

June 1999

BLIND SERVICES STUDY - BACKGROUND MEMORANDUM

Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 4044, a copy of which is attached as an appendix, directs a study of the feasibility and desirability of consolidating under the School for the Blind all programs and services provided to children and adults who are blind or visually impaired. Currently, state services to individuals who are blind or visually impaired are provided by the School for the Blind, the Department of Human Services, and the State Library.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

The 1993-94 interim Education Services Committee studied vision services. The study reviewed federal laws that relate to persons who are blind or visually impaired and state services including those provided by the Department of Human Services, public schools, the School for the Blind, and the State Library. The committee agreed that visually impaired state residents, whether children or adults, need to have available a continuum of services to ensure that the ultimate goal of independent living can be reached or at least approached. In addition to a continuum of services, visually impaired persons need overlapping services, and in the case of children who are visually impaired, an influx of education can be provided through the public school system; however, these children often require more services than a public school has the ability to offer. The committee however made no recommendations as a result of its study.

SERVICES PROVIDED TO BLIND OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED PERSONS School for the Blind

The mission of the School for the Blind is to function as a statewide, comprehensive resource and to work cooperatively with related agencies in providing a full range of services to all persons who are blind or visually impaired, including those with multiple disabilities. Services provided by the School for the Blind include:

1. Family services - The School for the Blind provides services to family members of people who are blind or visually impaired. The types of services include:
 - a. Learning how to access information on topics relating to their family member's visual impairment.
 - b. Developing an awareness of services available on a regional and national level.
2. Adult services - Adult adaptive skills training and evaluations are offered in the following areas:
 - a. Technology.
 - b. College or job preparation.
 - c. Vocational/career exploration.
 - d. Comprehensive vocational evaluation.
 - e. Braille.
 - f. Daily living skills.
 - g. Functional vision.
 - h. Low-vision training.
 - i. Orientation and mobility.
 - j. Personal adjustment to vision loss.
 - k. Recreation/leisure.

These services are provided for a fee with followup services provided in the community. The focus of these services is to enable the individual to become independent in all aspects of life.
3. Outreach for ages 0 to 5 - The School for the Blind provides outreach and in-house support to visually impaired children, ages 0 to 5, and their families. The support consists of testing, providing the family with information about the educational alternatives and adaptive toys/learning devices, and conducting support group meetings.
4. Outreach services to ages 6 through 18 - The School for the Blind provides outreach support to children ages 6 to 18, their families, and their teachers. The outreach teacher works with the child's family to determine what adaptations need to be implemented in the child's life. The outreach teacher informs the family about adaptive technology and learning devices that are available to visually impaired individuals, and may loan these items, if available, to the child on a trial basis. The outreach staff assists the child's teacher or teachers in:
 - a. Performing a vision-specific evaluation of the child to determine the best teaching methods.
 - c. Teaching family members how to become more effective advocates for their family member.

Statewide activities include an annual family weekend, regional "parent's night out," parent handbooks, and a family directory. The focus of these services is to support parents by enhancing the link among parents themselves and their interaction with School for the Blind personnel.

- b. Assisting the teacher on a consultation basis throughout the school year.
- c. Making onsite visits.
5. Technology - Technology services are provided to individuals who are blind or visually impaired, including those with multiple disabilities. Functions of this program include:
 - a. Performing technology evaluations.
 - b. Consultations.
 - c. Instruction.
 - d. Inservice training.
6. Library services - The School for the Blind library is the vision resource for the state of North Dakota. The library is responsible for:
 - a. Management of the American Printing House for the Blind quota funds.
 - b. Braille production.
 - c. Consumer, professional, and toy/adaptive equipment libraries.
 - d. Large print and Braille textbook depository.
 - e. Descriptive video library.
 - f. Product information service.
 - g. Talking book machine lending agency.
 - h. Telephone consultation.
7. Specific skills - The School for the Blind provides the opportunity for blind or visually impaired children, ages 6 to 18, to obtain onsite training for vision-specific skills at the School for the Blind. The school hosts eight 1-week sessions each school year. Four to five children participate during each of these weeks. The areas of learning include:
 - a. Daily living skills.
 - b. Orientation and mobility.
 - c. Technology.
 - d. Braille.
 - e. Braille music.
 - f. Recreation and leisure.
 - g. Personal development.

One week focuses on careers, where the children are able to job shadow various occupations.
8. Summer Adventure - The School for the Blind holds a summer camp entitled "Summer Adventure" each year. The camp is for all visually impaired children in grades 1 through 12. Activities at the camp are geared to the students who attend and to the following categories:
 - a. Socialization.
 - b. Music.
 - c. Daily living skills.
 - d. Recreation and leisure.
 - e. Orientation and mobility.
 - f. Personal development.
9. Orientation and mobility training - The School for the Blind hosts an orientation and mobility training course in conjunction with the University of Northern Colorado. The program is a three-week summer course.
10. Compensatory skills - The program allows children in grades 1 through 12 the opportunity to attend the School for the Blind for onsite specialized training. The specialized training is for vision-specific education needs that cannot be met at the child's local school. The vision-specific training includes:
 - a. Daily living skills.
 - b. Orientation and mobility.
 - c. Technology.
 - d. Braille.
 - e. Braille music.
 - f. Organizational and study skills.
 - g. Concept development.
 - h. Listening skills.
 - i. Career/vocational development.
 - j. Personal development.
 - k. Recreation and leisure.

The training may last as long as an entire school year. The decision for the child to attend the School for the Blind is based on the child's individual education plan (IEP).
11. Curriculum - The School for the Blind reviews and maintains vision assessment materials and vision-specific curriculum materials for persons who are blind or visually impaired including those with multiple disabilities. Items include instruments utilized to determine the functioning ability of an individual, tapes, books (Braille and large print), adaptive aids, and curriculum guides designed to teach vision-specific skills (orientation or mobility), daily living skills, technology, personal development, vocational/career, recreation and leisure, Braille, and visual efficiency.
12. Administration - The School for the Blind administration program provides fiscal and personnel management, safety, policies and procedures, and administration of statewide vision services.
13. Maintenance and utilities - The maintenance and utilities program provides for the maintenance and utilities costs associated with the School for the Blind buildings and grounds and provides a safe working environment at the facility.

State Library

The State Library provides information services to visually impaired individuals. Services include books on tape, large print books, and a radio reading service called Dakota Radio Information Service. The Dakota Radio Information Service broadcasts live daily programs that provide information from local newspapers.

Department of Human Services

Infant Development Program

From birth through age 2, a child who is blind or visually impaired may receive early intervention services through the Department of Human Services by participating in the infant development program. Services offered by this program include in-home assistance, parent training, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech therapy. The infant development program serves children with a number of development issues, one of which may be vision related. However, if a child's only issue is vision, the infant development program generally refers the child to the School for the Blind which then provides needed services to the child and family. The Department of Human Services provides infant development program services in all eight human service regions. The department contracts for services in the North Central (Minot), Lake Region (Devils Lake), West Central (Bismarck), and Badlands (Dickinson) human service regions. The department provides the services directly in the other four regions of the state. The 1999-2001 biennium budget for the infant development program totals \$3,250,507, \$2,187,792 of which is from the general fund.

Vocational Rehabilitation Division

Through the Vocational Rehabilitation Division of the department, services are provided to individuals who are blind or visually impaired. Services can include medical evaluations; evaluations of vocational potential; training and placement needs; medical, surgical, psychiatric, and hospital care if needed to maintain or secure employment; visual aids if necessary for work; reader services for blind persons; telecommunications; sensory and other technological aids and devices; tuition and fees, books, and supplies at universities, colleges, and commercial and trade schools; on-the-job training; job placement equipment; and individual guidance and counseling, coordination, or services, and followup activities. The division can provide independent living services for persons over age 55 whose visual impairment is severe enough to make gainful employment extremely difficult but for whom independent living goals are feasible. These services include outreach, surgical or therapeutic treatment, eyeglasses and other aids, mobility training, and guide and reader services.

1999-2001 FUNDING

The following schedule presents the funding provided for blind or visually impaired services for the 1999-2001 biennium:

School for the Blind	
Salaries and wages - 28 FTE	\$2,391,456
Operating expenses	678,059
Equipment	70,500
Capital improvements	51,790
Total all funds	\$3,191,805
Less estimated income	1,002,577
Total general fund appropriation	\$2,189,228
State Library - Blind and visually impaired services	
Salaries and wages - 4 FTE	\$208,128
Operating expenses	19,000
Total all funds	\$227,128
Less estimated income - Federal funds	156,880
Total general fund appropriation	\$70,248
Department of Human Services - Vocational Rehabilitation*	
Salaries and wages - 10 FTE	\$723,498
Operating expenses	210,961
Equipment	7,925
Capital improvements	830
Grants	155,407
Total all funds	\$1,098,621
Less estimated income	868,004
Total general fund appropriation	\$230,617
Total all funds	\$4,517,554
Total special funds	\$2,027,461
Total general fund	\$2,490,093
* Because the infant development program serves a wide range of children with impairments, the funding provided for this program is not reflected on this schedule.	

STUDY PLAN

The committee may wish to proceed with this study as follows:

1. Review services provided by the School for the Blind, Department of Human Services, and State Library for blind or visually impaired individuals.
2. Receive testimony from representatives of the School for the Blind, Department of Human Services, and State Library regarding options for consolidating services.
3. Receive testimony from interested persons regarding services to the blind or visually impaired.
4. Consider options for consolidating all services for blind or visually impaired persons under the School for the Blind.
5. Develop committee recommendations and any necessary legislation to implement the recommendations.

Fifty-sixth Legislative Assembly, State of North Dakota, begun in the Capitol in the City of Bismarck, on Tuesday, the fifth day of January, one thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine

**SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 4044
(Senators St. Aubyn, W. Stenehjem)**

A concurrent resolution directing the Legislative Council to study the feasibility and desirability of consolidating under the School for the Blind all programs and services provided to children and adults who are blind or visually impaired.

WHEREAS, the state has a significant interest in ensuring that children and adults who are blind or visually impaired are able to function as independently as possible; and

WHEREAS, children and adults who are blind or visually impaired require a continuum of educational, rehabilitative, and other services or assistance if they are to function as independently as possible; and

WHEREAS, it is the responsibility of the state to make available an appropriate continuum of services to children and adults who are blind or visually impaired; and

WHEREAS, the state offers a variety of services to children and adults who are blind or visually impaired through the School for the Blind and the Vocational Rehabilitation Division of the Department of Human Services;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF NORTH DAKOTA, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING THEREIN:

That the Legislative Council study the feasibility and desirability of consolidating under the School for the Blind all programs and services provided to children and adults who are blind or visually impaired; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Legislative Council report its findings and recommendations, together with any legislation required to implement the recommendations, to the Fifty-seventh Legislative Assembly.