

Contact: Diana Gonzalez

IBSSS REPORT AND WORK PLAN

Action Requested: Receive the IBSSS report and work plan.

Executive Summary: One of the objectives of the Board of Regents, as stated in its strategic plan, is to “utilize management and oversight systems that regularly measure achievements in Board and institution strategic priorities, while pursuing continuous quality improvement in programs and services.” Therefore, in its quest to assess the statewide services being provided by the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School, the Board created the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School Task Force (Attachment A) in September 2004 to examine the future needs and solutions for all students who are blind or visually impaired, including those with additional disabilities, and determine how future services could be provided in the most effective and efficient manner. After an in-depth review during 2004-05, the Task Force developed seven recommendations in response to the Board’s directive.

Chief among the recommendations was the joint creation of a coordinating council by the Board of Regents and the State Board of Education to review all services which support the education of students who are blind or visually impaired. The Council (Attachment B) was created in September 2005 and met during 2005-06 to review the recommendations and to provide advice to the superintendent and other service providers regarding the implementation of the recommendations. To summarize its work, the Council developed a set of preferred future statements regarding vision services in Iowa (Attachment C). In March 2006, the Board communicated to the Coordinating Council and the citizens of Iowa that the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School would continue to provide services to students who are blind or visually impaired through the school program in Vinton, as well as through off-campus statewide services.

During the past year, using both its own data collection and analysis and the advice of the Coordinating Council, the School addressed all seven recommendations. Some of the recommendations have been completed, but most will be ongoing because the educational needs of students are ongoing. Implementation of the recommendations has defined three key areas that will guide the work of the School in 2006-07:

- ◆ Finalize cooperative agreements among the Board of Regents, Department of Education, AEAs, and the Department for the Blind to develop a statewide service delivery system for students who are blind or visually impaired, including those with additional disabilities.
- ◆ Continue to improve efficiency and effectiveness of services supported by the Vinton site faculty and staff, including continued development of flexible and innovative services delivered in regional locations as needed and continuation of work with Iowa State University to finalize recommendations for efficient use of physical facilities in concert with the current feasibility study.

- ◇ Develop and implement a comprehensive professional development plan that will provide all Iowa service providers, including the IBSSS faculty and staff, with the knowledge and skills needed to contribute effectively to the continuous improvement of services to children who are blind or visually impaired and their families.

The work plan developed by IBSSS for 2006-07 includes the following components:

- ◇ Maintain a campus-based program in Vinton for students who have educational needs related to being blind or visually impaired.
- ◇ Serve students on-campus and off-campus for focused, shorter-term skill development.
- ◇ Implement the results of the feasibility study regarding the consolidation of school services in Vinton into the Old Main and Recreation buildings.
- ◇ Continue to explore other public uses for Palmer and Rice Halls and the Cottage, thereby saving considerable building and grounds maintenance costs.
- ◇ Continue to study staffing patterns and allocate personnel resources to address the educational needs of students.
- ◇ Continue to work with the AEAs, the Department of Education, and the Department for the Blind to develop a more unified service delivery model in which IBSSS will provide a leadership role in assuring equitable access to services across the state.
- ◇ Improve academic opportunities in math and science for students who are blind or visually impaired by working with secondary subject area teachers to augment their technical expertise.
- ◇ Offer short-term, targeted learning opportunities for students in regional settings and on the Vinton campus during the school year, on weekends, and during the summer.
- ◇ Develop a strong early childhood network that connects families and young children to resources for blind and visually impaired at the earliest moment possible.
- ◇ Develop systematic, regional professional development opportunities that provide timely skills and information to teachers and administrators who support blind and visually impaired students in LEAs and AEAs.

Background: The work of the Coordinating Council was guided by the seven recommendations of the IBSSS Task Force:

Recommendation 1 – Create a coordinating council to review all services which support the education of students who are blind or visually impaired, including those with additional disabilities.

Status: The Coordinating Council was created by joint appointment of the Board of Regents and the State Board of Education in September 2005 and met four times throughout 2005-06. The Council hosted four ICN sessions to elicit public input as it examined possibilities for making vision services in Iowa more efficient and effective. The Council also provided advice on a preferred service future, outcome measures, and priority tasks. The Coordinating Council will continue to serve as needed in an advisory capacity as the School continues its transformation.

Recommendation 2 – Provide equitable and timely access to services for students who are blind or visually impaired, including those with additional disabilities.

Status. The Council underscored the need for services to be centrally administered. Therefore, the Department of Education, the AEAs, and the Department for the Blind will collaborate with IBSSS to create a statewide system for the education of blind and visually impaired students through memoranda of understanding or 28E agreements. By August 2007, all teachers of the visually impaired and all of the orientation and mobility specialists will be hired, trained, equipped, supported, assigned, supervised, and evaluated by a central management authority. This will result in standardized expectations for service providers and high-quality, standardized services for students. The process for providing equitable and timely access to services for students who are blind or visually impaired, including those with additional disabilities, will be completed in August 2007, but the services will be ongoing.

Recommendation 3 – Begin discussions between IBSSS and the University of Northern Iowa with the objective of creating a rigorous program for students with visual impairments.

Status. Rigorous academic programs are dependent upon highly qualified teachers. Since 2004, 15 teachers have participated in the professional preparation program for teachers of the visually impaired at UNI. While providing high quality training, the program has helped to alleviate the teacher shortage. Beginning in Summer 2006, this training program will be more accessible to prospective teachers on the western side of the state as a result of shared resources among the Department of Education, IBSSS, UNI, and ISD. The School will continue to monitor the need for additional professional preparation, especially in the fields of mathematics and science.

Recommendation 4 – Create a structure at IBSSS that is sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of students for the core and expanded core curriculum, regardless of the students' primary program location.

Status. The following changes have been made at the School. Monitoring and adjustments will be ongoing.

- ◇ *Summer school - expanded opportunities for students by offering a summer program on the ISD campus as well as on the IBSSS campus. There are currently 55 students enrolled at IBSSS and 17 at ISD; approximately 20 students are first-time enrollees.*

- ◆ *Accountability – students will enroll at IBSSS for explicit educational purposes related to being blind or visually impaired as defined in their Individual Educational Plans (IEPs). There will be agreed-upon measures of progress and results data will be collected for each student. Beginning in Summer 2006, summer school teachers will teach in agreed-upon areas of the expanded core curriculum. Pre-tests and post-tests will be administered to chart individual and group progress toward goals.*
- ◆ *Flexible scheduling – faculty will work 189 days as they have in the past but their schedules will be based on student needs rather than a fixed/traditional school calendar.*
- ◆ *Statewide services – two on-campus faculty members have been reassigned to work on statewide needs. One will coordinate parent outreach and early childhood services, a much demanded service; the other will develop regional sports opportunities, including competitive and leadership experiences for blind and visually impaired students who would like to participate in athletics and recreational sporting events.*

Recommendation 5 – Explore further collaboration among IBSSS, the University of Northern Iowa, and the University of Iowa to enhance services for students with multiple impairments and pursue efficiencies in the delivery of services.

Status. Approximately 60% of blind and visually impaired children in Iowa have additional disabilities. The resources required to serve these children are beyond the capacity of any single provider, including IBSSS. Therefore, IBSSS will work with the University of Iowa's Center for Disabilities and Development to provide guidance and support for these students and their families by pooling expertise to guide appropriate programming and to locate available resources. In addition, an IBSSS faculty member will work part-time as a consultant for multiply and severely disabled children who are blind or visually impaired. There is a need for ongoing collaborations.

Recommendation 6 – Intensify efforts between IBSSS and other agencies to inform parents of children with visual impairments, including those with additional disabilities, of all the services available statewide.

Status. IBSSS reassigned a faculty member with early childhood certification to coordinate early childhood services throughout the state. On an ongoing basis, this faculty member will focus on connecting parents of young children to available resources and facilitating networks of support among parents of children who have been newly identified as visually impaired.

Recommendation 7 – Convene a group to develop standards and benchmarks for achievement of the expanded core curriculum for students with visual impairments, including those with additional disabilities.

Status. This breakthrough project was completed in Fall 2005. An expanded core curriculum containing standards, benchmarks, and assessments was distributed to professionals in December 2005. Group and individual professional development activities will be conducted during 2006-07 to guarantee professional implementation.

Details about the Task Force and the Coordinating Council are available in the Board Office.

IBSSS TASK FORCE MEMBERSHIP

Representation	Name
Former Regent and Task Force Chair	Dr. Beverly Smith
Pediatric Ophthalmologist and Regent	Dr. Amir Arbisser
AEA Teacher of the Visually Impaired	Ms. LeeAnn Back
Regent	Dr. Mary Ellen Becker
Parent of IBSSS Visually Impaired Student	Ms. Connie Buffum
LEA Graduate	Mr. Seth Cooper
State Board of Education Member	Sr. Jude Fitzpatrick
AEA Special Education Director	Dr. Jeananne Hagen
Parent of LEA Visually Impaired Student	Mr. Thomas Howsare
IBSSS Graduate	Ms. Karen Keninger
Business Person and Former School Board Member	Mr. Al Leff
Department of Education Chief of Bureau of Children	Ms. Lana Michelson
IBSSS Teacher of the Visually Impaired	Ms. Deb Wilberg
Business Person and Former School Board Member	Mr. Don Williams

COORDINATING COUNCIL FOR VISION SERVICES

Representation	Name
Regent and Council Co-Chair	Dr. Mary Ellen Becker
State Board of Education Member and Council Co-Chair	Sr. Jude Fitzpatrick
UNI Associate Dean and Professor	Dr. Sandra Alper
Graduate of LEA	Ms. Jennifer Axler
AEA Director of Special Education (AEA 1)	Mr. Harold Blatt
LEA Superintendent	Dr. Randy Braden
Parent of IBSSS Visually Impaired Student	Ms. Trudy Claassen
Board Office Policy and Operations Officer	Dr. Diana Gonzalez
AEA Chief Administrator (AEA 13)	Mr. Glenn Grove
Kirkwood Community College Dean – Learning Service Rehab.	Mr. Chuck Hinz
UNI Special Education Professor	Dr. Sunggye Hong
Parent of LEA Visually Impaired Student	Mr. Thomas Howsare
Iowa Department for the Blind Library Director	Ms. Karen Keninger
Des Moines Special Education Director	Dr. Ellen McGinnis-Smith
Department of Education Chief of Bureau of Children	Ms. Lana Michelson
SUI Center for Disabilities and Development Administrator	Mr. Mark Moser
Graduate of LEA and IBSSS	Mr. John Patterson
ISD Superintendent	Dr. Jeanne Prickett
IBSSS Interim Superintendent	Dr. Jeananne Hagen Schild

PREFERRED FUTURE STATEMENTS IDENTIFIED BY COORDINATING COUNCIL

- ◆ Providing appropriate training and support for general education classroom and special education teachers working with students who are blind or visually impaired.
- ◆ Using regional centers to provide access to the expanded core curriculum (life skills) and to eliminate geographical differences in the distribution of resources.
- ◆ Maximizing skill development in activities for daily living, literacy, social skills, and travel skills.
- ◆ Centralizing administration and coordination of service providers, assistive technology, and regional centers to allow for the allocation of available resources to achieve maximum effectiveness.
- ◆ Coordinating comprehensive transition to adulthood services with the Department for the Blind.
- ◆ Expanded early intervention services for birth – 3 which focuses on families, communication, and social skill development.