

**Services for Students
Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired
in Missouri**

**A Study Commissioned by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
Division of Special Education**

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INTRODUCTION

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Division of Special Education commissioned a study regarding services for children who are blind or visually impaired (VI) in Missouri. The study was designed to elicit information from key stakeholder groups throughout the state regarding the following major research questions:

1. What are the critical skills needed by students who are blind or VI to achieve successful educational and adult outcomes?
2. What are the necessary supports students require to develop the critical skills?
3. Which of the critical skills are local school districts and the Missouri School for the Blind adequately developing and which are not being adequately developed for students?
4. What role should the Missouri School for the Blind (MSB) assume in the education of students who are blind or VI?
5. What changes need to be made regarding training, policies, roles of different agencies (school districts, MSB, Blindness Skills Specialists, Rehabilitation Services for the Blind), funding streams, etc. for MSB and local school districts to more effectively meet the needs of students who are blind or VI?
6. What are effective ways to utilize current and possible future outreach staff from MSB?

The DESE Request for Proposal specified that data should be collected from a variety of sources to respond to these queries. Specifically, DESE anticipated that a series of Focus Groups and surveys be conducted with students, parents, general education and special education teachers, local school district administrators of special education services, recent graduates of school programs, employers, and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors with the Rehabilitation Services for the Blind.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The study has been designed to meet the requirements of the DESE Request for Proposal. Focus Groups and Surveys were conducted throughout the state. The initial component was a survey conducted in association with the April, 2005 Children's Vision Summit sponsored by the Task Force on Blind Student Academic and Vocational Performance (Task Force), the Rehabilitation Services for the Blind (RSB) and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). Secondly, focus groups were conducted with students, parents, general education and special education staff in local school districts, local school district administrators, Blindness Skills Specialists and other interested parties in seven locations throughout the state - - Cape Girardeau, Columbia, Kansas City, Kirksville, Missouri School for the Blind, Springfield, and St. Louis. Local school districts in each region (within a forty-mile radius of the host school district) that reported children with visual impairments on their December 1 Child Count for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act were invited to attend the Focus Group. Members of the Task Force also attended the Focus Groups. The third component included telephone surveys with Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors associated with the Rehabilitation Services for the Blind. Finally, telephone surveys were conducted with a number of individuals who are blind or VI who had graduated from high school within the past two years.

In addition, the study has incorporated other design elements to utilize information available from other sources. First, the Principal Investigator conducted interviews with leadership from key stakeholder groups to discuss the design of the study and obtain their perspectives relative to the major research questions. The stakeholder groups included leadership from:

1. Rehabilitation Services for the Blind and the Advisory Council for Rehabilitation Services for the Blind,
2. Task Force on Blind Student Academic and Vocational Performance,
3. Faculty and staff from Southwest Missouri State University (this university was selected because it is the only Missouri institution with training programs for teachers of the visually impaired and orientation and mobility instructors), and
4. Missouri School for the Blind.

Secondly, the Principal Investigator conducted a literature review regarding policy recommendations offered in recent years relevant to the design and delivery of services for students who are blind or VI. Policy recommendations from the American Foundation for the Blind, the Council for Exceptional Children, the Texas School for the Blind, the National Association of State Directors of Special Education, and the Vanderbilt University were reviewed for this study.

Finally, the Principal Investigator reviewed studies and recommendations specific to Missouri conducted pursuant to statutory requirements; ie., 162.1130 RSMo. – Task Force on Blind Student Academic and Vocational Performance, and 162.1136, RSMo. – Annual Blind Literacy Study. These reports were reviewed to identify areas of concern and specific recommendations that have been made to improve educational services for students who are blind or VI.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Literature Review Regarding Policies for the Education of Students who are Blind or VI.

One of the most comprehensive statements of policy regarding the development of appropriate services for students who are blind or VI came from the American Foundation for the Blind in the National Report to the Nation: The National Agenda for the Education of Children and Youth with Visual Impairments, Including Those with Multiple Disabilities, (Corn, 1995) and the revised publication of the original work (Huebner, 2004). The National Agenda contained a set of National Goals, strategies, and achievements that have provided strong guidance relative to the education of students who are blind or VI. The National Goals include:

- Goal 1 - - Students and their families will be referred to an appropriate education program within 30 days of identification of a suspected visual impairment. Teachers of students with visual impairments and orientation and mobility instructors will provide appropriate quality services.
- Goal 2 - - Policies and procedures will be implemented to ensure the rights of all parents to full participation and equal partnership in the education process.

- Goal 3 - - Universities with a minimum of one full-time faculty member in the area of Visual Impairments will prepare a sufficient number of teachers and orientation and mobility specialists for students with visual impairments to meet the personnel preparation needs throughout the country.
- Goal 4 - - Caseloads will be determined based on the assessed needs of students.
- Goal 5 - - Local education programs will ensure that all students have access to a full array of service delivery options.
- Goal 6 - - All assessments and evaluations of students will be conducted by or in partnership with personnel having expertise in the education of students with visual impairments and their parents.
- Goal 7 - - Access to developmental and educational services will include an assurance that textbooks and instructional materials are available to students in the appropriate media and at the same time as their sighted peers.
- Goal 8 - - All educational goals and instruction will address the academic and expanded core curricula based on the needs of each student with visual impairments.
- Goal 9 - - Transition services will address developmental and educational needs (birth through high school) to assist students and their families in setting goals and implementing strategies through the life continuum commensurate with the students' aptitudes, interests, and abilities.
- Goal 10 - - To improve students' learning, service providers will engage in ongoing local, state and national professional development. (Huebner, 2004)

From an instructional standpoint, one of the principal contributions of the National Agenda has been a coalescence of thought regarding the critical skills needed by students with visual impairments. The core curriculum and expanded core curriculum expressed by the National Agenda reflects the belief that students with visual impairments have two basic needs. First is a curricular experience which parallels that of their sighted peers. Students with visual impairments require appropriate instruction to develop competencies in the standard curricular areas that all other students are expected to demonstrate - - competencies in communication arts, mathematics, science, social studies, health and physical education, foreign language, fine arts and practical arts.

In addition, students with visual impairments have unique instructional needs as well. The “expanded core curriculum” may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Compensatory Skills, such as Communication Modes (Braille, Visual Efficiency, Listening Skills),
- Orientation and Mobility,
- Social Interaction Skills,
- Independent Living Skills,
- Recreation and Leisure Skills,
- Career Education,
- Use of Assistive Technology,
- Visual Efficiency Skills, and
- Self Determination (Huebner, 2004)

The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (in association with The American Council of the Blind, American Foundation for the Blind, American Printing House for the Blind, Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind, Association of Instructional Resource Centers for the Visually Impaired, Council for Exceptional Children, Council of Schools for the Blind, Perkins School for the Blind, the National Agenda Planning Group, National Association for Parents of the Visually Impaired and State Consultants for Services to Visually Impaired Students) published Blind and Visually Impaired Students: Educational Service Guidelines (Pugh, 1999). This publication has provided extensive recommendations for State Education Agencies regarding the development and support of strong educational programs for students with visual impairments. The report builds upon the work reflected in the National Agenda and further encourages appropriate services through recognition of the needs for:

1. supportive and appropriate program structures and administration,
2. appropriate assessment of students,
3. high standards in program requirements and placement options, and
4. personnel standards that reflect the uniqueness associated with blindness / visual impairments.

The Council for Exceptional Children developed a National Plan for Training Personnel to Serve Children with Blindness and Low Vision (Mason and Davidson, 2000). Following a comprehensive review of national strengths, needs and concerns, the CEC recommended:

1. A national network to support personnel preparation and technical assistance to ensure an adequate and appropriately trained supply of teachers and other professionals involved in the education of visually impaired students,
2. Support for a National Leadership Development Institute to develop mechanisms and programs to support professional development of present and future leaders in the field; and, support application of research to practice in blindness and low vision,
3. Development and support of a national comprehensive and cohesive recruitment campaign to increase the number of personnel serving the visually impaired population.

The application of national studies to local practice can be difficult. Educators and other leaders often face challenges when applying national goals and models to their local programs. Such reviews may challenge long held notions and assumptions regarding the appropriateness of services and placements that have developed over many years. Phillip Hatlen (Hatlen, 2003) Superintendent of the Texas School for the Blind and co-author of the National Agenda (1995), has written extensively regarding the evolution of schools for the blind. Hatlen writes that the 1980s was a decade where schools for the blind began to take charge of their own destiny. He observed a change from the notion that state schools for the blind served only those students whom the local schools were not able to serve, to a notion that placed schools for the blind in a partnership with local schools districts and parents to provide a range of services for students who are blind. Off campus or outreach programs have emerged to provide instruction in individualized academic and practical curriculum, career education, self esteem, education for challenging students and extra curricular activities (Hatlen, Fall, 2003). In addition, campus programs for students have changed to provide alternatives such as summer programs and short classes (Hatlen, Fall, 2003). The Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired has maintained a strong residential program option for students who are blind or VI. In addition, it has supported local school districts efforts to provide appropriate services through off-campus programs; and, developed curricular offerings at the campus school in spatially formatted academic subjects that are particularly difficult for Braille-reading students, such as science, mathematics and geography.

H.B. 401 - - Task Force on Academic and Vocational Performance Reports and Missouri Blind Literacy Reports.

House Bill 401 was enacted in 1999. Among other provisions, this legislation created the Task Force on Academic and Vocational Performance. The legislation specifies:

A task force on blind student academic and vocational performance is hereby established and shall be comprised of members appointed by the commissioner of education, in cooperation with the director of the department of social services, to represent consumer organizations, parents, teachers, public school special education administrators, school building principals, rehabilitation services for the blind, the Missouri school for the blind, employers, and others interested in quality services for blind students. This task force shall develop goals and objectives to guide the improvement of special education, related services, vocational training, transition from school to work, rehabilitation services, independent living and employment outcomes for eligible students. (Section 1133.3.3 RSMo.)

The Task Force on Blind Student Academic and Vocational Performance meets regularly throughout the year. It has standing committees dealing with Governmental Affairs, Transition and the Annual Study. In addition the Task Force has undertaken study on other topics including Teacher Certification, Orientation and Mobility Training programs, and status of the National Agenda. The minutes of the Task Force meetings provide a careful presentation of current issues and concerns regarding the education of students who are blind or VI. The Task Force has dealt effectively with numerous issues. Particularly relevant for this report is the work the Task Force has done with respect to an analysis and recommendations regarding Teacher Certification for Teachers of the Blind / Visually Impaired, supporting and coordinating the Blindness Skills Specialist Program, and sponsorship of the Children's Vision Summit.

In addition, H.B. 401 requires an annual assessment of literacy for students who are blind or visually impaired with a report made to the General Assembly. Specifically, the legislation requires the report to include:

- (1) The methodology of the study;*
- (2) The percentage of eligible students in the study who read Braille, print, or large print;*
- (3) The number of students who have a visual impairment sufficient to meet the definition "eligible student," as defined in section 162.1130;*
- (4) The number of students currently reading Braille, large print and standard print. The report shall also detail how many eligible students there are by age, grade level, ungraded and with multiple handicaps, who are enrolled in public school, or in the Missouri School for the Blind, respectively;*
- (5) The number of Braille-reading students who no longer receive any instruction in Braille reading and writing but do receive materials in Braille and Braille-related services;*
- (6) The number of certified vision teachers or teachers of the blind or visually impaired who are currently employed in the field in the state of Missouri;*
- (7) The number of eligible students who use a slate and stylus and/or other devices* in writing Braille;*
- (8) The number of eligible students educated in the general education classroom, in an itinerant or resource classroom, in a self-contained classroom or in a separate educational facility;*
- (9) The graduation rate of eligible students compared to those students who are not disabled;*
- (10) The number of eligible students who did not meet graduation requirements but were terminated from formal education having reached age twenty-one years;*
- (11) The number of eligible students who received transition planning services with the cooperation of the division of vocational rehabilitation or rehabilitation services for the blind as part of their IEP;*
- (12) The number of eligible students referred to rehabilitation services for the blind or division of vocational rehabilitation. (Section 1136.2 RSMo)*

The Missouri Blindness Literacy Studies have been completed and reported as required since 1999. The reader is referenced to the complete reports found on the DESE Website at <http://www.dese.mo.gov/divspeced/Blind/blindlitreports.html>. Relevant data from the Blindness Literacy Reports will be incorporated into this report as components of the data collected to respond to the six Major Research Questions.

Responses to the Six Research Questions - - Results of the Focus Groups, Surveys, Interviews, Literature Review and Statutory Report Data Review

Data were collected in a variety of venues for this report. First, data were collected via a series of Focus Groups conducted throughout the state. Attendees included students, parents, teachers, school administrators, and representatives from the Task Force on Academic and Vocational Performance. Invitations were sent to administrators of school districts within a 30 to 50 mile radius of the host school district that reported Blind or VI students on the December 1 Child Count. The invitations requested the attendance of students who are blind or VI, parents, teachers and school administrators.

The Focus Groups were conducted in the following school districts: Cape Girardeau, Columbia, Kirksville, Raytown, Springfield, St. Louis County Special School District, and at the Missouri School for the Blind. Responses were obtained from 24 students, 23 parents, 51 teachers and administrators, and nine other respondents representing members of the Task Force, Blindness Skills Specialists and university faculty.

The Focus Groups were organized such that teachers and administrators participated in one focus group and parents and students in another focus group. In all, fifteen focus groups were conducted. Facilitation of the focus groups resulted in the identification of consensus responses to the research questions.

A second source of data were interviews conducted with leadership from the Task Force on Academic and Vocational Performance, the Rehabilitation Services for the Blind (RSB) and the Advisory Council for the RSB, the Missouri School for the Blind, and faculty and staff from the College of Education at Southwest Missouri State University.

Third, the Investigator was invited to make a presentation at the 2005 Children's Vision Summit and obtained written responses to surveys from participants who included primary consumers, parents, teachers, school administrators, university faculty, and state agency representatives. Twenty-seven (27) written surveys were received.

A fourth source of data were telephone surveys with 7 Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors employed with RSB and from 3 recent graduates from high school who are blind or visually impaired. Follow-up with the recent graduates proved to be the most difficult aspect of data collection for this study. Because of the low numbers, the investigator utilized data from the 2001 Literacy Report in which 113 written surveys were mailed to recent graduates with a return of 25 useable responses.

Finally, literature reviews and reports previously mentioned in this report are the fifth source of data for this report.

What are the critical skills needed by students who are blind or VI to achieve successful educational and adult outcomes?

Elements of the "expanded core curriculum" (Corn, 1999 and Huebner, 2004) emerged as the prominent responses of the majority of focus group participants. Fifteen of the fifteen (15 out

of 15) focus groups agreed that Braille and Nemeth, Orientation and Mobility and Daily Living Skills were critical skills. Other prominent consensus responses included Assistive Technology (12 focus groups), Social Skills and Social Interaction (11 focus groups), Self Determination / Self Advocacy (10 focus groups), and general education curriculum competency (9 focus groups). Other skills identified by 5 or fewer focus groups included Recreation/Leisure, Employability Skills, Visual Efficiency, Note-taking, Computer Skills and Listening Skills. Certainly, one should not assume that those skills identified five times or fewer are not important. However, when asked to prioritize those that are critical, they received less support than others identified previously.

Telephone interviews with Rehabilitation Counselors provided a somewhat different response. While recognizing the importance of areas mentioned above, the Rehabilitation Counselors placed far greater emphasis on independent living, career education, transition, work experiences while still in school, technology competence and resilience. Their orientation to adult situations provided a distinctly more functional orientation to the considerations.

Similarly, interviews with recent graduates and the results of the graduate follow-up study done as a part of the 2001 Literacy Report (DESE, 2001) were supportive of the efforts of high schools and RSB to prepare the graduates for post-secondary education. However, those same respondents felt they were inadequately prepared for employment. Clearly, career education, transition and work skills emerge as critical skills for students who are blind or VI.

What are the necessary supports students require to develop the critical skills?

Availability of adequately trained personnel, including teachers, paraprofessionals, O&M instructors and therapists was a consensus statement in 15 out of 15 focus groups. In addition, 9 out of 15 focus groups identified professional development, 7 out of 15 identified access to appropriate materials (Braille, large print, etc.), and 7 out of 15 identified the availability of Technical Assistance and Outreach Staff to support the implementation of services for students. Also identified as necessary supports was the availability of technology and instruction in computer skills by 6 out of 15 focus groups. Elements of the Blindness Literacy Study, 2001 (DESE, 2001) also identify the need for quality instruction by competent staff and the availability of appropriate technology as necessary supports for the education of students who are blind or VI.

Which of the critical skills are local school districts and the MSB adequately developing and which are not being adequately developed for students?

Two general observations can be made regarding this question. First, the relative availability of adequately trained personnel had a significant impact on the responses. In those areas of the state where staff were available (primarily in urban and suburban areas), participants expressed confidence that most of the expanded core curriculum was being adequately addressed by the schools, particularly Braille, O&M, and Daily Living Skills. This was particularly true of responses from teachers and administrators. It was less evident in the responses of parents. Parents and students in five of the focus groups indicated a need for stronger instruction in elements of the expanded core curriculum, as did the staff at the Missouri School for the Blind

when commenting on the relative skill levels of students who were enrolling in MSB from other educational programs.

Interestingly, a secondary concern was raised by participants regarding how well critical skills would be addressed in the future. Respondents were aware that several of the appropriately trained staff were approaching retirement age. Respondents were unsure who would be available to continue the instruction.

High school graduates pointed out that schools were not meeting the instructional needs of students with respect to the availability of accessible materials, particularly in the areas of mathematics, science and geography (DESE, 2001).

Another common point of consensus in focus groups (7 out of 15) was that assistive technology was not being adequately addressed statewide. Concerns were expressed regarding the availability of contemporary computer equipment and software, and the use of technology devices that are being developed for such things as note taking. The 2001 Literacy Report also documented a need for additional training for teachers in the use of technology and adequate funding from local school districts to acquire necessary technology (DESE, 2001).

The development of appropriate social interaction skills and the availability of social networks were identified by 10 out of 15 focus groups as critical skills that were not being adequately addressed. The very low incidence of the disability often results in isolation of the student who is blind or VI. Participants often expressed concerns about this and a desire for extracurricular opportunities for students with similar disabilities and a coordinated statewide network to facilitate interactions and friendships.

What role should the Missouri School for the Blind (MSB) assume in the education of students who are blind or VI? What are effective ways to utilize current and possible future outreach staff from MSB?

These questions have been combined because of their close relationship to one another.

All of the focus groups concurred that the MSB must have a prominent role in the education of students who are blind or VI. Likewise, focus groups concurred that MSB needs to obtain resources necessary to maintain a strong residential and educational program for certain students. In addition, respondents asserted the need for MSB to develop flexible campus based and regional services responsive to the needs of the students, parents and schools. These data are consistent with the reports from Hatlen in The Evolution of the Schools for the Blind in the 21st Century (Hatlen, 2003)

Specifically, 11 out of 15 focus groups reached consensus on MSB developing short-term flexible placement options for students. During such placements, students would be given the opportunities to concentrate on the development of particular competencies or skills needed at the student's present time. After initial mastery or competency is achieved, the student would return to their home community. Respondents saw a far more dynamic nature to placements at the MSB that encouraged movement from their home community to MSB and return as the instructional needs of the student dictated.

Six out of fifteen (6 of 15) focus groups reached consensus that MSB must expand the Outreach and Assessment Program and develop regionalized services. This request was prominent in rural areas. Respondents visualized opportunities for the Blindness Skills Specialists and current Outreach staff at MSB to work in a more coordinated, rather than divided, fashion to respond to the needs of students and school district staff. Participants anticipated that the functions of the BSS and Outreach staff could be duplicative so long as the staff assumed separate geographic responsibilities.

However, even if the Blindness Skills Specialist (BSS) and Outreach staff are functionally merged to provide technical assistance, service needs may still out-strip available staff. In several of the rural areas, focus groups expressed strong agreement that MSB should partner with local school districts to “buy-out” portions of the employment contract of highly qualified VI and O&M staff who were not needed full time in their employing district. These staff would be retained in the field of VI, and, made available as a component of the MSB Outreach Program to serve the needs of otherwise un-served or under-served students. Particularly in rural focus groups, participants viewed an expanded outreach effort by the MSB as central to improving educational opportunities for blind and VI students. Despite best efforts, personnel in rural areas opined that staff shortages would remain an issue. The alleviation of this persistent issue could be achieved through an expanded outreach program that would bring qualified staff to bear on a regional level in rural portions of the state.

Eight out of fifteen (8 / 15) focus groups reached consensus on MSB serving as the facilitator of a statewide program to support the development of social support systems for students. In addition, these focus groups also concurred that MSB should be a focal point in the development of statewide parent training and support programs. Similar to previous themes already reported, the participants believed that both student social experiences and parent training and support must have effective regional components in addition to a state level component offered out of the MSB campus.

Finally, 8 out of 15 focus groups expressed a strong desire for the MSB to assume a more prominent role in professional development for professionals and paraprofessionals throughout the state. Several participants expressed a desire for MSB to reinstate programs like the “Weekend with the Experts”, and, develop a coordinated statewide professional development effort of sufficient magnitude and scope to attract prominent leaders in the field of visual impairments.

What changes need to be made regarding training, policies, roles of different agencies (DESE, MSB, RSB, school districts, Blindness Skills Specialist-BSS), funding streams, etc. for MSB and local school districts to more effectively meet the needs of students who are blind or VI?

Missouri policymakers are fortunate to have access to a rich source of information from which to draw to make recommendations and identify changes that are necessary to improve services for students who are blind or VI. This section of the report identifies changes that may be needed in the systems serving children who are blind or VI. In arriving at the recommendations, the Investigator has drawn from:

- The results of the Focus Groups, interviews and surveys conducted with students, parents, professionals and advocates during the Spring of 2005
- Reports and recommendations from national organizations including the American Foundation for the Blind, the National Association of State Directors of Special Education and the Council of Exceptional Children
- Data and recommendations from the Task Force on Academic Achievement and Vocational Performance and the Missouri Blindness Literacy Reports.

The following recommendations from the Investigator synthesize the data collected for this report and attempt to present a comprehensive statement regarding service enhancements for consideration by policy leaders responsible for the education of students who are blind or VI:

1. Twelve out of fifteen (12 / 15) Focus Groups achieved consensus on the recommendation that a structured process be undertaken to develop and inculcate a Shared Vision regarding the education of students who are blind or VI among MSB staff, RSB staff, parents, school administrators, teachers, university faculty and staff, advocacy organizations, private providers, etc. Roles, rules, fiscal and human resources, and responsibilities traditionally assumed by these entities should be examined with the commitment to organize these resources in a fashion supportive of a Shared Vision for quality education.
2. Educators and others interested in the education of students who are blind or VI must commit themselves to high expectations for all students who are blind or VI. Students' academic and adult outcomes are dependent on the adoption of high expectations for all. All students must be afforded:
 - High quality instruction in academics and the expanded core curriculum provided by highly qualified staff
 - Access to assistive technology that will allow blind and VI students to interact with their environment in a manner reflective of their capabilities
 - Access to appropriate instructional materials in a manner consistent with the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standards (NIAMS) as outlined in IDEA, 2004.
 - Access to high quality transition planning, vocational education, and employment experiences as a part of the high school experience.
3. Nine out of fifteen (9 / 15) Focus Groups concurred that a review of personnel preparation is needed in Missouri to appropriately respond to the personnel needs of local school districts.
 - Certification standards should be reviewed to ensure that prospective teachers are appropriately trained with respect to Braille, Nemeth Code, Assistive Technology and other competencies necessary to ensure students' needs relative to the expanded core curriculum are met.
 - Local school districts, using professional development funds, and universities, using appropriations and available external funding sources, should allocate the financial resources necessary to support Teacher Education and Orientation and Mobility education for aspiring educators. The low incidence of the blind / VI population may require state level consideration for additional financial support for these programs.

- Personnel preparation should ensure an appropriate level of practicum and mentoring support of prospective and new personnel in the field. University, MSB and school staff can work together to accomplish this and thereby better ensure lower attrition of staff from the field.
 - DESE should review certification standards to ensure that fully certificated professionals from other states that meet standards comparable to those in Missouri are given the opportunity for full certification in Missouri.
4. The role of the MSB should be reviewed and consideration given to the following:
- Continued availability of a strong residential and educational programs
 - Curriculum review and revision to ensure that curriculum at MSB is aligned with the Grade Level Expectations and grade level assessments developed by DESE
 - Assurance that MSB is able to provide training, technical support and assistance in accessing assistive technology required by students who are blind or VI
 - Development of flexible service delivery models capable of providing intensive instruction in critical skill areas for students for short periods of time (summer programs or other short-term service models).
 - Redefinition and expansion of Outreach Services that have a regional capacity and draw on resources from MSB, Blindness Skills Specialists, fully certificated local school district staff, and Children’s Specialists from RSB to meet the needs of rural Missouri and other schools districts with technical assistance and support needs.
 - Assume a position of leadership among school districts, private providers, other state agency personnel and university faculty to coordinate and facilitate a comprehensive program of personnel development for professionals and paraprofessionals working with blind and VI students throughout the state.
 - Coordinate the establishment of a statewide social support network for students who are blind or VI. Such a network should provide multiple opportunities for students to join together physically in a common location or via electronic means to develop meaningful social networks with students who are similarly situated.
 - Coordinate the development of regional and statewide parent training and support networks for parents of students who are blind or VI. Parents in focus groups consistently expressed the desire for meaningful interaction with experts and other parents as they respond to the ongoing challenges of parenting.

SUMMARY

This report examines the strengths and needs regarding educational services for students who are blind or VI. Care has been taken to review relevant data from national organizations, Missouri organizations, existing reports and studies regarding educational services for students who are blind or VI, and new data gathered through meetings and focus groups with key stakeholders in Missouri. The recommendations have been compiled based on the input from key stakeholders and a review of relevant research and policy papers reviewed in this report.

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