

North Dakota Vision Services/ School for the Blind

**A Division of the Department
of Public Instruction**



500 Stanford Rd
Grand Forks, ND 58203
www.ndvisionservices.com

Testimony **Paul Olson**

Chairman Vigesaa and Members of the House Appropriations Committee:

My name is Paul Olson. I am the superintendent of North Dakota Vision Services/School for the Blind (NDVS/SB). I will provide additional testimony specifically relating to our budget request in SB 2013.

MARCH 1, 2023

Base Budget and Request

	FTE Positions	Salaries	Operating	Capital Assets	Total	General Fund	Special Fund	Total
2023-25 Agency Request	27.75	\$5,153,098	\$895,686	\$478,192	\$6,526,976	\$4,891,862	\$1,635,114	\$6,526,976
Senate	Senate Version					Funding Source		
	FTE Positions	Salaries	Operating	Capital Assets	Total	General Fund	Special Fund	Total
2023-25 Biennium Base Level	27.75	\$4,992,194	\$792,671	\$39,192	\$5,824,057	\$4,761,879	\$1,062,178	\$5,824,057
Payroll Changes:								
Cost to continue increases		37,066	-		37,066	36,145	921	37,066
Teachers - Composite Salary Schedule		93,838			93,838	93,838		93,838
Additional Temp Salaries		30,000			30,000	-	30,000	30,000
Classified Salary Increases		132,154			132,154	118,632	13,522	132,154
Health Insurance Increase		152,608			152,608	136,821	15,787	152,608
Operating Changes:								
ITD M365			7,015		7,015	-	7,015	7,015
Additional Operating			60,000		60,000		60,000	60,000
Equipment and Doors			26,000		26,000		26,000	26,000
Power Platform DP			10,000		10,000		10,000	10,000
Capital Asset Changes:								
Roof Replacement & Rep				150,000	150,000	-	150,000	150,000
Repair Tar Parking Lot				50,000	50,000		50,000	50,000
Gutters for South Wing				50,000	50,000		50,000	50,000
Update Front Entrance				55,000	55,000		55,000	55,000
Flooring/Cabinets for Living Qtrs.				45,000	45,000		45,000	45,000
Update Student Commons Area				50,000	50,000		50,000	50,000
Replace Electric Panel Corridor				10,000	10,000		10,000	10,000
Replace Doors & AC Units				29,000	29,000		29,000	29,000
Senate Version	27.75	\$5,437,860	\$895,686	\$478,192	\$6,811,738	\$5,147,315	\$1,664,423	\$6,811,738

2023-25	
Special Fund Projections:	
Land Department Trust Funds	\$ 1,686,570
Rental Income	353,180
Charge for services	32,000
Other	30,000
Total Projected Revenue	\$ 2,101,750

Optional Requests

Changes We Are Requesting to Senate Version - We ask that you consider maintaining what is included in the Senate Version. Please reference the Workforce sheet for more on the compensation package.

2023-2025 Item	Amount Requested	Included in Senate/Executive Version (Ongoing)	Funding Source
1 Additional Operating	\$ 60,000	\$ 60,000	Special
2 Teacher Salary Increases	93,838	93,838	General
3 Temporary Salaries	30,000	30,000	Special
4 Additional IT Costs	10,000	10,000	Special
Total Ongoing Optional	\$ 193,838	\$ 193,838	

2023-2025 Item	Amount Requested	Included in Senate/Executive Version (One-Time)	Funding Source
5 Equipment Under 5,000	\$ 26,000	\$ 26,000	Special
6 Upgrade Parking Lot Tar	50,000	50,000	Special
7 Flooring - Cabinets E. Wing	45,000	45,000	Special
8 Update Front Entrance	55,000	55,000	Special
9 Update Student Commons Area	50,000	50,000	Special
10 Replace Electrical Panel	10,000	10,000	Special
11 Roof Replacement & Repairs	150,000	150,000	Special
12 Gutters for S. Wing	50,000	50,000	Special
13 Misc. Repairs (Doors & A/C)	29,000	29,000	Special
Total One-Time Requests	\$ 465,000	\$ 465,000	

Optional Requests

1. **Additional Operating** This request includes: 4,000 for programming purposes for an event called Family Weekend. This program is growing, and we want to be able to provide quality education to families about their child's vision loss. 40,000 for anticipated utility increases. We receive our heat/electricity from UND and were recently charged a 19,000-overage fee. 11,500 for inflationary increases for outreach services to students/adults. Our property is on 10 acres of land and we recently began hiring to apply chemical application to control weeds, 4,500.
2. **Teacher Salary Increases** This is to place teachers on the Composite Salary Schedule developed by HRMS for 2023-25. This includes wages, retirement, and payroll taxes. They are not classified employees.
3. **Temporary Salaries** This request is to return a portion of the temporary salaries reduced in a prior biennium. We are anticipating 25% of staff to retire in next 5 years. This will allow a cushion to hire temporary staff as vision professionals are in high demand and short supply.
4. **IT Costs** This will allow NDVS to advance to Power Platform and allow us to build upon a low-code solution via a database, DataVerse. Our lead IT team member has been working with NDIT on this project for over a year and suggest this for the most positive citizen outcome.
5. **Equipment under 5,000** This includes 12,000 for adaptive technology equipment. NDVS/SB needs to be the leader in adaptive technology in ND. This will allow us to demonstrate new products. This also includes 3,600 for a floor scrubber and 4,900 for a carpet cleaner which the current machines are over 15 years old. These machines are both used frequently. This request also includes 5,500 to replace two doors in the garage/warehouse area.
6. **Update Parking Lot – Tar** This includes the north parking lot adjacent to Sixth Avenue North and the northwest parking lot adjacent to Sixth Avenue North and Stanford Road. The tar in this area has been repaired and older than 25 years old. It needs to be resurfaced and could be a safety hazard with its unlevel surface.
7. **Flooring – Cabinets for East Wing** This is to replace the flooring in the suites (where students reside) 10,000 and replacement of kitchen cabinets in the apartments, 35,000. These items will be over 25 years old at the time of replacement.



8. **Update Front Entrance** This will include an update to the front entrance (door #4). Most of the cost includes a drain to the sewer system for water that collects in this area. We are treating it as a safety issue. Breakdown of costs: Install drain 28,000, cement 17,000, tree removal 3,000, and landscaping 7,000.



9. **Update Student Commons Area** The objective is to make the room more functional to use as a social gathering or for student projects.



10. **Replace Electrical Panel – Corridor** This is to replace a panel that is approaching 45 years old.
11. **Roof Replacement and Repairs** This request includes replacement of the roof in the corridor area between the East Wing and South Wing – 135,000. During April 2022, SiteLogic and Tecta inspected the roof for all our buildings. It also includes deferred maintenance of 15,000.
12. **Gutters for South Wing** Due to the fact that we have been doing deferred maintenance for many years, only one roof area is in need of replacement, and the replacement of gutters South Wing.
13. **Misc. Repairs (Doors and AC Units)** This request includes the replacement of two doors, (main door) – sliding door and exterior door between the South/East Wing, 19,000. Also includes the replacement of two air conditioners, 10,000.



NORTH DAKOTA VISION SERVICES/SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND

NDVS/SB may be one of the most unique of all state agencies. Our mission to serve people of all ages with visual impairment alone makes our role in the state unique. In terms of our workforce, the majority of our staff have specialized degrees and are considered experts in the field on the state level as well as some being recognized nationally. In most instances members of our work team cannot be replaced quickly or easily due to a shortage of professionals in this field regionally and nationally.

NDVS/SB currently has no FTE vacancies. A report from HRMS revealed that we are one of the ten lowest paid agencies. We highly support compensation increases for our classified employees and teachers. We also ask that you consider supporting SB2015 for the equity package.

WHAT HAPPENS IF WE CAN'T DO OUR JOB...

Result 1



Children under age three with visual impairment would not receive early intervention to facilitate concept development, use of all senses and confidence in movement if our teachers were unable to provide guidance to parents and a variety of services within the child's home.

Result 2



Students in public and private schools across the state would not receive expert assessment and instruction in the skills required to fully participate and be successful in school and ultimately be Choice Ready at the time of graduation.

Result 3



Adults who become visually impaired or blind as a result of age-related conditions, disease or accidents would not receive the training in orientation and mobility, technology, self-care, braille and other special skills that build independence. People who go without this vital training lose independence and are often not able to take care of themselves or be active in their communities.

CURRENT AGENCY TEAM MEMBER STATS

11.5

Average years of instructional services

0

Number of vacancies

27.75

Full-time team members

7

Retirement-eligible next 5 years

\$58,005

Teachers average annual salary

\$50,371

Classified average annual salary *

* Does not include Superintendent

Other Bills That May Affect NDVS/SB

SB 2015 which aligns with the Executive Budget provides equity dollars for all agencies as well as the University System and Research & Extension. This proposed equity package, if approved, will be in addition to the performance-based increases that have also been recommended. NDVS/SB currently is one of the ten lowest paid agencies from HRMS.

Below is the estimated target equity and justification as identified by HRMS.

<div><div>SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND</div><div>Estimated Targeted Equity</div><div>\$160,000</div><div>Biennial Expense</div></div>	<div>Justification for targeted equity:</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agency identified certain job categories as particularly hard to fill and retain<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Vision Specialists◦ Maintenance Workers◦ Maintenance Supervisor◦ Administrative Staff• Population analysis also revealed some relatively low paid employees
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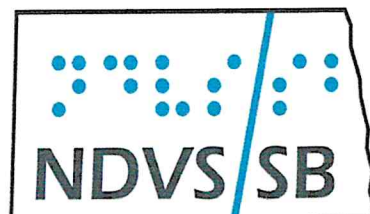
Audit Findings

An audit was completed by the State Auditor's Office in 2021. This is what the report stated: **WHAT WE FOUND - This audit did not identify any areas of concern.**

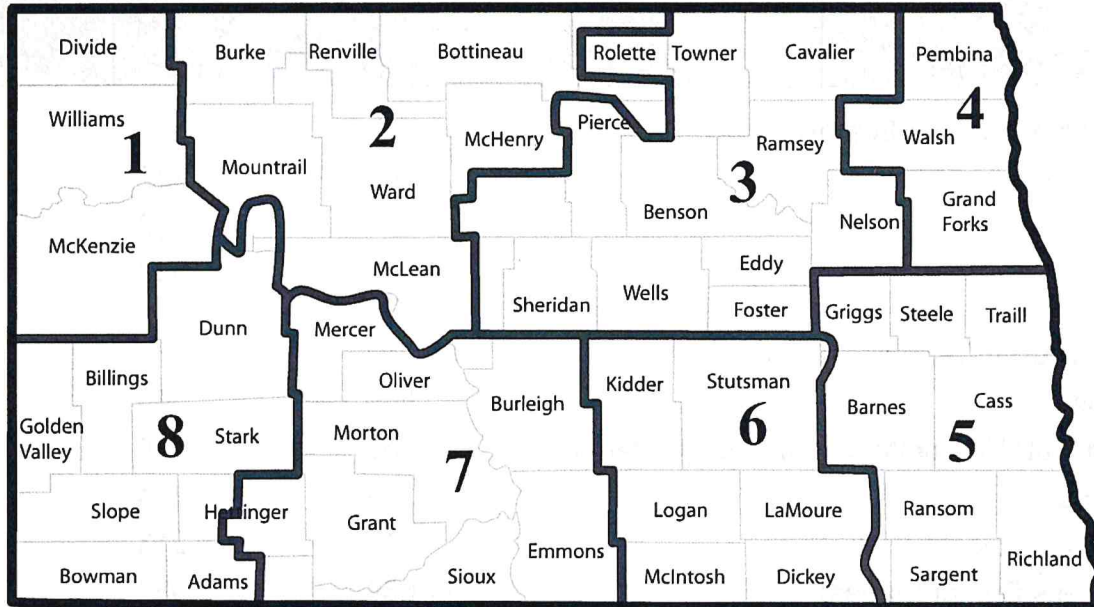
Client Services Data

Services Provided	2019-2021 Biennium	7/1/21 - 6/30/22 Annual	7/1/21 - 12/31/22 18 Months
Clients Served (Unduplicated):			
Infants/Students	292	232	270
Adults	<u>217</u>	<u>130</u>	<u>181</u>
Total	509	362	451
Vision Resource Center:			
New Loans	969	543	543
"Reaching Out" Newsletter (circulated quarterly)	365	538	910
APH Federal Registry	296	314	314
Store Sales (Invoices)	417	213	271
Braille Access Center (pages)	11,638	5,087	9,476
Short-term Programs (Persons Served):			
Student Programming	175	63	93
Adult Weeks	14	19	26
Summer Camps	27	20	26
Evaluations, Consultations, and Instructions (Services Provided):			
Consultations	1,598	838	1,295
Evaluations	400	210	297
Instruction	5,616	4,481	6,420
In-Service Training (Attendees)	660	901	1,403

(As of 06/30/20)



Citizens Served by Region July 1, 2021 to December 31, 2022



Region 1 - Williston

Infants/Students: 8
Adults: 4
Total: 12

Region 5 - Fargo

Infants/Students: 65
Adults: 37
Total: 102

Region 2 - Minot

Infants/Students: 39
Adults: 17
Total: 56

Region 6 - Jamestown

Infants/Students: 33
Adults: 5
Total: 38

Region 3 - Devils Lake

Infants/Students: 32
Adults: 13
Total: 45

Region 7 - Bismarck

Infants/Students: 26
Adults: 29
Total: 55

Region 4 - Grand Forks

Infants/Students: 34
Adults: 58
Total: 92

Region 8 - Dickinson

Infants/Students: 31
Adults: 10
Total: 41

Relocated/Out of State

Infants/Students: 2
Adults: 8
Total: 10

Totals

Infants/Students: 270
Adults: 181
Citizens: 451

Conclusion

North Dakota Vision Services/School for the Blind staff strive to serve boldly and operate efficiently. As a small agency with a sizable mission to provide services and resources to children and adults who are visually impaired, we must look forward and prioritize our tasks and projects. For the 2023-2025 biennium the short list of priorities strengthens and enhances services while being cost effective.

In a competitive environment it is important that increases in compensation for all staff are included. The increases for teachers allow NDVS/SB to compete with other North Dakota School districts. An increase in temporary salaries allows NDVS/SB to recruit and retain part-time employees (Such as dorm staff) at a competitive wage as well as utilize professional part-time help as needed to meet our obligations around the state.

There are always facility maintenance projects and modest upgrades that are requested every two years. This coming biennium is no different but the list this time around has a very reasonable price tag given how proactive we have been in keeping up on the health of the building and grounds. Enhancing the usability of the building for instruction through updating the front entrance, the student commons area and replacing flooring in the East Wing will greatly improve the appearance and function of the facility.

We consider each of these optional packages very important or essential. The roof targeted for replacement and the gutter repair for example are necessary and we feel it is prudent to do the as soon as possible. From new IT costs to purchasing new assistive technology, each item on the list was selected with care and a mindset of cost effectiveness.



Beyond 23-25 there were a number of additional improvements identified by SiteLogic. An upgraded HVAC system in the South Wing would enhance air quality as the current CFM is below standard. Also, in the South Wing a more substantial remodeling of space would increase function and enhance the lifespan of the building for decades. Those are future considerations, but we pride ourselves in being proactive by identifying needs well in advance.

Thank you for your consideration. We are prepared to provide additional information and clarification requested to assist you in this process.





North Dakota Vision Services/School for the Blind is a division of the
Department of Public Instruction,
Kirsten Baesler, State Superintendent
www.dpi.nd.gov

NDVS/SB does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, age, sex (wages) or genetics in its programs and activities.

Testimony for SB2013 page 1

To: Representative Don Vigesaa, Chair, and Members of the ND House Appropriations Committee, 68th Legislative Session.

From: Allan Peterson, Legislative Committee, North Dakota Association of the Blind (NDAB). Home address: 7009 Horseshoe Bend, Horace, ND 58047.
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Re: Testimony offered for SB2013, specifically for the appropriation provided to North Dakota Vision Services / School for the Blind for the biennium of 2023 – 2025.

Greetings Chairman Vigesaa, Vice Chair Kempenich, Representatives Bert Anderson, Bellew, Brandenburg, Karla Rose Hanson, Kreidt, Martinson, Meier, Mitskog, Mock, Monson, Nathe, Jon Nelson, O'Brien, Pyle, Richter, Sanford, Schatz, Stemen, Strinden, and Swiontek, Members of the House Appropriations Committee.

I am testifying on my own behalf as well as for that of the **North Dakota Association of the Blind**, we are testifying in support of the budget request that has been submitted for North Dakota Vision Services / School for the Blind for its operation and capital expenditures for the next biennium of 2023 - 2025.

A resolution that supports the appropriation request of NDVS/SB, adopted by North Dakota Association of the Blind, is also included with this testimony.

To be clear, we are testifying not only to maintain but to strengthen the appropriation for NDVS/SB. We do support the budget for NDVS/SB as was proposed in Governor Doug Burgum's budget as has been submitted to the 68th North Dakota Legislative session. We are well aware, that there are significant unmet needs and a great need for more resources that, if available, would help serve more people with sight loss in ND.

It cannot be over emphasized, just how important it is that persons who lose some or all of their sight, be afforded the opportunity to receive appropriate quality blindness rehabilitation skills training to deal with this most serious life altering change. This training is really what makes all the difference in having a much better quality of life.

About North Dakota Association of the Blind (NDAB): You could say that North Dakota Association of the Blind is an organization of and for people who are blind or visually impaired. We are a statewide membership organization that was founded 87 years ago in 1936. A majority of our members are blind or sight impaired. We provide educational, mentorship, networking, social and recreational opportunities for members and nonmembers. As an organization, we strongly advocate for blindness specific rehabilitation skills training, employment opportunities, and adaptations that will enhance and improve the lives of people who are blind and visually impaired. We have no paid staff, and our services are provided through the work of unpaid volunteers.

As a person who lost his eyesight as an adult, I can testify to the importance and efficacy of the training that can be offered by NDVS-SB. The skills that I learned through what is known as "orientation and mobility" using a white cane, is an adaptation I use each and every day and is of immeasurable importance to my independence. The skill set of orientation and mobility is taught by a mobility instructor who has been certified to provide this training. Clients learn and perfect the skills of mobility and orientation over a period of several weeks and even months of training.

Besides the "orientation and mobility" skills that I've learned, I rely heavily on the use of a computer that has been equipped with a speech (audio) output program, which allows me to work productively as a person that has no functional eyesight.

The instruction that I've received from the NDVS-SB technology experts on using audio output from my computer has been absolutely vital in developing my skills to access this mode of communication. Many others in the population of people who are blind can provide similar testimonials on the absolute vital need for the services of the skilled technology instructors employed by NDVS/SB. Because the digital revolution is so critically vital to independence in today's society, we desperately need the specific training to allow us to be proficient in utilizing today's latest electronic technology.

I have also gained very valuable skills on using an iPhone from instructors at NDVS/SB and am very thankful that this training can be offered virtually via a phone call.

Another vital skill I've learned and used extensively with the aid of instruction from teachers at NDVS-SB is to read and write in Braille. I have found this skill to be particularly useful in writing notes and marking items; Braille is an adaptation comparable to the use of paper and pencil.

Whether they are children or are adults, learning the skills to deal with blindness are best done at a teaching facility that is equipped and has the professional staff needed to instruct their students, so they are better able to deal with the challenges that this disability imposes on a person. And North Dakota Vision services / School for the Blind is the only teaching institution in North Dakota that offers a comprehensive program of instruction to deal with sight loss adjustment and It is absolutely imperative that this service be maintained and strengthened so that it is better able to continue to serve those of us who must deal with significant sight loss.

One of the benefits the pandemic yielded, was that we learned how to communicate virtually using electronic platforms like Zoom. Instructors at the School coordinated with our organization to offer a variety of virtual weekly meetings that have included among others - valuable information on accessible technology, coping skills, daily living skills like cooking, and much, much more that continue to be offered presently.