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COORDINATING COUNCIL FOR VISION SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT

Action Requested: Receive the report.

Executive Summary: During Spring 2006, the Coordinating Council for Vision Services developed a plan, titled "Preferred Future for Vision Services in Iowa," which was approved by the State Board of Education and the Board of Regents, State of Iowa. The Preferred Future Plan (Attachment B) became the blueprint for developing a statewide system of excellence to provide educational services to Iowa students who are blind or visually impaired. At the final meeting of the Coordinating Council in May 2006, functional responsibility for implementing the Preferred Future Plan was assigned to the appropriate staff members; and the Coordinating Council was assigned an oversight/advisory role.

This report provides a summary of progress that has been made to date toward achieving the goals established by the Coordinating Council. One of the changes that occurred since the May 2006 meeting is that Regent Rose Vasquez replaced former Regent Mary Ellen Becker and now serves as co-chair with Sr. Jude Fitzpatrick. Attachment A summarizes the changes in programs and services to blind and visually impaired students that have occurred or are being planned. The time and effort committed to this endeavor by the Coordinating Council for Vision Services have resulted in a number of positive changes.

Details about the Coordinating Council annual report are available in the Board Office.

PREFERRED FUTURE PLAN FOR VISION SERVICES IN IOWA
Progress Report to the Coordinating Council for Vision Services

- ◆ **Providing appropriate training and support for general classroom and special education teachers, administrators, and area education agency staff who work with students who are blind or visually impaired.**
 - Two regional summer institutes and a statewide ICN professional development session were conducted focusing on accommodations for the student with visual impairment in the areas of technology, independent living skills, and performance monitoring of individual education plan goals. While summer institutes have been conducted for many years, 2006 was the first year for two regional summer institutes. Two regional summer institutes will be held again this year.
 - IBSSS now has an early childhood consultant devoted to providing assistance in the identification and provision of services to newly identified children who are blind or visually impaired. Effective for the 2007-08 school year, IBSSS has employed a teacher of secondary mathematics with experience in teaching students who are blind or visually impaired. The teacher will provide technical assistance in mathematics to teachers who have students who are blind or visually impaired in their classrooms as well as offer targeted short-term classes to students. Consultation and technical assistance will also be available to school districts and area education agencies to develop and improve successful strategies for students who are blind or visually impaired with severe multiple disabilities so that these students can be integrated into their local district special education programs.
 - IBSSS has developed content and methods for common standards-based evaluation in compliance with Iowa teaching standards specified in Iowa Code 284.3 that is being used this year as the evaluation method for all teachers of the visually impaired and certified orientation and mobility specialists.

- ◆ **Using regional centers to provide access to the Expanded Core Curriculum (including life skills) and to eliminate geographical differences in the distribution of resources.**
 - A statewide training session in September and an ICN session in December were conducted on the use of the expanded core curriculum (ECC) to promote quality and consistency on curriculum content for Iowa students who are blind or visually impaired. Specialized training opportunities have been provided by leadership staff of the IBSSS throughout the state on implementation of the expanded core curriculum.
 - Summer sessions for students who are blind or visually impaired were held on the Vinton campus, the ISD campus, and in collaboration with Camp Sunnyside in Johnston. Extended weekend programs will be offered during 2007-08 on the Vinton campus for students who attend their home school district but can benefit from additional instruction in the expanded core curriculum.

◆ **Maximizing skill development in activities for daily living, literacy, social skills, and travel skills.**

- ◆ Assessments are identified for the nine areas of the expanded core curriculum and work is underway to identify appropriate assessments of mathematics and reading that can be used statewide. The area education agency directors of special education have been asked to support the use of these instruments with all students who are blind or visually impaired statewide.
- ◆ Statewide data has been gathered to determine students currently served and the degree and type of services provided to each student. These data will be further refined to clarify caseloads, the nature and extent of service provided, and more information about the transition components.
- ◆ IBSSS is implementing flexible scheduling so that faculty will work 189 days as in the past, but their schedules will be based on student needs rather than a fixed school calendar.

◆ **Centralizing administration and coordination of service providers, of assistive technology, and of regional centers to allow for the allocation of available resources to achieve maximum effectiveness.**

- ◆ A leadership team representative of the cooperating agencies who serve students who are blind or visually impaired was formed to facilitate the coordination of services, and leverage funding, expertise, and opportunities from all available resources. The members are: Jeananne Schild, IBSSS Interim Superintendent; Lana Michelson, Iowa Department of Education Director of Student and Family Support Services; Glenn Grove, Loess Hills Area Education Agency Chief Administrator; Allen Harris, Director of the Iowa Department for the Blind; and Harold Blatt, Keystone AEA 1 Director of Special Education.
- ◆ Discussions with the AEA Directors of Special Education regarding the recommendation that all teachers of the visually impaired and certified orientation and mobility specialists be employed by a central administrative agency resulted in the establishment of two work groups who will develop the details for the statewide system by early 2008.
- ◆ Renovation of Old Main is nearing completion which will allow all educational and residential services to be concentrated in one building.

◆ **Coordinating comprehensive transition to adulthood services with the Department for the Blind.**

- ◆ The Iowa Department for the Blind and IBSSS staff continue to meet to discuss their respective philosophies and programs, and to interact as professional colleagues. They have agreed to focus on results, not methods. They are working together on summer and short-term expanded learning programs, Braille Challenge, and a fifth year high school program with Kirkwood Community College.

- ### IBSSS and Iowa Department for the Blind staff are making progress toward a collaborative referral process that will ensure joint transition planning when students who are blind or visually impaired reach age fourteen.

- ◇ **Expanded early intervention services for birth through age 3 which focuses on families, communication, and social skill development.**
 - ### IBSSS now has an early childhood consultant who 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.
 - ### IBSSS will replicate the Saturday School currently held at the Iowa Department for the Blind for Des Moines with children and their families in the Cedar Rapids area. The Department of Education will market these two opportunities through existing groups of interested parents, Early Access Coordinators, and the Parent Educator Connection Network.
 - ### Five staff development modules for quality educational services for children birth through age 5 who are blind or visually impaired have been conducted statewide.

PREFERRED FUTURE FOR VISION SERVICES IN IOWA
Developed by the Coordinating Council for Vision Services in 2005-2006

A Preferred Future for Vision Services in Iowa will be characterized by:

A. Providing appropriate training and support for general education classroom and special education teachers, administrators and AEA staff who work with students who are blind or visually impaired.

We would know this is occurring if:

1. Qualitative assessments, such as repeating the survey of parents and providers conducted as part of the needs assessment data for the Coordinating Council, are completed periodically and showed greater satisfaction.
2. General education and special education teachers demonstrated greater confidence and competence while working with blind and visually impaired students.
3. All paraprofessionals were provided training using state of the art technology.
4. Students who are blind or visually impaired are identified and receive appropriate identifications services as early as possible and focused training is provided for LEA teams for newly identified BVI¹ children.
5. Teachers held appropriate expectations for achievement and student achievement increases.
6. Performance evaluation of TVIs² and COMs³ is tied to professional development.

B. Using regional centers to provide access to the expanded core curriculum (life skills) and to eliminate geographical differences in the distribution of resources.

We would know this is occurring if:

1. Each BVI student had access to intensive training in the expanded core curriculum (ECC) within a one-hour drive of his or her home.
2. Students resided within their home communities while accessing services from regional centers, including weekend and evening support and transportation.
3. There was evidence of participation in regional centers by parents, families, teachers and administrators.
4. BVI students received intensive, age appropriate training in expanded core curriculum on an ongoing basis throughout K-12 as documented on their individual education plans (IEPs).
5. TVIs and COMs spend less of their time in travel, and more in planning, consulting and teaching.

¹ Blind and visually impaired.

² Teachers of the visually impaired.

³ Certified orientation and mobility specialists.

C. Maximizing skill development in activities for daily living, literacy, social skills, and travel skills.

We would know this is occurring if:

1. Objective assessments of BVI students indicate that students have achieved age appropriate levels of skill development in each of the nine areas of ECC and are able to compete with their similar sighted peers in classroom and extracurricular activities.
2. One year after graduation from high school, BVI students are as successfully employed or in higher education, live as independently, participate in the community and are as personally satisfied as similar sighted peers.
3. Students are taught and use the most effective array of visual and non visual skills.
4. Objective assessments of these skills are based on statewide standardized benchmarks of achievement jointly developed and endorsed by the education system, adult services and blindness communities.
5. All TVIs are fully competent in reading, writing and teaching Braille.

D. Centralizing administration and coordination of service providers, assistive technology, and regional centers to allow for the allocation of available resources to achieve maximum effectiveness.

We would know this is occurring if:

1. There was a structure in place that facilitates the coordination of services and leverages funding, expertise and opportunities from all available resources, including the Iowa Department for the Blind.
2. Evidence of coordination of services can be seen on the IEPs with the roles of the various partners clearly defined and nonduplicative.
3. TVIs and COMs throughout the state are hired, trained, equipped, supported, allocated, supervised, and evaluated by a central administrative agency.
4. A full continuum of services, including residential options that are flexible and targeted is supported by the coordination of services.
5. A document or tool is in place that will navigate the system for use by parents, the medical profession, educators, Department of Human Services personnel, and others who would find it useful.
6. System redesign leads to student outcomes that rival the performance of similar students without BVI. The system operates more economically and without geographic bias.

E. Coordinating comprehensive transition to adulthood services with the Iowa Department for the Blind.

We would know this is occurring if:

1. The Iowa Department for the Blind and IBSSS developed a plan to create a unified philosophy of blindness, their respective programs were complementary, and personnel in all systems valued the expertise and contributions of their counterparts.
2. Parents viewed the education system and the Iowa Department for the Blind as partners, working together to achieve a unified goal of success and independence for students.
3. IEPs reflect goals related to transition.

F. Expanded early intervention services for birth through age 3 which focuses on families, communication and social skill development.

We would know this is occurring if:

1. Parents of infants and young children had early experiences with regional centers and reported satisfaction with the assistance and support found there. This assistance and support is characterized by recognition that parents and family are the first, best and most influential teacher for any child, that critical foundational socialization, personality, and skill development occurs during this time, and that most families have little or no experience of blindness or visual impairment.
2. Early screening, evaluation and diagnosis would be available through the medical community with results reported to appropriate service providers. Follow-up was provided in all cases through the redesigned system of coordinated services.
3. Professional development regarding BVI is provided to Early Access teachers.