaired. Braille literacy and competency is important aspect of instruction of the blind. Teachers and staff are expected to possess a certain level of proficiency if they are to instruct students who are blind. Not all states require that vision professions have braille proficiency nor do many specialized schools for the blind. In a representative sample of specialized schools for the blind (n=28), only nine states, required TVIs to have a braille proficiency exam and only twelve specialized schools had a braille proficiency policy in place for vision professional in their schools. Some of the lack of having a braille proficiency exam might be due to the fact that many specialized schools for the blind might have a more students with multiple disabilities or who might be non-readers.

## ***The State of Washington***

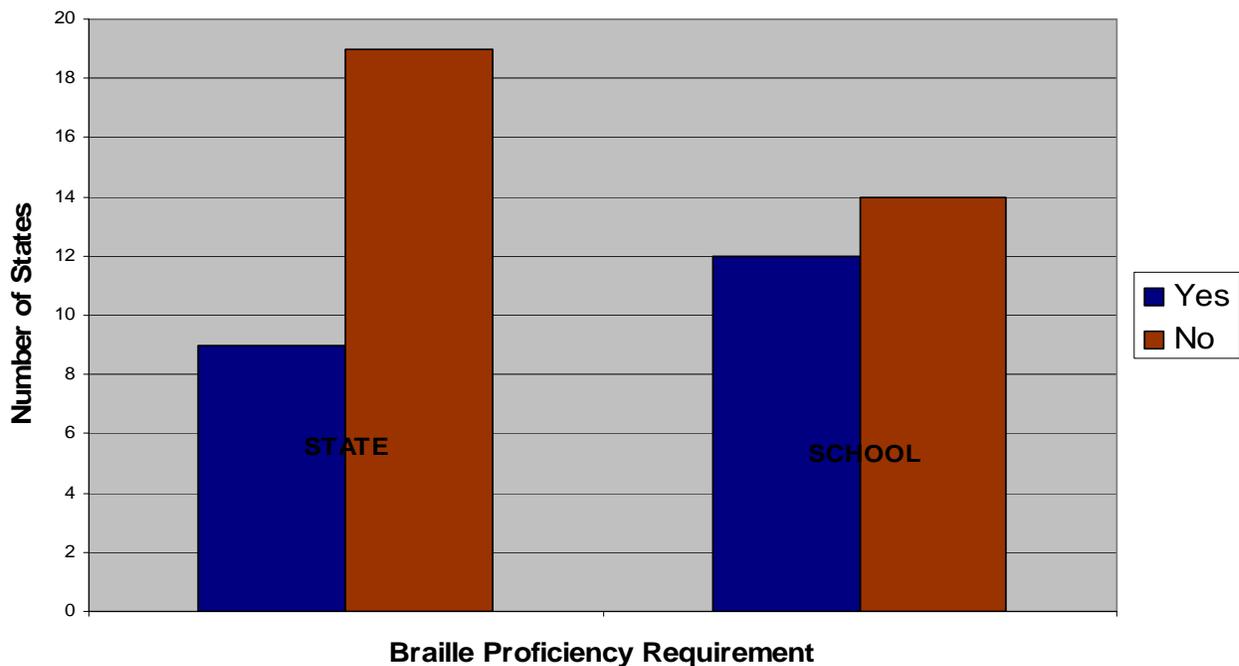
The state of Washington requires an endorsement for a teacher to work in special education. To work as a teacher of the visually impaired (TVI) teachers must be certified in that area in addition to securing a special education endorsement. TVIs and other vision personnel who must teach using braille are expected to demonstrate a competency in reading and writing braille. Vision professionals, those producing braille and para-professionals working with blind/visually impaired students in schools systems are expected to have a grade two standard literacy braille code by successfully completing a state-administered exam. The Braille Literacy Understanding Exam (BLUE) is an assessment of braille competency.

## **Washington State School for the Blind**

Washington State School for the Blind is among a limited number of states that have both a braille proficiency requirement within the state and within the specialized school. Under Washington State Administrative code, teachers of the visually impaired (TVIs) must pass the BLUE Exam. Teachers applying for jobs with the WSSB must possess braille literacy skills before they are hired.

The BLUE Exam is an outstanding example of requiring educators and professionals working with the blind and visually impaired to have an additional competency requirement (which is measured every five years).

### **State and School Braille Proficiency Requirement (n=28)**



## **Assistive or Adaptive Technology**

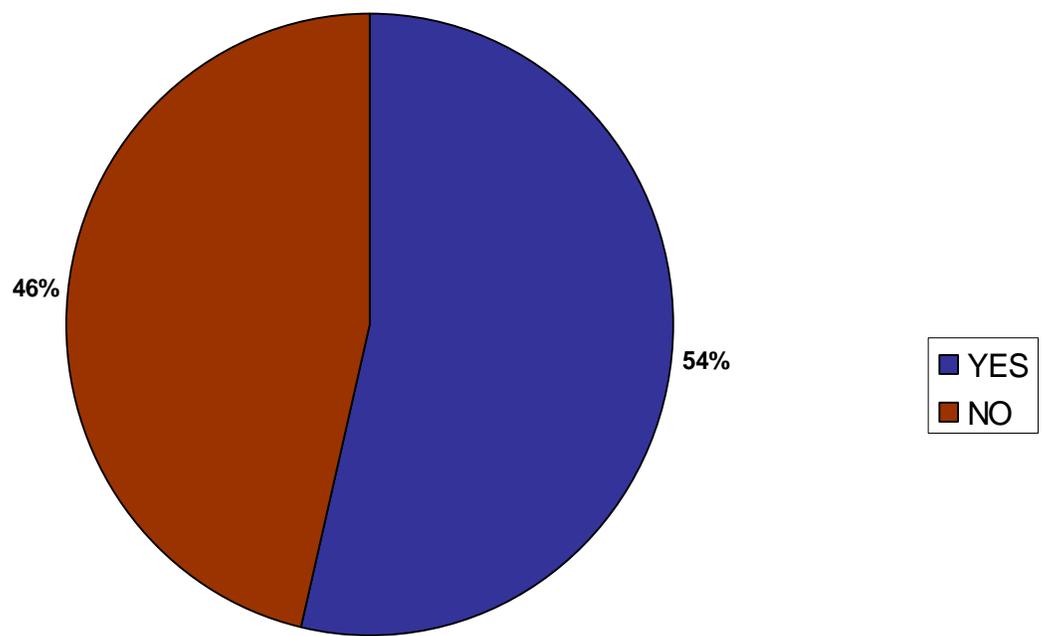
### ***Specialized Schools for the Blind***

Specialized schools for the blind are often requested to provide specialized training and equipment to the local education agencies. Specialized schools often have equipment loaner programs in which assistive technology is loaned to LEAs. Fifty percent of the specialized schools offer equipment loaner programs to ESDs and LEAs. Thus the role of the specialized school can focus on providing assistive technology training and equipment to meet the accommodation needs of the school systems for particular students.

### ***Washington State School for the Blind***

Technology is a key to success in leveling the educational learning field for students who are blind or visually impaired. Students in specialized school settings are often exposed or able to utilize technology and are provided direct instruction in the use of the technology from instructors who are experts with the equipment. The technology staff at the Washington State School for the Blind provides excellent and outstanding support with the ESDs and LEAs. Public school students continue to benefit from the support provided from WSSB. WSSB is the Assistive Technology Center for Blind and Visually Impaired children for the state of Washington and provides a large amount of training each year for those working with the blind.

## **Assistive Technology Loaner Program Specialized Schools for the Blind (N= 30)**



## **Educator Evaluations of Services and Programs for the Blind**

In the mid-fall of 2006 data collection started in surveying various educational personnel both at the state, district, local education agency, and specialized school for the blind. A survey instrument was developed and electronically disseminated to educators in Washington who specifically worked with children or students who are blind or visually impaired. The survey included the need for services and evaluated current services for students who are blind or visually impaired.

Several important factors arose from the evaluation data collected from the respondents. Vision professionals, educators, and consumers were asked to rate services provided by the various schools and programs that work with students who are blind and visually impaired.

Administrators and vision professionals were asked to rate the following four educational services for students who are blind or visually impaired provided by local school districts and three state agencies. The respondents were then broken into two groups for comparative purposes. The two groups included vision professionals in public school settings and vision professionals at the WSSB.

### **Educational Service Delivery Agency**

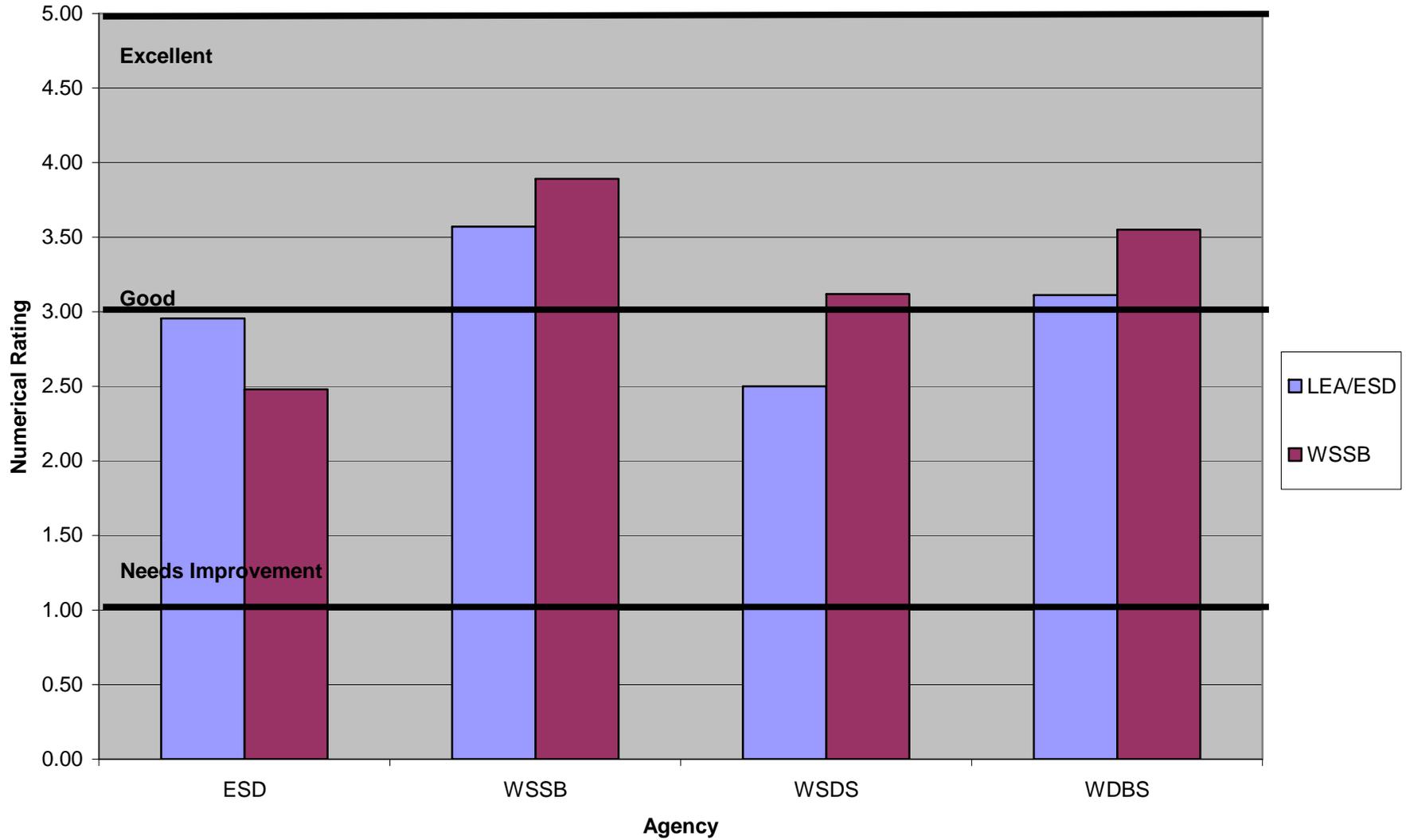
The data analyses resulted in a ranking of the four education providers, Educational School Districts or Local Education Agencies, The Washington State School for the Blind, the Washington Sensory Disability Service, and the Department of Services for the Blind.

Using a Likert rating scale of 1 – Poor to 5 – Excellent, the two groups rated the WSSB the highest and the Department of Services for the Blind was rated second highest. Public school vision professionals around the state rated the services provided by their school districts lower than the services provided by WSSB and rated the services provided by the Washington Sensory Disability Service the lowest.

Educators from WSSB rated the services provided by the ESDs as the lowest, probably basing their response on experiences they have had with students who come into WSSB after having problems in the ESDs or LEAs. These data are representative of the responses one would expect from other specialized schools for the blind.

The primary reasons specialized school educators believe a student enrolls in a specialized school is to 1) learn braille, 2) become proficient with assistive technology, or 3) the local school system cannot meet the service needs of the student. (A copy of the survey instrument is included in the Appendices C and D of this report).

Agency Rankings as perceived by Public School and WSSB Educators  
(n=85)



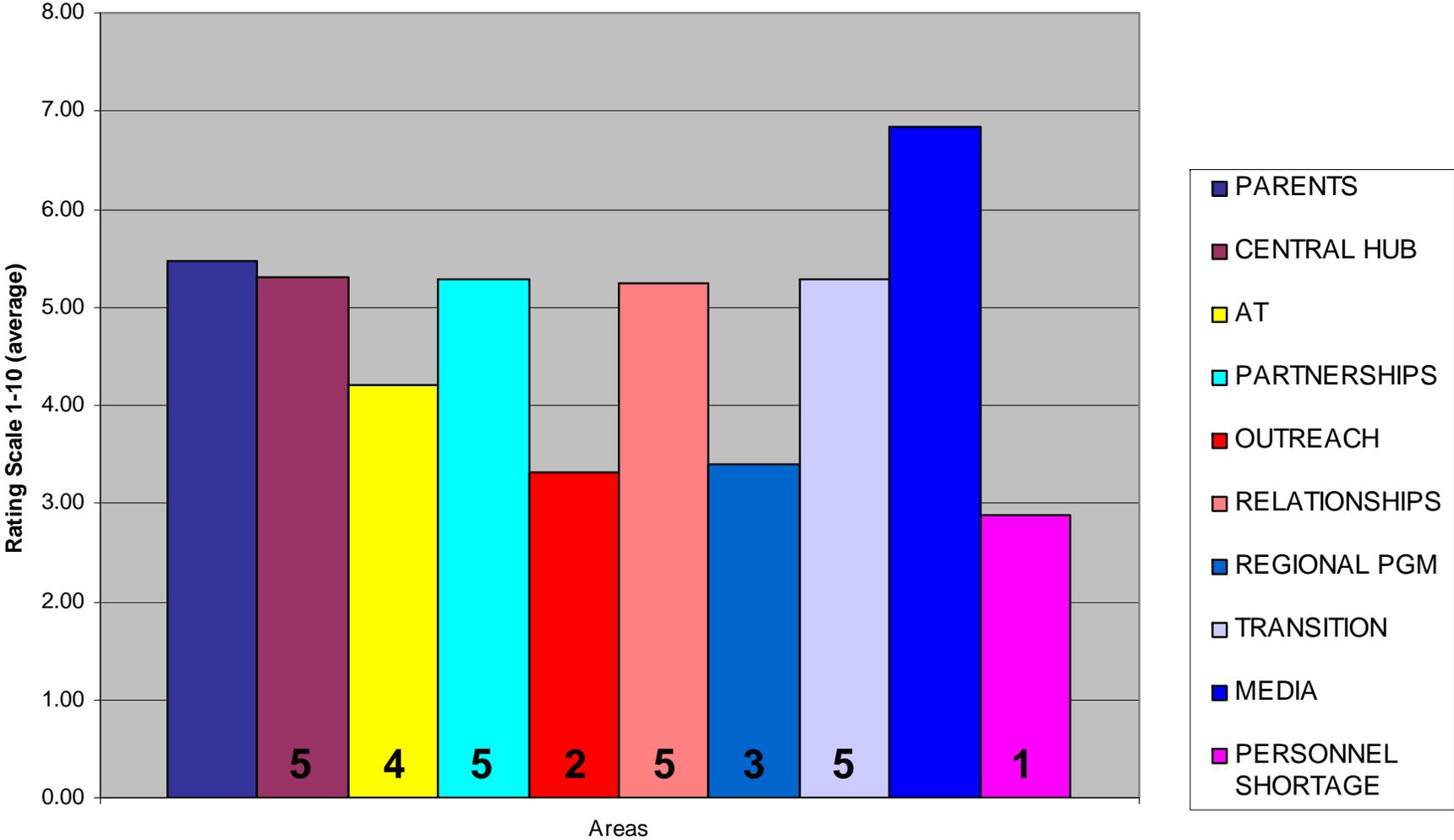
## **Prioritized Needs to Improve Statewide Services for the Blind**

Vision professionals around the state and at the Washington State School for the Blind were asked to prioritize ten issues that they deemed needing improvement in the provision of educational services to student who were blind. The following ten items were rank ordered by importance:

1. Increasing parental involvement in student programming for B/VI students.
2. Identifying Washington State School for the Blind as the central hub for blind/visually impaired service delivery, short-term placement, and outreach coordination.
3. Expanding assistive technology programs and support services in the state
4. Developing effective partnerships with other state agencies for the blind.
5. Expanding statewide outreach services to include early intervention programs, parent infant programs, and itinerant teachers.
6. Enhancing relationships or partnerships with other LEAs/ESDs for service delivery or contractual services.
7. Establishing regional programs to fill the void between itinerant services and services provided by the Washington State School for the Blind.
8. Emphasizing transition or activities of daily living skills for students
9. Shortening the time taken to receive appropriate instructional media for students who are blind or visually impaired.
10. Addressing the shortage of highly qualified personnel by hiring more teachers for the visually impaired and orientation & mobility specialists.

The top prioritized needs as identified by Washington state vision professionals were to address the shortage of vision professionals (question #10). The second most pressing need was to expand outreach services which are related to the shortage of vision professionals (question #5). The third prioritized need was to establish regional programs (question #7). This issue was constantly suggested because of the location of WSSB which is in the most southwestern part of the Washington. The fourth prioritized need was to provide more assistive technology staff, training, and equipment to support the educational needs of students who are blind (question #3). There was a three-way tie for fifth place in that building relationships with ESD and LEAS (question #6), forming more effective partnerships with other agencies (question #4) and identifying WSSB as the central hub for educational vision services (question #2) are all interrelated. It makes logical sense to have one central organization as the hub for services for all children who are blind or visually impaired in that it would provide a lead organization with a core of expertise that could focus on the specialized educational needs that would make interagency and interaction with state educational districts through shared partnerships and relationships easier.

## State Educator Prioritized Needs to Improve Statewide Services for the BVI



## **STUDY SUMMARY**

The following information presented are a result of researching current data available, comparative analyses of specialized programs for the blind and visually impaired, and an evaluation of current and needed services in the state of Washington.

### **Project Summary**

The research project examined, identified, and analyzed the following factors affecting children and young adults who are blind and visually impaired:

- Current educational practices in Washington State for children who are blind, visually impaired, and multiply disabled.
- Best educational practices implemented nationally for students who are blind and visually impaired.
- Services and programs needed to improve or enhance the education and services delivery to students who are blind and visually impaired.
- Highly qualified personnel needs for the state of Washington required for the provision of services as mandate by federal education initiatives (IDEA and NCLB).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENHANCE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS**

### **Best Educational Practices for Students who are Blind**

In Washington, educational services for the blind and visually impaired are provided under the direction of the Office of State Public Instruction and the Governor's office. Students who are blind or visually impaired are educated either directly or indirectly by the Educational School Districts (ESD) and Local Educational Agency (LEA), or by the Washington School for the Blind (WSSB).

The two models used in the instruction of the blind or visually impaired are the itinerant teacher or specialized school model. Each model is unique in the student receive either one-on-one instruction or is taught with a cohort of peers with visual impairments.

In Washington, some rural school districts experience a high turnover of qualified vision professionals and some school districts are provided educational support via Outreach staff from the Washington State School for the Blind. Expansion of the current educational programs in Washington should help provide services to students in rural and underserved areas.

The State of Washington provides excellent educational opportunities for students who are blind or visually impaired, but according to vision professionals in the state, there are some areas that need to be addressed to improve and expand the full-continuum of age-appropriate service, address the bias in high stakes testing, and recruit vision professionals to better serve all children who are blind, visually impaired, or multiply disabled.

The following recommendations should be considered to: 1) improve the identification of students needing vision services, 2) enhance or expand the current educational structure in

place, and 3) address the specialized testing and entire life-spectrum needs of students who are blind and visually impaired.

## **Office of State Public Instruction**

### ***High Stakes Assessments***

High stakes assessments affect all students with disabilities. The Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) was introduced in 1997 as an assessment instrument for children to measure competencies in specific areas. The WASL is administered to students in the 3-8<sup>th</sup> grades and again for students in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

For students with visual impairments problems arise in any assessments when the assessment instrument uses graphics or illustrations to answer questions. The WASL does not incorporate universal testing design specifically developed for students who are blind or visually impaired. Students who are blind and visually impaired are therefore placed at a distinct disadvantage when taking the WASL. With educators knowledgeable about the limitations table, graphs, and figures pose to students who are blind and visually impaired, the Office of State Public Instruction should utilize the expertise available at the Washington State School for the Blind to ensure that fairness and bias are eliminated in testing students who are blind or visually impaired. Interagency cooperation in ensuring that the test is equitable for all students will not only impact students at WSSB, but will impact all students who are blind or visually impaired attending schools in public school settings.

Students who are blind or visually impaired should not be penalized by testing bias and there should be specific training models established to work with administrators and teachers who will be administering the WASL to students who are blind or visually impaired.

### ***Child Count Data***

The national incidence statistic used from IDEA for children who are visually impaired is 0.01% of any states total special education student population. In Washington this would translate into about 1,600 students with visual impairments if the number is derived from the state IDEA Child Count data. The OSPI should examine the classification of students who are classified as visually impaired. The five-year data presented and reported to the federal government under IDEA are not representative of the total number of students who are blind or visually impaired. The Child Count data in 2005 reports 305 children with visual impairments needing special education services under IDEA. Yet, the data available from the American Printing House for the Blind and the Federal Quota Count show that there are over 1,200 blind or visually impaired students receiving at least accessible media services in the state.

Labeling or categorizing students in a disability group is not always ideal, but in the best interest of the educational programs available for the student, appropriate identification of the child's disability leads to better educational programming for the student's special needs.

### ***National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE)/Council of School for the Blind Vision Professional Training***

The Hilton Perkins Foundation funded a project to develop and provide training for special educators working with children who are blind and visually impaired. The National Association

of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) and the Council of Schools for the Blind (COSB) developed a training program to train special educators and administrators regarding the specific educational learning modalities that need to be utilized or considered when working with children who are blind or visually impaired.

Since 2002, approximately 25 states have held NASDSE Blind Vision Professional training for their special educators. The program provides valuable information and workbooks that are visual impairment specific. The Office of State Public Instruction, in conjunction with several other state agencies for the blind, should take a leadership stance on this opportunity and provide the NASDSE training to all special education administrators, directors of special education, and state agencies serving children and youth who are blind or visually impaired.

## **Washington State School for the Blind**

### ***On-campus Enrollment***

Presently, WSSB has an enrollment of about 70 students per year which has remained static over the past five years. With the past five years, student outreach efforts have expanded exponentially. Approximately 60% of the on-campus students are braille readers. Longitudinally, over a 20-year period, residential student enrollment has remained level due to several factors such as available and ample housing for students and compliance by WSSB to maintain appropriate levels of student/teacher and student/residential staff ratios.

In 2005, the enrollment at the Washington State School for the Blind was approximately 38 residential students and 28 day students. Almost 50 percent of the students enrolled at WSSB were in high school. Students revolve in and out of WSSB throughout the school year so enrollment tends to vary from 65 – 75 students per year in the on-campus program.

### ***Outreach Students***

Students served by the WSSB Outreach staff have increased to serving over 600 students on a monthly basis. Outreach professionals, teachers of the visually impaired and orientation and mobility specialists, provide vision-related services as itinerant teachers serving many of the ESD and local LEAs. More outreach staff should be hired under cooperative agreements with OSPI or ESDs to provide more intensive services for students who live in underserved areas.

### ***Academic and Residential Components***

Both the academic and residential components of the WSSB provide students with educational opportunities to excel. Students attending WSSB on average attend 3.1 years before they either complete school or return to their ESDs/LEAs. Many high schools students take classes at the local high school or Clark College and are mainstreamed in the local school.

The residential component provides students the opportunity to learn daily living skills. The students eat both breakfast and dinner in their dorm cottage. For the older students, they plan and cook their own meals and do household chores.

Several factors that were discussed and that might need to be addressed in the future:

- 1) More support staff are needed to meet the state-mandated and school-initiated programs.

- 2) Teachers need training in electronic IEPs
- 3) There is a mix of academic and alternative diploma students in the same classrooms, with the state focus on NCLB and high states assessments, this area might need to be explored more fully.
- 4) Expanding the school year (ESY) so that Activities of Daily Living and Independent Living Skills can be expanded upon as part of the student's IEP.
- 5) Specific training is needed in working with students with autism. The CDC recently quoted a statistic that one out of 150 children is now being diagnosed with autism (CDC Report, 2007). Currently at WSSB there are 18 students with visual impairments and autistic like behaviors. Staff training is imperative when working with this population. There is an excellent resource out there for this population in a text prepared by Marilyn and Jay Gense. [Gense M.H. and Gense, D. J. (2005). **Autism Spectrum Disorders and Visual Impairments: Meeting Student's Learning Needs**, AFB Press].
- 6) WSSB and OSPI need to work more closely together in the development of alternative testing formats or reducing the visual bias of the WASL.
- 7) Additional dormitories or an independent living cottage needs to be built to house the LIFTT students. There needs to be a separation between younger students and those who have completed school

### ***Assistive Technology***

The students attending WSSB are offered a unique opportunity in terms of the assistive technology (AT) and experience they gain from using the newest technology. One of more noted aspects of WSSB was the assistive technology expertise and support of AT in the local ESDs. Educators around the state expressed that the AT support they received from WSSB was outstanding. The educators also expressed a need for more technology training. The expansion of the AT aspect opens additional possibilities to provide more outreach services to the ESDs. Consideration should be made to hire additional staff members who can work closely and consult with the ESDs.

### ***Community Involvement***

The WSSB has a close interaction within the local community. The school provides a pre-school for the local community on campus. The school also holds events that are open to the general public on its campus facilities. The campus is also unique in that it houses an on-campus police department for the Vancouver City Police. This aspect of the WSSB provides a positive image and promotes the programs among the local community close to campus.

### ***Best Practices Demonstrated by WSSB***

The Washington State School for the Blind is one of the model "environmentally-green" educational programs in the United States. Over the past five years, innovative programming such as Project LIFTT, the Digital Learning Commons, and the Digital Learning Portal for the Blind has been implemented to enhance learning and opportunities for individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

WSSB has focused on an environmentally "green" approach. The Ogden Resource Center is a prime example of the focus towards ecological campus design. Another example of the

ecologically-minded approach is the use of hybrid cars for campus staff and for all the Outreach vision professionals.

### **Interagency Collaboration and Service Delivery**

Interagency coordination, especially in service delivery of low-incidence disability groups, is vital. State agencies and organizations that form a collaborative partnership include:

- Washington Office of State Public Instruction
- Washington Department of Services for the Blind
- Washington Sensory Disability Services
- Washington State School for the Blind

There needs to be a state agency from which all educational services for the blind and visually impaired are coordinated or directed. For federal and state reporting and compliance and public education issues, this solely resides with the OSPI.

For matters involving the movement of students from school to postsecondary opportunities and work, the Department of Blind Services does an outstanding job of working with other agencies to provide vocational rehabilitation services.

In matters of facilitating and coordinating vision professional services and programs, such as itinerant teachers, assistive technology, and teacher/paraprofessional training there needs to be a central hub and educational leader. As an expert and leader in providing a wide range of educational and program services, WSSB should be identified as the state-wide resource for educational programming affecting students who are blind and visually impaired. Clearly defining the role of WSSB as the vision resource in Washington is especially important in low incidence disability groups and where resources and personnel are limited.

### **Department of Social and Health Services**

#### ***Early Intervention and Parent Infant Programs***

The recent increase in Outreach Services in many states has been the expansion of the Infant and Toddler/Early Intervention program (ITEIP). Funded by federal monies from IDEA, Early intervention services in Washington State have fallen under the Department of Social and Health Services and for infants who are blind, visually impaired, or multiply disabled, under the Adult Vocational Programs of the Department of Services for the Blind (DSB). It is imperative that early intervention and parent infant programs focus on providing early diagnosis and family resources for children birth through three years old. The onset of vision loss at an early age can dramatically impact families if they have no where to get information.

Early identification and intervention should be addressed to include all infants and toddlers qualifying for blind and visually impaired services across the state. Washington has the need for birth through three services. Intensive services for birth through three are not being provided in terms that these are not mandatory services in Washington.

Under IDEA, early intervention services include, but are not limited to the following:

- Assistive technology
- Audiology
- Family training, counseling, and home visits

- Health services
- Medical services only for diagnostic or evaluation purposes
- Nursing services
- Occupational therapy
- Physical therapy
- Psychological services
- Service coordination (family resource coordination)
- Social work services
- Special instruction
- Speech language pathology
- Transportation and related costs
- Vision services

In many states, Parent-Infant programs and Early Intervention are coordinated through specialized schools for the blind for those children needing vision services. The state of Washington should follow models of similar programs in other states, in the development of early identification and parent-infant services. Currently, these services are provided under the Department of Services for the Blind which is an adult vocational rehabilitation provider, not providers of special education.

If a set of services is to be provided to specific groups of individuals needing specialized needs, the fragmentation or separation of services has a tendency to interrupt services or does not provide what is a needed set of seamless service delivery, especially as a child matriculates from a medical service provision model into a public education model. Thus, it would greatly enhance services for infants, toddlers, and children who are blind, visually impaired, or multiply disabled to have one agency provide services from birth through 21 years old thus reducing the chances of children falling through the service delivery cracks.

Currently, itinerant or outreach vision professionals can provide consultation for children birth through three years old, if the educational school district (ESD) has these services. Establishing a closer collaborative effort between agencies in identifying earlier identification of developmental disabilities is needed. It would make sense to have the WSSB with experience in visual impairment and blindness should the lead agency in early identification and parent-infant programs, especially when it involves infants or toddlers who are blind, visually impaired, multiply disabled, or developmentally disabled.

## **Department of Services for the Blind**

### ***Transition from School to Adult Life (LIFTT)***

The collaborative on-campus transition service for school completers is a partnership between WSSB and DSB. Students who are blind and visually impaired can attend the on campus where they learn independent living skills and focus on work experiences and career exploration under the guidance of a vocational rehabilitation counselor. Currently the LIFTT program students reside on the third floor of the WSSB administration building. Ideally, having an independent living facility on campus or living in a home in the local community close to the school would greatly augment the focus of promoting independent living for students.

## **Washington State Sensory Disability Services**

### ***Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired***

It is evident that vision professionals throughout the state and consumers from both the Washington Council of the Blind and the Washington Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind have questioned the viability of the Washington State Sensory Disability Service. From focus group discussions, many did not believe that the WSDS meeting the needs nor expectations of the stakeholders who are blind and visually impaired. With one vision specialist working in WSDS, there appears to be very limited in the numbers of student who are blind and visually impaired that could be served by such a small program. Examining the cost and salary expenditures for this one position, the state would be better served eliminate the one position, turn the funding and operations of the Instructional Resource Center over to WSSB, and hire additional staff to provide more services for the blind and visually impaired.

### ***Instructional Resource Center for the Blind***

The Instructional Resource Center for the Blind provides a valuable service to all students who are blind and visually in Washington State. The IRCB provides braille and large print materials to the EDS and has in 2005 produced over 113 braille textbooks transcribed and 169 large print textbook productions. From the braille master prints the IRCB reproduced 38 textbooks. From the large print masters, the IRCB reproduced 103 large print school textbooks.

The Braille Project at Washington Correction Center for Women contracts with ten inmates for braille transcription and other transcriptionists (including two former inmates) to meet the braille needs for students who are blind. Through Braille Access, the IRCB also produced 152 WASL assessment booklets to the local school districts.

It is apparent that the primary connector between the student with a visual impairment, the local school districts, and special education professionals is the Ogden Resource Center/Instructional Resource Center for the Blind at the Washington State School for the Blind (WSSB). The current administrative oversight agency is the WSSB for the IRCB with some funding support coming from the Washington Sensory Disability Service (WSDS). The daily oversight and administration of the IRCB is handled by a director who reports to the Outreach Director at the WSSB.

The logic of having another separate state agency in another part of the state administering a crucial program for all Washington students for the blind and visually on the campus of a specialized educational program for the blind needs to be revisited. All the work of the IRCB and their association on the WSSB campus should be examined and realigned with the educational needs of the students. Thus, it is deemed important that the current administrative structure and reporting agency be changed from WSDS and that the IRC for the Blind, located on the WSSB campus report and receive direct funding through WSSB.

### **Expanding Outreach Services and Personnel**

Outreach services have been being provided to ESDs from the Outreach vision professionals from WSSB. The number of students served by vision professionals has been estimated at around 600 students with visual impairments per month. While this does not portray the total

number of students served on an annual basis, these data are higher than the number of students identified by OSPI through their annual Child Count Data.

Outreach efforts and service coordination through WSDS have been minimal and their only role (as reported from educators) has been providing an in-service training. Since WSDS was established, the number of cooperative agreements with ESDs for contractual services has decreased for vision professionals. Thus, the role of WSDS as a vision service provider needs to be examined more fully.

The Outreach Program also provides a Low Vision Clinic to assess the vision needs of children and adults on the WSSB campus. The Low Vision Clinic has a facility on the WSSB campus that is funded by the Lions Club. Annually, approximately 90-120 low vision evaluations are conducted in partnership with Pacific University-School of Optometry.

### ***Establishing Regional Programs***

In the past few years, the number of educational cooperatives between ESDs has decreased for itinerant vision personnel. Thus, in some pockets of the state, students with visual impairments may be receiving intermittent rather than continuous vision services.

Many states have established regional programs to better provide more services to students in a local area. One of the primary problems with providing itinerant services is the amount of time vision professionals have to spend in traveling from one school to another school which results in less time spent in direct instruction. The establishment of regionally-established services provided by WSSB and associated with the ESDs would help provide services for students in rural or hard to reach areas such as the San Juan Islands. This also would be helpful in having strategically located experts in early intervention and parent-infant programs.

### **Increasing Number of Vision Professionals in Washington**

More needs to be done to hire or train vision professionals and to retain them in these fields. This is especially true in rural areas in which personnel shortages or personnel turnover is the greatest. Finding or locating local individuals willing to pursue a vision professional degree might help retain a professional in the local area.

WSSB has an agreement with Portland State University to provide the WSSB campus as an internship site for the Teacher Preparation in Visual Impairment program. WSSB also has higher education ties with Clark College, Washington State University – Vancouver, Stephen F. Austin University, the University of Northern Colorado, and the University of Washington.

With a shortage of vision professionals nationwide, innovative programs need to be established in Washington that will recruit and provide training for vision professionals. The approach of “grow your own” recruitment strategy is a model that works in the health care profession, especially to increase the number of nurses who live in rural areas. This can be done by providing scholarships and working with several distance education programs available around the United States. Teacher prep programs are available through a consortium of colleges and universities such as, the University of Arizona, Texas Tech, Florida State University, and the Pennsylvania College of Optometry (PCO).

OSPI and WSSB should focus on hiring more personnel with dual-certifications. Several programs around the United States are now producing graduates as TVIs and O&Ms. Graduates with dual-certification are becoming more in demand and the pay scales for dually-certified vision professionals should be commensurate with their additional educations. Essentially, schools and districts hiring dually-certified vision professionals might not need to hire both a TVI and O&M.

### **Promoting Assistive Technology and Digital Learning**

A strong emphasis has been placed on assistive technology for students who are blind or visually impaired at WSSB. Assistive technology helps students who are blind or visually impaired meet the educational and vocational outcomes expected of other students. At WSSB, a strong emphasis is placed on technology. The staff and assistive technology equipment available for all students at WSSB and through outreach efforts and training is among the best in the United States.

Interagency collaboration and cooperation between WSSB and the DSB has resulted in the purchase of newer technology which is made available to students around the state. With the introduction of new technology, additional teacher training is required and an increase in assistive technology staff to meet the needs of all students both in the public schools and at WSSB.

Throughout the state, parents of children who are blind and visually impaired have rated the assistive technology aspect of WSSB as impressive in the education of their child. Another technological aspect of WSSB is that parents, who might live in other parts of the state, are able to attend their child's IEP meeting via video teleconferencing. This is important in that parents are involved in the educational programming and services for their child.

WSSB is also a member of the Digital Learning Portal for the Blind that allows students who are blind and visually impaired educational opportunities with other public school peers. The Digital Learning Portal for the Blind is unique to the state of Washington and is an excellent example of the involvement of WSSB with a consortium of five organizations (Carroll Center for the Blind – Boston, MA, Found for Blind Children, Gibney Family Foundation – Phoenix, AZ, Hadley School for the Blind – Winnetka, IL and the Washington State School for the Blind – Vancouver, WA) in expanding and electronically enhancing the educational programs for students throughout the state.

Additionally, WSSB is also a member of the Washington Digital Learning Commons (DLC). Established in 2003, the DLC provides high school students and teachers with an on-line learning community. The DLC offers classes and training opportunities to students who are blind and visually impaired. Starting in 2006-2007, WSSB will offer on-line class options through the DLC to all high school students in Washington who are blind and visually impaired. WSSB is committed to expanding the digital learning opportunities for all students in Washington by hiring a Distance Learning Coordinator at WSSB.

### **Future Educational and Service Delivery Considerations**

There is no true comparison between the educational programming differences of specialized schools for the blind and public schools. Given the lack of sufficient numbers of qualified

personnel to serve and teach children who are deaf or blind, a specialized school placement provides a viable educational and cost-effective choice for parents. It is imperative that early identification and intervention should be expanded to ensure that all infants and toddlers qualifying for blind and visually impaired services across the state are identified.

The continuum of placement options should be considered the best practice for students who are blind or visually impaired. In some areas of the state, services for students who are blind or visually impaired are limited or non-existent. This may be due to various factors which include a shortage of qualified vision professionals, the need of the student to receive more intensive training (such as reading braille), or because student's home is in a remote region of the state.

Regardless of placement, educational programs for students should be provided by qualified vision professionals and teachers. Best practices are sometimes difficult to measure, but successful outcomes (such as school completion or employment) are a good measure of overall best educational practices.

The WSIPP study (2006) proposed two policy options from its study of the Washington State School for the Deaf and the Washington State School for the Blind.

***1). Maintain the schools' instructional, residential, and outreach programs while considering capital funding requests and changes in governance structure***

***2). Scale back school operations with partial or full closure of one or both schools.***

A third option should be strongly considered that was not presented by the WSIPP Report would be:

**3). Maintain the current school's instructional, residential, and outreach programs, increase funding to support the hiring of additional outreach personnel to work with the more rural ESDs, and maintain the existing governing structure.**

This option, not presented as an alternative under the 2006 WSIPP study, seems to be the most logical in terms of providing specialized services for a low-incidence population. It is also more cost effective to support and develop further educational programs to serve those unidentified students who appear on the APH Federal Quota Count, but do not appear in the State Child Count. The WSIPP statement from their recommendations states that *"the full extent of the impacts on local schools and individual students is unknown"* (WSIPP, 2006, p. 6).

Mann (2006) in the WSIPP literature review cites that collaboration between local schools and specialized schools is increasing, leading to a more seamless set of services available for students who are blind or visually impaired. As these two educational settings work together, there has been an increase in 1) transferring between the settings, 2) expanding the educational practice of short-term placements to work identified student needs, and 3) more mainstreaming efforts between public and specialized schools for academic students.

Also, Washington Sensory Disability Service only has one vision professional out of a staff of 17 working on vision-related services. Fiscal governmental responsibility should examine the need

for the vision component of WSDS and move that position to WSSB. It also does not appear to be fiscally-sound management practices to have a state program (the IRCB) located at WSSB and associated by proximity and personnel supervision administered by another program in the middle of the state with only one employee. By appearances using overhead monies as a flow-through agency to support an almost non-existent program at WSDS reduces the amount of monies that should be provided directly to the IRCB and it also reduces the amount of monies that could be used for direct media services for students who are blind or visually impaired.

If the issue is primarily about cost, then the state must be prepared to have the ESDs shoulder the burden of finding and hiring highly qualified staff. If public school were the only option available, then the students would not be able to receive additional expanded core curriculum studies that focus on social skills, activities of daily living, and orientation and mobility skills because of the core content expectations within the classroom. Expanded core curriculum means time added on to the school day to focus on these important life skills. Thus, the full-continuum of placement options would not exist for children who are blind or visually impaired.

Examining other issues about the cost of education for low incidence groups, the WSIPP study stated that "*Potential expenditure savings could be offset by requests from the local districts for supplemental funding if students require exceptionally cost-intensive services or an out-of-state residential placement*" (WSIPP, 2006, p .6). In their own words, the possibility of expenditure savings could in essence cost more. Add on to this the possibility that the student might have to attend school completely out of state which could pose a major imposition on any family.

Given all these variables, specialized schools for the blind serve a small segment of the public school population of students who are visually impaired. These students need a variety of specialized educational options and a residential placement is one of the options that should continue to be available. Providing adequate numbers of qualified vision professionals in all public school settings will not occur unless more federal and state funds are provided to higher education programs who are graduating individuals trained to teach and work with individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

The Washington State School for the Blind is one of the leaders in the education of children and students who are blind and visually impaired. The opportunity to expand services through regional programming and the use of the distance learning and digital portal teaching model will further enhance the full-spectrum of positive educational outcomes for students who are blind or visually impaired.

The various findings provide foundation for a list of recommendations that are intended to help the state move in a positive direction for students who are blind or visually impaired. There are several factors that need to be considered and should be implemented to improve and expand services for parents and families of infants, toddlers, and students who are blind, visually impaired, or multiply disabled.

- Early identification and intervention should be evaluated and aligned to provide a seamless set of services as they move from a medical service delivery model into and

educational program that includes all infants and toddlers qualifying for vision-related services across the state.

- A stronger commitment towards strengthening family involvement is needed, including family-oriented services such as parental education and counseling throughout the child's education.
- In order to have effective early intervention programs, increased family involvement, and viable services for children who are blind or visually impaired, early and appropriate services must be brought closer to where these children reside through either regional centers or via cooperative agreements with related educational entities.
- The roles of WSSB as statewide resources need to be more clearly defined and include proactive responsibilities such as tracking all students who are blind or visually impaired in the state and assisting the Office of State Public Instruction in meeting their needs.
- WSDS needs to develop clearer philosophies of service and purpose for the blind or solely focus on deafness-related issues. It is thought that because of the minimal services currently provided by WSDS through the vision component either be eliminated and moved under the supervision of the WSSB.
- More needs to be done to retrain current vision professionals in the state and to focus on recruiting individuals to train and education them as O&Ms or TVIs so that they can help reduce personnel shortages. Using the medical nursing model of "growing your own" and providing financial or educational opportunities to meet shortage needs might need to be considered. This is especially important in rural areas of Washington where finding or maintaining itinerant personnel are the greatest.
- Increased funding and hiring assistive technology staff throughout the state so that students who are blind and visually impaired can be held to the same academic standards as other Washington students. This also includes reducing the visual bias and visual limitations posed by high stakes testing such as the WASL.
- Students who are blind or visually impaired have additional learning needs. This can be accomplished through focusing on the National Agenda, which focuses on the expanded-core curriculum for students who are blind or visually impaired, and the extended-academic year.

In closing, the data presented in this study is consistent with other specialized schools for the blind in the United States. Every state's school for the blind programs varies in degree and scope of services provided to infants, students, and family members. Specialized schools also vary in funding sources and the diversity of the student population served. In addition, specialized schools for the blind and visually impaired in the United States vary in their interaction and role in the public education of students with disabilities. The role of the specialized school should be as an educational entity and resource to students, parents, family members, the general public, and public and private school special educators and teachers.

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# **APPENDICES**

## **Appendix A**

### **DATA SOURCES**

- Washington State Institute of Public Policy (WSIPP Study)
- National Center for Special Education Finance
- American Institute for Research – Kentucky Study
- Washington State Department of Education - Child Count
- Northwest Association for Colleges and Schools (Accreditation)
- Washington State School for the Blind - Student Information Database
- Washington State Instructional Resource Library of the Blind
- Community Services of the Blind and Partially Sighted - Seattle, WA
- Washington AER Chapter
- Washington Council of the Blind
- National Federation of the Blind of Washington
- Washington State Department of Special Education
- Washington State Department of Services of the Blind (DSB)
- Council of Schools of the Blind (COSB)
- American Printing House of the Blind – Federal Registry
- Independent data collected from State Schools of the Blind
- Pacific University College of Optometry (PUCO)
- Washington Braille Book and Talking Library

## Appendix B. WSSB and Specialized School Comparison Summary

	<b>WSSB</b>	<b>Specialized School For The Blind</b>
<b>Unique School Features and Characteristics</b>	Orientation and mobility Braille Instruction Social interaction and independent living Specialized technology Transition	Orientation and Mobility Braille Instruction Independent Living Skills Specialized technology Parent Infant Programs Regional Centers Physical and Occupational Therapy Parent Infant Programs Early Intervention Instructional Resource Libraries
<b>Five-year Enrollment trend</b>	Static with increasing outreach students	Static with increasing outreach
<b>Geographic range</b>	Statewide	National
<b>Student grade levels</b>	K-12	K-12
<b>Student gender</b>	More boys than girls	Equal numbers of boys and girls
<b>Student ethnicity compared with statewide student population</b>	Proportionately more white students	Various depending on region of the country
<b>Student residential status</b>	On-campus during the week and returned home on the weekends	Live on campus and go home most weekends. Some schools only send students home once a month
<b>Student additional disabilities</b>	Over half have disabilities in addition to vision loss	More than half served in the specialized setting have additional disabilities. Some schools are almost exclusively for students with multiple disabilities.
<b>Student length of stay</b>	Three and a half years, remaining steady	Three to five years. Average five and a half years.
<b>Outreach program</b>	Operated for 25 years and expanding; currently nearly 600 services/month. Mostly self-sustaining via fees-for-services.	Outreach services have been expanded to include parent/infant programs and itinerant teacher services. Services have increase over 300% in the past five years.

	<b>WSSB</b>	<b>Specialized School For The Blind</b>
<b>Governance structure</b>	Independent state agency reporting directly to the Governor's Office overseen by a Board of Trustees	Varies from reporting directly to the Governor's Office, Board of Regents (Higher Education) or state Department of Education. Only two schools reports to another agency, Department of Health and Human Services (North Carolina and Illinois).
<b>Personnel Shortages</b>	There is a significant shortage of qualified vision professionals throughout the state	Nationally, educators in specialized schools estimated that in the next five years there is a projected shortage of 800 Teachers of the Visually Impaired and 430 Orientation and Mobility Specialists
<b>Educational Costs</b>	<p>WSIPP estimated WSSB costs ranging from \$24,000 for day students and \$26,000 for the residential component. These data are skewed in that the cost per student is based upon a six-hour school day, not a 24-hour IEP school day or the additional medical costs associated with a specialized school.</p> <p>Educational costs in the public school the students would not receive the quality or expertise of services if the school system had to hire additional vision and medical staff for the students.</p>	<p>Estimated cost per residential student can range from \$25,000 per year ranging upwards over \$100,000. The cost per student varies depending upon enrollment and the presence of additional disabilities.</p> <p>Data vary from region to region. Primarily the basic cost factor different from a public school are the 24-hour IEP school day and extended day staff needed to oversee the students 24/7. Many schools have full-time medical staff (nurses, PTs, OTs, and psychologists), which are not necessarily provided in local public schools.</p>
<b>Student School Completion Outcomes</b>	School completion rates are similar to other specialized schools for the blind	Around 51% of the students attending specialized schools receive an academic diploma. An estimated 34% receive a certificate of attendance
<b>Dropout Rates</b>	At WSSB, no students dropped out of school in the past five years	At specialized schools for the blind, the dropout rate is 0% compared to the national public school average for students with visual impairments which is around 20%

	<b>WSSB</b>	<b>Specialized School For The Blind</b>
<b>Outreach Services</b>	WSSB provides vision services to nine public schools students for every on-campus student served.	Specialized schools for the blind are serving approximately three public school students with visual impairments for every one on-campus student served.
<b>Distance Education</b>	WSSB is a leader in the blindness field with the Digital Learning Portal and Digital Learning Commons.	Specialized schools are working with distance education for staff but many have not embraced nor recognized the value-added educational opportunities of the digital classroom for students.
<b>Assistive Technology</b>	WSSB is recognized as the primary resource for assistive technology for the blind in the state.	Specialized schools nationwide focus on assistive technology but only 50% have equipment loaner programs for the LEAs in their respective state.
<b>High Stakes Assessments</b>	WSSB and all students who are blind or visually impaired are affected by the visual bias presented when taking the WASL.	Many states have alternative media formats for graphics and extended test times to reduce or eliminate the visual biases associated with high stakes testing. Most specialized schools for the blind have assigned staff to work in a collaborative and cooperative effort with their state departments of education to address and screen out any potential visual bias in testing.
<b>Student Safety</b>	WSSB provides a safe environment with the Vancouver Police Department having a remote police station located directly on campus. On campus all staff are issued security cards to gain access to any facility. These data are tracked in databases for record.	Student safety is a concern for all specialized schools. Some campuses have full-time security guards, have installed security cameras and monitors, and have implemented other child safety measures.

**Appendix C**  
**Evaluation of Educational Services and Programs for the  
Blind and Visually Impaired in Washington State**

**Washington State Department of Education**  
**Directors/Coordinators/Teachers of Special Education Services**

**September 2006**

**1. Please identify the Washington ESD or LEA in which you work.**

*(Identify your LEA, ESD, or school)* \_\_\_\_\_

**2. In your opinion, rate the following services/programs provided for  
children and students who are blind or visually impaired in  
Washington. (Place an X in the box next to the number you rate)**

a. The local ESD, LEA, or school in which you work.

<b>Needs Improvement</b>		<b>Good</b>		<b>Excellent</b>
1___	2___	3___	4___	5___

b. The Washington State School for the Blind

<b>Needs Improvement</b>		<b>Good</b>		<b>Excellent</b>
1___	2___	3___	4___	5___

c. The Washington Sensory Disability Services (WSDS)

<b>Needs Improvement</b>		<b>Good</b>		<b>Excellent</b>
1___	2___	3___	4___	5___

d. The Washington State Department of Services for the Blind (DSB) –  
Child and Family/Transition Services

<b>Needs Improvement</b>		<b>Good</b>		<b>Excellent</b>
1___	2___	3___	4___	5___

**3. Rank order (prioritize one through ten) the top 10 areas that you believe the state of Washington needs to address to improve statewide services and programs for students who are blind or visually impaired.**

*1 = the top priority, 2 = a higher level priority, 3 = a high level priority, 4 = a medium-high level priority, 5 = a medium level priority, 6 = a medium-low level priority, 7 = a low level priority, 8 = a lower level priority, 9 = the lowest level priority, 10 = not a priority at all*

- Increasing parental involvement in student programming for B/VI students.
- Identifying Washington State School for the Blind as the central hub for blind/visually impaired service delivery, short-term placement, and outreach coordination.
- Expanding assistive technology programs and support services in the state
- Developing effective partnerships with other state agencies for the blind.
- Expanding statewide outreach services to include early intervention programs, parent-infant programs, and itinerant teachers.
- Enhancing relationships or partnerships with other LEAs/ESDs for service delivery or contractual services.
- Establishing regional programs to fill the void between itinerant services and services provided by the Washington State School for the Blind.
- Emphasizing transition or activities of daily living skills for students
- Shortening the time taken to receive appropriate instructional media for students who are blind or visually impaired.
- Addressing the shortage of highly qualified personnel by hiring more teachers for the visually impaired and orientation & mobility specialists.

**Additional area not addressed (be specific)** \_\_\_\_\_

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**4. Please provide the number of the students in your school district or school who have vision-related problems that require specialized services.**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Blind
- \_\_\_\_\_ Low Vision
- \_\_\_\_\_ Deaf/Blind
- \_\_\_\_\_ Vision problems along with another disability

**5. Does your school district contract for vision services?**

*(Place an X in one of the boxes)*

- Yes
- No

**6. Please identify the services your school district/school contracts for with private service providers or the Washington State School for the Blind Outreach Services. (Place an X in all that apply)**

- Teacher of the Visually Impaired
- Orientation and Mobility Specialists
- Assistive Technology Specialists
- Braille Transcription
- Nemeth Transcription

**7. Within your school district, please identify the number of vision professionals employed within your school system or district. (Include paraprofessionals who work with students with visual impairments) Also, please indicate whether these staff have passed the B.L.U.E. Exam.**

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Passed BLUE Exam</u>
Teachers of the Visually Impaired	_____	_____
Orientation and Mobility Specialists	_____	_____
Assistive Technology Specialists	_____	_____
Braille Transcriptionists	_____	_____
Nemeth Transcriptionists	_____	_____
Paraprofessionals (Teacher Aides)	_____	_____

**8. Assuming additional funding were available and additional vision professionals could be hired to provide services to students in your school district, how many vision professionals would need to be hired – in addition to your current vision professionals?**

Teachers of the Visually Impaired	_____	(number needed)
Orientation and Mobility Specialists	_____	(number needed)
Assistive Technology Specialists	_____	(number needed)
Braille Transcriptionists	_____	(number needed)
Nemeth Transcriptionists	_____	(number needed)
Paraprofessionals (Teacher Aides)	_____	(number needed)

**9. Identify the top three areas that need immediate attention in the State of Washington that will help in providing quality services for students who are blind and visually impaired.**

- #1 \_\_\_\_\_
- #2 \_\_\_\_\_
- #3 \_\_\_\_\_

**10. What services do you receive from the Washington State School for - the Blind?**

- Instructional Resource Library**
- Outreach Services (Itinerant Consultative Services)**
- LIFTT Transition Services**
- Short-term Placement**
- Assistive Technology**
- Workshops & Training**
- Sports Camp**
- YES 1 (Youth Employment Services)**
- Summer Programs**
- Braille Access/Transcriber Services**
- Educational Program Assistance**
- Low Vision Clinic Screening**
- Other Services (please identify)**\_\_\_\_\_

**11. What services do you receive from the Washington Sensory Disability Services?**

- Outreach Services (Itinerant Services)**
- LIFTT Transition Services**
- Assistive Technology**
- Workshops & Training**
- Other Services (please identify)**\_\_\_\_\_

**12. Other comments and suggestions that you feel are important in the delivery of services for the blind and visually impaired in Washington.**

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**Name (Optional):**

**Email (Optional):**

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND CONSIDERATION. THE INFORMATION SHARED IN THIS STUDY WILL HOPEFULLY HELP IDENTIFY AND IMPROVE EDUCATIONAL AND PLACEMENT SERVICES FOR ALL CHILDREN AND STUDENTS WHO ARE BLIND OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED IN WASHINGTON STATE.**

**If you have any questions or concerns, please feel to email me**

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**Appendix D**  
**Evaluation of Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired**  
**in Washington State**

**WSSB Survey**  
**June 15-19, 2006**

**1. Please identify the WSSB department in which you work.**

- Administration
- Academic/Vocational
- Outreach
- Residential
- Instructional Resource Center
- Foundation
- Other

**2. In your opinion, rate the services/programs provided for children and students who are blind or visually impaired in Washington.**

a. Washington State School for the Blind

<b>Needs</b>			<b>Good</b>		<b>Excellent</b>
<b>Improvement</b>					
1	2	3	4	5	

b. Washington Department of Education/Office of Public Instruction

<b>Needs</b>			<b>Good</b>		<b>Excellent</b>
<b>Improvement</b>					
1	2	3	4	5	

c. Washington Department of Social and Health Services/Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

<b>Needs</b>			<b>Good</b>		<b>Excellent</b>
<b>Improvement</b>					
1	2	3	4	5	

d. Washington State Department of Services for the Blind

<b>Needs</b>			<b>Good</b>		<b>Excellent</b>
<b>Improvement</b>					
1	2	3	4	5	

**3. Rank order (prioritize) the top 10 areas that the Washington State School for the Blind needs to address to improve statewide services and programs for the B/VI.**

**1=top priority .....5= important .....10=least important**

- Increasing parental involvement in student programs
- Emphasis that WSSB is the service delivery hub for the B/VI
- Expanding assistive technology programs and services
- Developing effective partnerships with other state agencies
- Expanding outreach services to include early intervention, parent-infant programs, and itinerant teaching
- Enhancing relationships and programs with LEAs/ESDs
- Increasing short-term placements
- Emphasis on life or activity of daily living skills for students
- Strengthening residential programming
- Addressing the need for highly qualified personnel or shortages

**4. Identify three areas that need immediate attention by the Washington State School for the Blind in providing quality services for students who are blind and visually impaired.**

**#1 .** \_\_\_\_\_

**#2.** \_\_\_\_\_

**#3.** \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Other comments and suggestions that need to be considered.**