

MEMORANDUM

To: Board of Regents

From: Board Office

Subject: Request by the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School to Study the Needs of Preschool Children with Visual Impairments

Date: July 7, 2000

Recommended Actions:

1. Approve the request for a study, with expenditure of up to \$25,000. Suggest that the study make use of all available sources of existing data, such as the AEA and others.
2. Request IBSSS to work out an arrangement with the pertinent AEAs to pay for professional services provided by their consultants and supervisors on behalf of the study with appropriate approval of the Board Office.
3. Request IBSSS, in the future, to meet with the School's Advisory Committee for input and recommendations on studies such as this one prior to requesting Board approval.

Executive Summary:

From data informally provided by vision teachers, parents, and AEA supervisors, it would appear that Iowa is experiencing a substantial increase in the number of infants and toddlers with visual impairments. A number of these children have additional disabilities. The reasons for the increase during the past 1-2 years are unclear. Prior to this time, however, an increase in this special population generally resulted from (1) better identification procedures and efforts and (2) increasing skills of the medical community in saving the lives of newborns.

The Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School is requesting approval to conduct a statewide study which will focus on identifying the number of preschool children who have visual impairments, the current level of services being provided to these children, and the need for additional services to be provided by the School. The study will be designed and conducted by the Center for Social and Behavioral Research at the University of Northern Iowa.

The total cost of the study is projected to be \$25,000. The funds for the study will be obtained from three sources - reallocation of State Vision Grant/Preschool Consultant Funds and IBSSS Preschool Consultant Funds, and the IBSSS endowment. According to Superintendent Thurman, the reallocation of funds for this study will not result in the elimination or reduction of any existing activities. The School is not using the funds from the State Vision Grant/preschool consultant or the preschool consultant funds because the School does not currently employ a preschool consultant. The School has received informal approval from the Department of Education to reallocate the funds for the preschool consultant in the State Vision Grant to conduct this study following the Board's approval.

While the Advisory Committee for the School has not had an opportunity to meet to discuss this proposal, it is Superintendent Thurman's expectation that the Advisory Committee will be involved in reviewing the results of the study and advising the superintendent regarding appropriate recommendations to the Board of Regents.

This report addresses the following Key Result Area (KRA) in the Board's Strategic Plan:

KRA 2.0.0.0 Provide access to educational, research, and service opportunities within the missions of the Regent institutions.

Background:

The Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School has a long history of providing services to preschool children with visual impairments and their families. In the past, the School provided services through a preschool consultant who was based in Vinton. However, that position has been vacant for the past 3-4 years although the School has recruited actively to fill the position.

Notwithstanding that the personnel shortage in the preschool area is perhaps the most acute nationally of all professional positions in the field, the School desires to address the needs of preschool children and their families in a more aggressive and active manner. In the Reorganization Plan which was approved by the Board in March 2000, the School continued to include the position of preschool consultant. For FY 2001, approximately 80% of the funding for the position will come from the School's general fund and the remainder will come from the State Vision Grant.

Analysis:

The services needed by preschool children with visual impairments are quite unique. Infants need visual and language stimulation while toddlers need orientation and mobility services. In addition, families need to learn how to provide assistance to their children. These are the services that the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School is eminently qualified to provide.

Therefore, the School is interested in conducting a study to investigate the needs of this population with the purpose of gathering data which will permit the School to make decisions about possible future services. The School proposes to study the needs of preschool infants and toddlers during the 2000-2001 school year.

The study will address the following objectives:

1. Determine the birth rate, number, distribution, age range, and cause of visual impairment and additional disabilities of preschool infants and toddlers in the state.
2. Determine the present level of service that these children and their families receive from all sources.
3. Determine the need for services for this population, with particular emphasis upon family needs. Review existing models of preschool services in the United States and Canada.
4. Prepare a recommendation to the Board of Regents regarding the role of the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School in providing services to the preschool population.

A core work group, consisting of the Superintendent, the state vision consultant, the state deaf-blind consultant, a representative from the AEA preschool consultants, a representative from the supervisors of vision programs, a representative from nationally recognized preschool programs/services, and a research consultant from one of the Regent universities would oversee the study.

There would be three phases in this study:

- ◆ Phase I would be completed by December 31, 2000 and would include the design and implementation of a study which would address objectives 1 and 2. The study would be designed by the Center for Social and Behavioral Research at the University of Northern Iowa and would be based on broadly accepted research standards and methodologies. The study would gather data from families, schools, and AEAs. During this phase, information on existing preschool programs in the United States and Canada would also be reviewed.

- ◆ Phase II would be completed by April 15, 2001. During this phase, there would be visits to model preschool programs to observe best practices stated in objective 3. The data collected in Phase I would be analyzed and used to develop specific recommendations for the Board of Regents as stated in objective 4.
- ◆ Phase III would be completed by May 31, 2001 when the Superintendent presents the findings of the study and recommendations to the Board of Regents. If appropriate, the recommendations would include an action plan that defines costs, funding sources, and personnel implications.

The total cost of the study will be \$25,000 that will be allocated in the following manner:

- ◆ \$7,500 for travel to visit preschool programs in Boston, Phoenix, and San Francisco and for travel expenses for the consultants. These cities have been selected because they have nationally recognized programs to serve preschool children with visual impairments.
- ◆ \$7,500 for professional service fees for the three representatives who would serve on the core work group - one from a national program, one from AEA preschool consultants, and one from supervisors of vision programs.
- ◆ \$10,000 for services which would be provided by the University of Northern Iowa, including the study design, data collection and analysis. This is an approximation for the cost of conducting the study; additional funds might be required depending on the ultimate scope and complexity of the project.

The funds will be obtained from the following funding sources:

- ◆ \$15,000 from the State Vision Grant/Preschool Funds;
- ◆ \$2,000 from the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School/Preschool Funds;
- ◆ \$8,000 from the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School Endowment.

According to Superintendent Thurman, the School is not currently using the funds from the State Vision Grant/preschool consultant or the preschool consultant budget because the School does not have a preschool consultant. Therefore, the reallocation of funds for this study will not result in the elimination or reduction of any existing activities. The School has received informal approval from the Department of Education to reallocate the preschool consultant funds from the State Vision Grant to the study following the Board's approval.

While the Advisory Committee for the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School has not had an opportunity to meet to discuss this proposal, it is the Superintendent's expectation that the Advisory Committee will be involved in reviewing the results of the study and advising the Superintendent regarding appropriate recommendations to the Board of Regents.

The Board Office recommends that the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School receive approval to conduct the proposed study with a projected cost of up to \$25,000, making use of existing data available through the AEAs and other sources. The School should work out an arrangement with the pertinent AEAs to pay for professional services provided by their consultants and supervisors with appropriate approval of the Board Office. In the future, the School is requested to meet with the Advisory Committee for input and recommendations on studies such as this one prior to requesting Board approval.


Diana Gonzalez

Approved:


Frank J. Stork