

Note: See revisions (~~highlighted copy~~) on page 13.

Embracing Our Future...

A Strategic Plan for
the Iowa Braille School
2003 - 2007

January 2003

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Mission Statement...

The mission of the Iowa Braille School is to enable Iowa's students who are blind or visually impaired to function as independently as possible in all aspects of life by providing appropriate educational opportunities, resources, and support services.

Vision Statement...

The Iowa Braille School will become Iowa's center of knowledge and in service provision, for the education of children who are blind or visually impaired, including those with additional disabilities, from birth to age twenty-one. In collaboration with the AEAs and LEAs, this includes opportunities, resources, and support service provision for the children and youth, their families, and for the professionals and para-professionals working with these children.

Values Statement...

The values of the Iowa Braille School are best defined by the Student Outcomes. With every opportunity, resource, or service available, each student will be better equipped to:

1. Maintain personal health and well-being;
2. Communicate thoughts and feelings;
3. Demonstrate independence and self-determination;
4. Solve problems and make personal decisions;
5. Develop interpersonal relationships and contribute to family, school and the community; and
6. Adapt to new circumstances.

In addition to the values defined by the Student Outcomes, the School values: people, knowledge, education, ~~integrity, ethics, honesty, trust, fairness, civility~~, compassion, collaboration, diversity, efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability.

Culture Statement...

We believe that our School climate, and the culture of the Iowa Braille School, in order to be conducive to learning and personal growth, must include:

1. A common vision, shared by all;
2. Open dialogue with one another;
3. A spirit of cooperation ~~and collaboration~~;
4. Opportunities to form broad partnerships; and
5. Leadership that shares these beliefs and supports student and staff efforts to grow.

Environmental Assessments were conducted during the last two years of the 1998 – 2002 Strategic Plan. They focused on gathering information from parents, from professionals who provide services, and from supervisors and directors of educational programs. Areas assessed included early childhood services and services to school age children through age twenty-one.

Face-to-face interviews with AEA Special Education Directors and vision teams were conducted. The Early Childhood Study was completed, and information is available upon request from the results of the Study. Information was gathered from parents and guardians of children who are visually impaired, including those with multiple disabilities, ages 8 and younger at the time of the survey.

The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) developed, in cooperation with the Hilton/Perkins Program, educational service guidelines for students who are blind or visually impaired. The guidelines were published in 1999. The guidelines represent the most current and the most comprehensive body of work that addresses what is most needed to improve the education of children who are blind or visually impaired. The guidelines address five areas. They are 1) foundations for educating students who are blind or visually impaired, including those with additional disabilities; 2) supportive structure and administration; 3) assessment; 4) program requirements and placement options; and 5) personnel. The NASDSE educational service guidelines are available for review from the Iowa Braille School Superintendent's office.

In June and July of 2001, NASDE training was done with the AEA Special Education Directors, AEA Vision Supervisors, and AEA PEC (Parent Educator Connection) Coordinators. The NASDSE participants identified the following as areas of concerns: 1) Training certification for TVIs/O&M; 2) Free and appropriate education (FAPE) and reality balance; 3) Continuum of services for rural states; 4) Professional preparation (pre-service/in-service); 5) Caseloads; 6) Parent training; 7) Paraprofessional training; 8) Early intervention; 9) Systematic way to consider children's needs and expanded core curriculum; 10) Outcomes and adult transitions; 11) State-wide assessment; 12) Time to do it all; 13) Greater Improvement in adequate education of children with visual impairment; 14) Early identification; 15) Need for quality system for easy access to evaluations; 15) Funding issues; and 16) Early Childhood services.

From the 16 areas of concern, participants identified the top 3 areas to address: 1) Attracting and retaining trained personnel; 2) Providing FAPE (free and appropriate education) within a reality-based model of service delivery; and 3) Continuum of services for children with visual impairments. These needs were taken into consideration during the development of the Strategic Plan.

The Future...

For children who are blind or visually impaired to function independently in today's world, they must be well prepared to face the challenges of adulthood. In developing the 2003-2007 strategic plan, much time was devoted to listening, planning, and challenging ideas to determine what is the best future for the children served by the School. The School's mission is defined in three ways: 1) providing appropriate educational opportunities, 2) providing appropriate educational resources and 3) providing appropriate educational support services. With our theme, "Embracing the Future," these three areas will define our future from 2003 – 2007.

2003 - 2007 Strategic Plan *Embracing Our Future...*

Key Result Area: Quality and Access in Education

The goals, strategies, action plans, and performance indicators outlined in this plan will be the responsibility of the Iowa Braille School unless otherwise noted.

Goal I.

Improve the quality of the programs provided to students who are blind or visually impaired, including those with additional disabilities, with the purpose of enhancing student outcomes, including literacy.

Strategy:

1. Implement Quality Programming for Students who are Blind or Visually Impaired (QPVI) in 100% of the AEAs and in the Center-based program

Action Steps:

- A. QPVI will be offered to all AEAs
- B. QPVI will be offered to the Center-based program
- C. Collect data on demographic make-up of students who are blind or visually impaired served by Iowa Braille School Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVIs) and Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists (COMS)
- D. Collect IEP goal data of students who are blind or visually impaired served by Iowa Braille School TVIs and COMS
- E. Develop additional strategies / interventions as data warrant

Performance Indicators:

- 1) Percentage of AEAs that participate in QPVI
- 2) Percentage of direct service Center-based providers who participate in QPVI
- 3) Percentage of IBS faculty collecting and submitting the required information
- 4) Percentage of data sheets disaggregated and analyzed for proficiency levels and areas of concerns

Goal II.

Develop and maintain a process for the delivery of Early Childhood Services (birth to kindergarten) for infants, toddlers and young children who are blind or visually impaired, including those with additional disabilities.

Strategies:

1. Analyze current data from the Early Childhood Study and the Early Childhood Registry to determine the current level of service for children from birth to kindergarten, and their families
2. Recruit and hire an Early Childhood Specialist
3. Identification of needs by Early Childhood Specialist
4. Establish a Steering Committee of stakeholders to collaborate in the on-going development of services to meet the needs of children and families

Action Steps:

- A. Early Childhood Specialist (ECS) will provide leadership in data analysis
- B. ECS will provide statewide strategies and interventions for families and professionals
- C. ECS will evaluate strategies and interventions for on-going service improvement

Performance Indicators:

- 1) Number of children who are identified with visual impairments prior to four months of age
- 2) Number of families of children who are identified with visual impairments who are contacted by Early Childhood Services
- 3) Number of families' needs met by Early Childhood Services

Goal III.

Improve the literacy of children who are blind or visually impaired by using promising practices.

Year 1 Strategies:

1. All children and students who are blind or visually impaired, including those with additional disabilities, will receive quality literacy evaluations provided in collaboration with the Iowa Braille School through technical assistance, resources, and services.

Action Steps:

- A. Provide Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (TVIs) with necessary assessment tools to obtain quantifiable data on literacy grade levels, words read per minute, and comprehension rates
- B. Provide training on the assessment tool
- C. Provide awareness on need for literacy data
- D. Conduct literacy assessments and analyze data on a stratified sample of summer school students who are Braille readers
- E. Conduct a survey on current literacy practices for students who are Braille readers
- F. Analyze the data from surveys and assessments

Performance Indicator:

- 1) Number and percentage of professional staff who are trained in and have access to literacy assessment tools
2. Professionals and other educational personnel will demonstrate increased skill levels in the area of literacy instruction for children and students who are blind or visually impaired, including those with additional disabilities, through on-going quality professional staff development provided by the Iowa Braille School.

Action Steps:

- A. Provide quality on-going professional staff development activities, which include national experts and research in the area of literacy for all students who are blind or visually impaired, including those with additional disabilities, provided to educational personnel
- B. Provide recent research articles with guided questions for professionals
- C. Provide resource materials on literacy for AEs

Performance Indicators:

- 1) Number and percent of statewide professionals who attend ongoing professional development activities in the area of literacy
- 2) Number and percent of statewide professionals who report increased skills
- 3) Number of research articles with guided questions provided to statewide educational personnel
- 4) Number and percent of staff who report accessing the professional resource materials provided

3. *Promising practice* literacy instruction for children and students will be implemented in the AEA through technical assistance, resources, and services provided by the Iowa Braille School.

Action Steps:

- A. Provide literacy-based resource materials for AEA professional library
- B. Provide AEAs with assessment protocol and directions to obtain data in every AEA on literacy levels
- C. Use U.S. Department of Education monies to provide AEAs with professional development funds to continue literacy training, purchase additional resource material, or access additional staff development
- D. Guide AEAs in creating action plans to address literacy levels in each AEA
- E. Help AEAs move from awareness to application in the area of literacy for students who are blind or visually impaired, including those with additional disabilities
- F. Continue to provide technical assistance to AEAs in order to complete their action plans developed in year one

Performance Indicators:

- 1) Number and percentage of AEA professionals receiving training on *promising practice* literacy instruction
- 2) Number and percentage of AEA professionals who report the use of literacy-based resources provided by the Iowa Braille School
- 3) Number and percentage of AEA professionals who have completed literacy assessments on 80% or more of their current students
- 4) Number and percentage of AEAs that complete literacy action plans

Year 2 Strategies:

4. AEAs will complete an action plan to address literacy levels within their AEA

Action Steps:

- A. After several training sessions on inter-rater reliability, the TVIs in the AEAs will complete the Jerry Johns (standardized reading assessment inventory) on every student with a visual impairment, as appropriate in the AEA
- B. Analyze and report data on the percentage of students on grade level, reading at a rate of 125 words per minute (3rd-7th grade), 150 words per minute (7th-10th grade) and 200 words per minute and above (11th-12th graders) and comprehension rates
- C. AEAs will develop an action plan using *promising practices* to address any deficit areas of literacy
- D. The Iowa Braille School will provide ongoing technical assistance to complete action steps

Performance Indicator:

- 1) Number and percentage of professionals in AEAs who completed literacy assessments on 80% or more of their current caseload
5. Continue to collect and analyze literacy trend data from the AEAs

Action Step:

- A. Develop and implement interventions and strategies after analysis of the data

Performance Indicator:

- 1) The number and percentage of students who demonstrate progress in literacy as a result of the interventions and strategies

Year 3, 4 and 5 Strategies:

6. Continue to collect and analyze literacy trend data

Action Step:

- A. Continue to provide ongoing technical assistance in yearly literacy evaluations for all AEAs

Performance Indicator:

- 1) Number and percentage of students who receive yearly literacy evaluations
7. Continue to provide staff development opportunities for professionals and families in the area of literacy

Action Steps:

- A. Continue to address literacy at all professional staff development opportunities
- B. Continue to research *promising practices* and disseminate among statewide staff and families through outreach efforts

Performance Indicators:

- 1) Number and percentage of professionals who report increased/new skills from staff development opportunities
- 2) Number and percentage of families who report increased/new skills from staff development opportunities

8. The Iowa Braille School will provide data driven literacy initiative for statewide services

Action Steps:

- A. Using data from the first three years assign a task force to develop *promising practices* for literacy instruction
- B. Continue to assimilate current research in literacy instruction
- C. Distribute and train all AEA staff on literacy initiative
- D. Design a data collection process to demonstrate effectiveness of literacy initiative

Performance Indicators:

- 1) Number and percentage of professionals who report new/increased skills as a result of the literacy initiative training
- 2) Number and percentage of families who report new/increased skills as a result of the literacy initiative training

Goal IV.

Create and sustain opportunities, resources and support to benefit Iowa students who are blind or visually impaired, including those with multiple disabilities, through collaborative efforts.

Strategies:

1. Provide input and support to the teacher preparation program in visual impairments at the University of Northern Iowa

Action Steps:

- A. The Iowa Braille School will continue to advocate and offer resources to UNI during the development of the teacher preparation program
- B. Provide on-going support to the teacher preparation program including practicum and student teaching sites, housing on campus in Vinton, and experience in a residential setting
- C. Provide technical assistance to the University of Northern Iowa in the placement of certified graduates as teachers of the visually impaired in Iowa

Performance Indicator:

- 1) The number of students using IBSSS as a practicum or student teaching site

2. Continue to collaborate with AEAs, LEAs and other related agencies to meet identified needs

Action Steps:

- A. Provide professional development opportunities to AEA and LEA Vision Supervisors
- B. Promote promising practices to the AEA Directors of Special Education at their annual meetings
- C. Promote *promising practices* through membership and participation in a variety of related decision making organizations
- D. Respond to opportunities that create efficiencies and economies through our use of our facilities and resources
- E. Provide opportunities for vision related professionals to exchange information, strategies and ideas

Performance Indicator:

- 1) Respond as appropriate to the identified/determined needs of students with visual impairments, including those with additional disabilities, as permitted by the Board of Regents, State of Iowa.