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**Sent:** Friday, March 13, 2009 12:27 PM  
**To:** Smith, Dianne [BOARD]  
**Subject:** FW: Services for blind children move into homes (Gazette)

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**From:** Doyle, Sheila [BOARD]  
**Sent:** Thursday, March 12, 2009 11:06 AM  
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**Subject:** Services for blind children move into homes (Gazette)

FYI - article by Diane Heldt -

Article published: Mar 12, 2009

## Services for blind children move into homes

**VINTON** The stately campus of the Iowa Braille School here is home to 12 students this year.

Just a few years ago, it had three times that number, and a few decades ago the campus was home to 160 students.

The 12 students, who are blind or vision impaired, live on campus during the week and go home on weekends. All of their classes, meals and dorm rooms are in the same historic building, Old Main.

The shrinking on-campus enrollment at the 157-year-old school is part of the transition to a Statewide System for Vision Services that aims to provide more and better services to students in their local schools and environments.

"The Iowa Braille School is intended to be a part of that whole continuum but not necessarily the significant part that it once was," said Patrick Clancy, who on Aug. 1 became superintendent of the Braille School and administrator of the new Statewide System for Vision Services.

The new system was established one year ago, a joint agreement of the four state agencies responsible for providing services to the blind.

In 2005, just 23 percent of the Braille School's state appropriation was spent on services for students with vision impairment in Iowa, with the rest supporting the small residential program. This year, 45 percent of the school's \$5.6 million in state money goes to help more than 400 students across Iowa.

Imoni Cardine is one of those students. The 6-year-old is a kindergartner at Kenwood Elementary in Cedar Rapids. Three times a week she meets in the school library with Joan Banse, a teacher of visually impaired students.

Imoni punches the large keys on a Perkins Braille Writer, which is similar to a typewriter but spits out Braille-imprinted pages. She and Banse read a book with Braille phrases and plastic buttons for Imoni to put into slots. During an exercise to strengthen her fingers for the Braille Writer, Imoni connects bumpy, curved toy pieces.

Casey Duggan, the Kenwood paraprofessional who helps Imoni during class, said the time Imoni spends with Banse makes a difference.

"It's a slow process, but you can tell it's a consistent, positive influence," he said.

Banse formerly taught at the Braille School but now travels to Cedar Rapids, Anamosa, Marion and Lisbon to teach seven students with varying visual impairments.

"They're in their home community, and they make friends, stay with their families," Banse said. It's good to "blur the lines" that divided services before, said Guy Fisher, a teacher of the visually impaired based in Keystone Area Education Agency's Decorah office. Under a statewide system, all resources and experienced staff are coordinated to best help students, he said.

"We'll be able to provide services to more kids, kids who maybe sometimes slipped through the cracks," he said.

In the first year of the statewide system, the budget savings and shifting of positions from the Braille School to other services allowed the addition of three orientation and mobility specialists and two math and literacy consultants who work with students around the state, Clancy said.

Eventually, all 31 teachers of Iowa's blind and visually impaired and the 13 orientation and mobility specialists will be employed by the statewide system. Currently, about half of the teachers are employed by AEAs. That reorganization streamlines the budget, referral services and operating procedures, Clancy said.

Cedar Rapids parent Renee Henderson said it's comforting to know her son, who turns 3 in July, will continue to get the services he needs in his home community. Her son, Terrel, was born almost completely blind. Banse comes to the Henderson home twice a month to read Braille books with Terrel. When he starts school, the services will be provided there.

"I think that is a really big deal," Henderson said. "Even though he's different, he won't feel like he has to be separated from everyone else."

But some parents still prefer the residential school model.

Clancy, the Braille School's director, said the residential school remains an important component of services. But it's possible the school's future will come up again, he said, adding he thinks residential enrollment will never break 30 again.

The Braille School is becoming more of a short-term option, he said, as more students attend for only one semester or year, or perhaps for intense summer instruction in Braille or independent living.

"We'll continue to look at what's the function and what can be offered here," he said. "What's important is that the children get what they need."