

Contact: Diana Gonzalez

**REQUEST TO CONTACT IOWA DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT REGARDING
FEASIBILITY STUDY**

Actions Requested: Consider approval for the Board of Regents Executive Director to (1) contact the Iowa Department of Management regarding conducting a feasibility study to examine the administrative and programmatic functions of the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School and the Iowa School for Deaf as required by Iowa Code §270.10 and (2) take appropriate next steps.

Executive Summary: The Iowa School for the Deaf and Iowa Educational Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired operate under the direction of the Board of Regents as two separate entities to provide needed educational services to students who are deaf or hard of hearing and students who are blind or visually impaired. In order to plan for future effective and efficient operation of services for students with sensory impairments, it is necessary to determine the feasibility of examining the administrative and programmatic functions of the two schools. This request addresses the Board of Regents Strategic Plan priorities to provide “educational excellence and impact; and economic development and vitality.” It also addresses Goal #8 of the Board’s Strategic Plan – “Iowa’s public universities and special schools shall be increasingly efficient and productive.”

Background:

- ◇ Services provided by the Iowa School for the Deaf. The Iowa School for the Deaf (ISD), which was founded in 1854 and moved to its current location in 1870, is one component of the continuum of services in Iowa for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. ISD serves more than 100 Iowa students each year on its campus in Council Bluffs through a combination of residential and day school attendance; it also serves approximately 10 students from Nebraska under a contract for service arrangement.

ISD uses a language rich model for students who are deaf or hard of hearing with a focus on the language of the student and emphasis on the importance of American Sign Language. Strategic initiatives center on language acquisition and achievement in areas of the core curriculum. Services to Iowa students who are deaf or hard of hearing are also provided through the local school districts and area education agencies.

- ◇ Services provided by the Iowa Educational Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Service delivery is centralized on the campus of the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School in Vinton which was established in 1852 and moved to its present location in 1862. Each year, Iowa Educational Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired serves more than 500 students statewide through a partnership agreement with the Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Department for the Blind, and Area Education Agencies.

Primary service delivery occurs through an itinerant model providing direct and consultation services based on student needs identified in their Individual Education Programs (IEP). While long-term residential services are no longer provided on the Vinton campus, the campus is used for short-term programs, administrative and consultation services, and library services for Iowa students who are blind or visually impaired. A substantial portion of the campus is currently leased by AmeriCorps NCCC.

- ◇ Coordinating Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. In 2007, the Board of Regents and the Iowa Department of Education created the Coordinating Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to undertake a thorough review of all state services that support the education of students who are deaf or hard of hearing and to make recommendations for future services and their delivery for these children. Both boards recognized the need for a long-term solution that could be accomplished in an appropriate, effective, and efficient manner through coordination and collaboration with other service-providing entities.

The recommendations identified by the Council in 2010 were approved by both the Board of Regents and the Iowa Department of Education. The recommendations focused on improved equitable access to high quality services for all Iowa students who are deaf and hard of hearing and included the creation of an executive team to provide oversight.

- ◇ Coordinating Council for the Blind and Visually Impaired. In 2004, the Board of Regents and the Iowa Department of Education created the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School Task Force (which later became the Coordinating Council for Vision Services) to examine the future needs and solutions for all Iowa students who are blind or visually impaired, including those with additional disabilities. The Council recommendations, approved by the Board of Regents and Iowa Department of Education in 2006, led to the creation of Iowa's Statewide System for Vision Services. The partnership agreement for statewide services was established in 2008 and in 2010 the organization was named Iowa Educational Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired. A study conducted in 2010 led to the closing of the long-term residential program in Vinton.

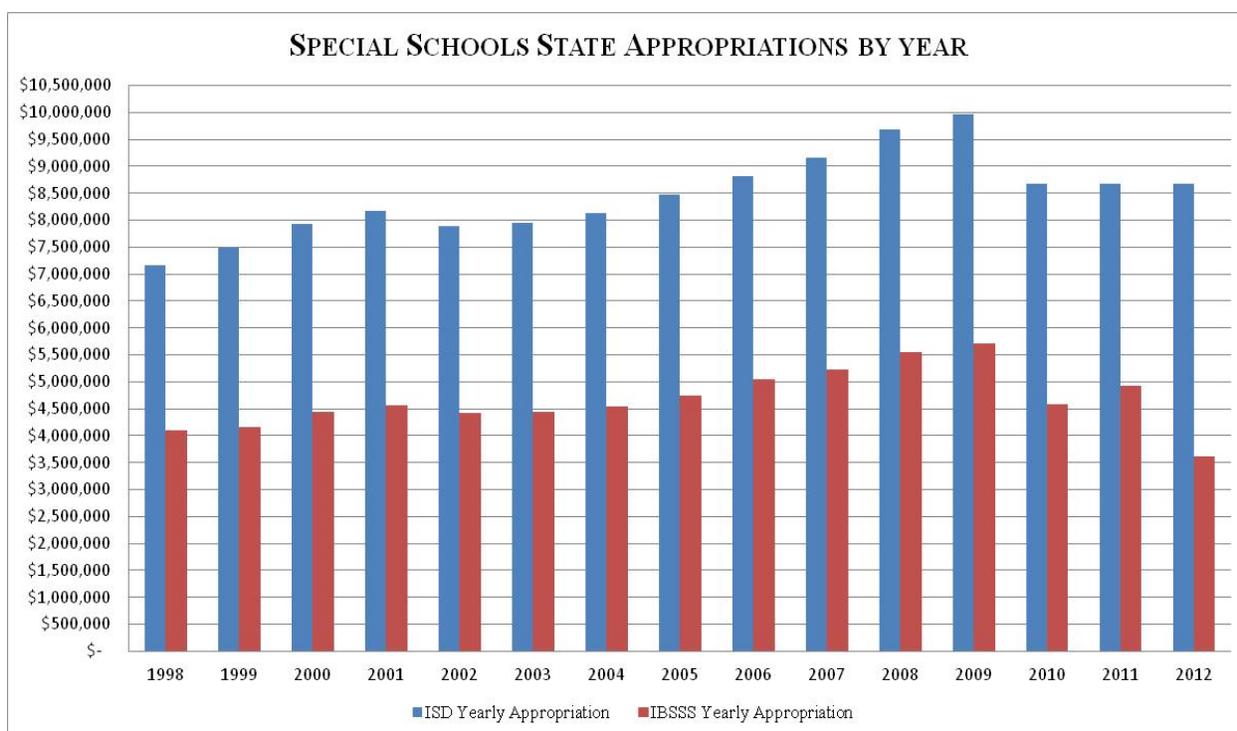
- ◇ Purpose for contact with Iowa Department of Management. Iowa Code §270.10 specifies that "the state board of regents shall not merge the school for the Deaf at Council Bluffs with the Iowa Braille and sight saving school at Vinton or close either of those institutions until all of the following requirements have been met:

1. The department of management has presented to the general assembly a comprehensive plan, program, and fiscal analysis of the existing circumstances and the circumstances which would prevail upon the proposed merger or closing, together with data which would support the contention that the merger or closing will be more efficient and effective than continuation of the existing facilities.

The analysis shall include a detailed study of the educational implications of the merger or closing, the impact on the students, and the opinions and research of nationally recognized experts in the field of the education of visually impaired and deaf students. The comprehensive plan shall further include a study relating to the programming, fiscal consequences, and political implications which would result if either a merger or an agreement under chapter 28E should be implemented between the school for the deaf in Council Bluffs and comparable state programs in the state of Nebraska.

2. The general assembly has studied the plans, programs, and fiscal analysis and has reviewed their impact on the programs.
3. The general assembly has enacted legislation authorizing either the closing or the merger to take effect not sooner than two years after the enactment of the legislation."

- ◇ Service delivery. The full implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) during the past 37 years has led to increased early identification, an increase in educational services provided by local school districts and support agencies, and an increase in students accessing special education services in their home communities. These factors require a continuum of service delivery models to meet students' needs.
- ◇ Availability of resources. State appropriations for Iowa's special schools have significantly decreased in the recent past. This has resulted in work force reductions and other expenditure decreases by the two schools. To plan for the future, it is necessary to examine increased efficiencies in the use of resources to continue and expand needed services to Iowa students with sensory impairments. The following graph shows the decreases in state funding which Iowa's special schools have experienced.



- ◇ Proposed contact timeline. With approval from the Board of Regents, the Executive Director will (1) contact the Iowa Department of Management by May 1, 2012 to address the requirements of Iowa Code §270.10 and (2) take appropriate next steps.