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(FORM UPDATED: 08/11/2010)

WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE ... PUBLIC HEARING - COMMITTEE RECORDS

1997-98

(session year)

Senate

(Assembly, Senate or Joint)

Committee on Education...

COMMITTEE NOTICES ...

- Committee Reports ... **CR**
- Executive Sessions ... **ES**
- Public Hearings ... **PH**

INFORMATION COLLECTED BY COMMITTEE FOR AND AGAINST PROPOSAL

- Appointments ... **Appt** (w/Record of Comm. Proceedings)
- Clearinghouse Rules ... **CRule** (w/Record of Comm. Proceedings)
- Hearing Records ... bills and resolutions (w/Record of Comm. Proceedings)
(**ab** = Assembly Bill) (**ar** = Assembly Resolution) (**ajr** = Assembly Joint Resolution)
(**sb** = Senate Bill) (**sr** = Senate Resolution) (**sjr** = Senate Joint Resolution)
- Miscellaneous ... **Misc**

* Contents organized for archiving by: Stefanie Rose (LRB) (December 2012)

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF CADOTT COMMUNITY

P.O. Box 310

Cadott, Wisconsin 54727

Fax 715/289-3748

November 21, 1997

Representative Luther Olson
P.O. Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708

Senator Calvin Potter
P.O. Box 7882
Madison, WI 53707

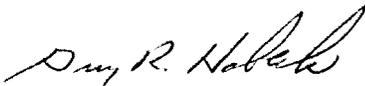
Dear Representative Olson and Senator Potter:

As chairperson of the legislative education committee in each respective house of the legislative I'd request that you copy and distribute the enclosed letter I wrote to John Benson on September 15, 1997, to each member of your committee prior to December 16.

I'd like your committees to please consider the opinions of the Cadott Community School Board and myself on the recommendation of John Benson to close the Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped. We oppose the state not serving these students as they now do.

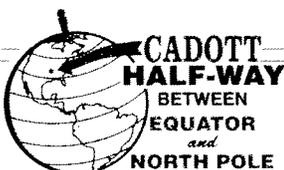
Thank you, in advance, for your consideration of our opinion.

Sincerely,



Guy R. Habeck
Superintendent

Enclosure



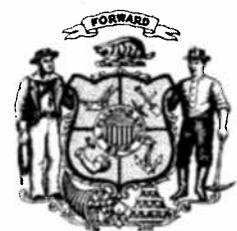
Guy R. Habeck
Superintendent
715/289-3795

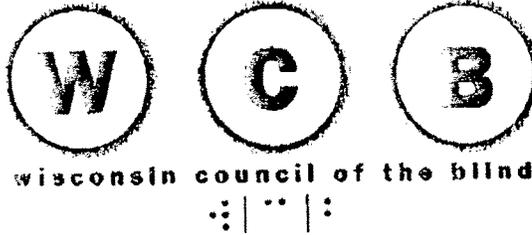
Martin Schultz
Jr./Sr. High School Principal
715/289-4211

Daniel Strebig
Elementary Principal
715/289-4213



WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE





Attention: Paul Rusk
Office of Senator Potter
Fax: 267-6796

From: Mark J. Karstedt
12-1-97

Initial speakers opposed to the DPI proposal to close WSVH for December 16, 1997 Joint Education Committee. The following names are split into proposed panel groups for individual testimony:

William English - former WSVH Superintendent (Madison) - history & background
Robert Olivero - grandparent (Racine) - costs/percentages/ratio's
Karen Perzentka - alumnus (Madison) - state response/WCB position/explain binder

Tom Hanson - WSVH teacher (Janesville) - role of school/part of continuum
Judy Holmes - O&M instructor (Milwaukee) - urban caseloads/district efforts/
marketing of WSVH
S. Lane Anthony - VI teacher (Barron) - rural VI caseloads/district efforts/
marketing of school

John Voorhees - Dir. Of Special Ed (Oak Creek District) - district level services/
marketing of school
Paul Edwards - ACB (National) - Michigan school situation - national agenda
Michael Bina - Superintendent, Indiana School for the Blind - COSB - successful
programs
Dorothy Arensman - Superintendent, Illinois School for the Visually Impaired

Amy Snow - WSVH student (per student government) - personal experience
Shelly Lauer - Parent (Neenah) - case study
Dick Pomo - WCB Executive Director - state services, ADA, future roles

In addition, Karen Heesen (608) 752-0139 is coordinating testimony of other students and parents.



WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE





Department of Family and Community Medicine
St. Michael Family Practice Residency Program

David S. Smith, M.D.
Assistant Professor and
Program Director

James G. Blanton, M.D.
Assistant Professor and
Associate Director

Ann C. Beecher, M.D.
Assistant Professor

Carroll P. Cully, M.D.
Assistant Clinical Professor

Sylvia M. Metzger, M.D.
Assistant Clinical Professor

Christopher R. Ovide, M.D.
Assistant Professor

Michael B. Walkowiak, M.D.
Assistant Professor

December 9, 1997

Cheri McGrath
President, Board of Directors
Badger Association for the Blind
912 N. Hawley Avenue
Milwaukee, WI

Re: Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped

Dear Ms. McGrath:

I am writing to you as a member of the Badger Association and as a concerned visually impaired psychologist. The proposal by Mr. Benson to close the Wisconsin residential school for the blind in order to save the cost of running the school for only 60 or so blind children is alarming, not because I believe the school must remain open, but due to the absence of any clear plan articulated in the proposal to improve education for these and other blind or visually impaired children in Wisconsin.

As a clinical child psychologist who has worked with both able-bodied and disabled children, adolescents and adults in a professional capacity for 18 years, I believe that the concept of a year-round residential facility to teach disabled children is an anachronism. Today a much broader range of opportunities is available for the disabled person than in the past. To properly prepare an individual having a physical handicap such as restricted or absent vision for active participation in life, acquaintance with the world around him or her is essential. It is unrealistic to believe that after a dozen years of separate education and socialization apart from the larger, non-disabled society we all live in, a disabled young person will be prepared to engage that society without an arduous and unnecessary period of adjustment. Such sheltered isolation from the mainstream of our world may leave many totally unable to make the transition.

St. Michael Family Care Center
2400 West Villard Avenue
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53209
(414) 827-8348
FAX (414) 827-8048

It is true that the visually impaired student has special educational needs and will benefit from association with other non-sighted or low vision peers. Such association gives the student an opportunity to discover that she is not the only person who cannot see the world as others do, it can give the disabled child an increased sense of who he is, and, perhaps, the first realistic appraisal of her own abilities measured against real peers. Mr. Benson's eventual plan must allow for such contact and identification by these children.

It is more important that the non-sighted or low vision child be comfortable and familiar with the people with whom he must eventually live among and compete with for jobs, housing, recreation, socialization, and intimacy. Since the larger non-disabled world dictates how we must function to be successful in these areas, the disabled student must learn to function, as much as her or his disability will allow, within the everyday world we all live in. Confidence in oneself as being the same as anyone else except for one's vision cannot be attained by avoiding or shunning these other people. Social skills and behavioral norms are just that, behaviors established by the majority of the population, which includes the disabled and non-disabled alike.

This highlights the other important reason for regular school experience for the blind and visually impaired. Without their regular presence in the school and neighborhood, the disabled become oddities and unusual figures of attraction for the non-disabled. The stigma of disability begins with the disabled person ignorant of the able-bodied encountering the able-bodied person ignorant of the disabled. Tension and anxiety arise for both, both rely on myths they have acquired of the other in order to understand and interact with the other. The myths are then perpetuated. I have personally encountered *physicians and other professionals* who believe in the myth that I and other blind persons have more finely developed hearing than they, because I rely on it more!

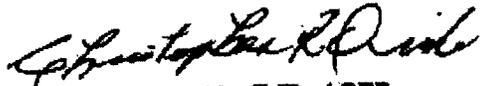
The negative impact on attachment and trust in others is a significant question as well, when we are discussing the concept of a residential school. There is little benefit to the well adapted child in being taken from her family for long periods of time to reside elsewhere for no better reason than she is blind. It reinforces the separation from the rest of the world even more than strongly than disabled people face when directly frustrated by their handicap in limiting their participation and enjoyment of life. These children vary in their goals, abilities, skills, achievement and achievement potential and have only blindness in common, blindness to bring them together. Nothing can more clearly say to a child that they are strange, different, undesirable and inadequate simply because they cannot see or cannot see very well.

Without the presence of the blind child in the regular school classroom, both able-bodied and disabled lose. It is also desirable that disabled children and adults be in close contact with their disabled peers and have the opportunity to know that they are not alone in being the same but different. It would be most beneficial for the state to develop regional centers for special learning needs and social acculturation of the blind and visually impaired, where they could spend time in with others having vision problems to learn skills necessary for their function in everyday life situations that the sighted person would not encounter. Strengthening primary and secondary educational services in the regular classroom situation that we all should experience is mandatory. Programs that exist only on paper to satisfy bureaucratic dictates must be supplanted by actual blind and low vision education being available to students who need them.

I hope the Badger Association can represent my concerns and suggestions at the state hearing on December 16 in Madison, as I cannot attend the hearing. To keep the Wisconsin school for the blind or to eliminate it without making provision for improved blind and low vision education in this state would be a serious disservice to the citizens of Wisconsin, blind and sighted. To maintain the school simply as an anachronistic institution to satisfy the sentiments of its alumni or evade the need to bring blind and visually handicapped education up to the standards demanded by the needs of these students would be criminal malpractice of authority.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

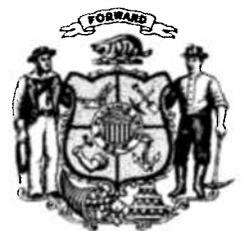
Very truly yours,



Christopher R. Ovide, EdD, ABPP
Board Certified in Counseling Psychology
Board Certified in Health Psychology
American Board of Professional Psychology
Licensed Psychologist: Wisconsin, #789; North Carolina, #1950
Licensed Clinical Psychologist: Virginia, #2075
Asst. Prof. of Family & Community Medicine
Asst. Prof. of Psychiatry & Behavioral Medicine
Medical College of Wisconsin



WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE





wisconsin council of the blind



Attention: Paul Rusk - Update on testimonials

Office of Senator Potter

Fax: 267-6796

From: Mark J. Karstedt

12-10-97

Initial speakers opposed to the DPI proposal to close WSVH for December 16, 1997 Joint Education Committee. The following names are split into proposed panel groups for individual testimony:

William English - former WSVH Superintendent - history & background
Robert Olivero - grandparent - costs/percentages/ratio's
William Koehler - former WSVH Superintendent - recent background & requests
Karen Perzentka - alumnus - state response/WCB position/explain binder/definitions

Tom Hanson - WSVH teacher - role of school/part of continuum
Judy Holmes - O&M instructor - urban caseloads/district efforts/marketing WSVH
S. Lane Anthony - VI teacher - rural caseloads/district efforts/program marketing
Lisa Tomberlin - Braille instructor/task force member - specialized needs

John Voorhees - Dir. Of Special Ed (Oak Creek) - district services/ awareness
Paul Edwards - ACB (National) - Michigan school situation - national agenda
Michael Bina - Superintendent, Indiana School for the Blind - COSB - successful programs for the visually impaired

(American Council of the Blind)

Amy Snow - WSVH student - personal experience
Shelly Lauer - Parent of WSVH student - case study
Dick Pomo - WCB Executive Director - state services, ADA, future roles
Paul Schroeder - AFB Director - national services and programs

Organization for the Blind

In addition, Karen Heesen (608) 752-0139 is coordinating testimony of other students and parents.

Is there any plan to have someone signing for the hearing impaired?



Tommy G. Thompson
Governor

Valorie T. Olson
Executive Secretary



HEAB Mailing Address:
Post Office Box 7885
Madison, WI 53707-7885

Phone: (608) 267-2206
Fax: (608) 267-2808
E-Mail: HEAB@mail.state.wi.us

**State of Wisconsin
Higher Educational Aids Board**

131 West Wilson Street, Madison, Wisconsin

FAX COVER SHEET

HEAB'S FAX NUMBER: (608) 267-2808

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**PLEASE REPORT TRANSMISSION PROBLEMS
TO SENDER AT (608) 267-2208**

DATE: December 12, 1997

FAX TO: Senator Potter's Office

FAX FROM: HEAB

SUBJECT OF: Fiscal Estimate

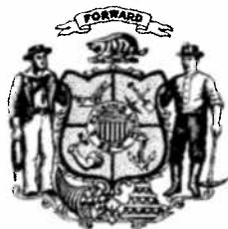
OF PAGES (INCLUDING COVER): 2

URGENT PLEASE REPLY PLEASE COMMENT FOR YOUR INFORMATION

COMMENTS:



WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE



**National Federation of the Blind of Wisconsin
Speakers for Public Hearing**

NFB of Wisconsin Panel One

Bonnie Peterson, President, NFB of Wisconsin

Margie Watson, President Wisconsin Parents of Blind Children

(must leave by 12)

Sandra Hazelton, Parent

Tim Lauerman, Parent

Mary Ann Dam, Braille Transcriber

NFB of Wisconsin Panel Two

LaRee Rattle, 2nd Vice president, NFB of Wisconsin, Education Major, UW Whitewater

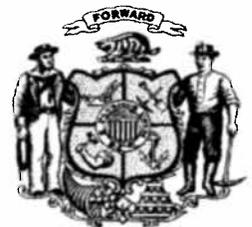
Vern Lind, WSVH graduate

Lisa Mann, WSVH graduate, BLIND Inc. graduate

Bernadette Krajewski, WSVH graduate



WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE





WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

P.O. Box 7882 • Madison, WI 53707-7882

For Immediate Release
December 15, 1997

For More Information Contact:
Greg DiMiceli 608-266-2253

SURVEY SHOWS 29 PERCENT OF BLIND COMMUNITY NEVER HEARD OF SCHOOL FOR BLIND

MADISON - A recent survey conducted by Senator Tim Weeden (R-Beloit) and Rep. Wayne Wood (D-Janesville) shows that 29.4% of parents with blind children did not know of the existence of the Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped in Janesville. [*Cross tabulation between those who currently send their children to WSVH and those who were not aware of the School.*]

Following a recommendation made by State School Superintendent John Benson to close the Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped (WSVH), two legislators have sent a survey to all Wisconsin families with blind children. Overall, the survey showed that 25% of respondents would consider sending their children to the School on a regular basis. More surprisingly, two-thirds of the parents stated that they would consider sending their child to the School for a summer program if it met their child's needs. Nearly an identical two-thirds also said they would consider sending their child to a short-term program if it met their needs. Currently, the Janesville School does not offer a short-term program or a summer course.

Of the respondents who were not aware of the School, 81.7% said they would not likely send their child to the School on a full-time basis. [*Cross tabulation between those who didn't know of the School and would consider enrollment.*] Of those same respondents, however, 48.8% would consider sending their child to a summer program, and 57.3% said they would consider sending their child to a short-term program. The reason most often cited by respondents for not wanting to send their child to the School full-time was that they did not previously know of

-MORE-

the School and felt they already had set the educational program for their child. Most of these respondents would, however, consider a supplement to their child's education in the form of a short-term program or a summer course.

"The results of this survey, while striking, are not completely unexpected," State Senator Tim Weeden said. "I think the survey shows us two things. One, it shows that supporters of the School are right in their claim that the Department of Public Instruction has not done an adequate job of letting parents know about the School. And two, the survey points out a complete lack of focus on the correct mission and future of the School."

Rep. Wayne Wood, co-author of the survey agreed and was even more direct in his assessment of the results. "It is a shock to find out that nearly 30 percent of parents of visually handicapped students did not know of this resource to aid their children. We owe it to the visually handicapped children to make this resource available to them."

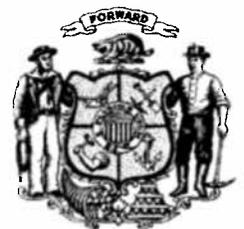
Added Weeden, "these results only show the awareness of the School among Wisconsin residents. There was a time when this School was a national model and attracted students from around the country. It's hardly surprising that enrollment is down."

Both legislators have been critical of Superintendent Benson's proposal to close the WSVH and have requested a Legislative Council study of the mission, role and future of the School. Weeden and Wood have introduced legislative resolutions in their respective Houses seeking a study of the School. Both resolutions (SJR 37 and AJR 85) have generated co-sponsorship support of approximately 50 percent of all legislators.

There were 321 responses out of a possible 1054 surveys, giving a 30.5% response rate. Both legislators noted that the survey was not a scientifically conducted poll.



WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE



**The Proposed Closing of the
Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped**

**A Presentation to
the Wisconsin Legislative
Joint Senate/Assembly Education Committee**

**December 16, 1997
10:00 a.m.**

**Michael J. Bina, Ed. D.
Superintendent
Indiana School for the Blind
7725 North College, Indianapolis, IN 46240
(317) 253-1481 #141**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and committee members.

My name is Michael Bina, Superintendent of the Indiana School for the Blind. I am Past President of the national Council of Schools for the Blind and the international Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired.

I was a Wisconsin resident for ten years beginning in 1973 as a teacher at WSVH and a CESA director of special education in Evansville, Edgerton, and Milton.

After 32 years of experience working with blind people, I believe that blind children can benefit being educated in both their local school districts and at the school for blind where they can get the best of both worlds.

However, if the local district does not have all the services in the required intensity and frequency, and the child only survives at best--- and can not thrive at all, then, as Wisconsin DPI Dr. John Melscher taught me, "the most productive setting" for that child is a 'safety net' alternative to the public school. Without WSVH, there would be nothing on which blind students could fall back.

Nationally 7% of blind children are in residential schools with 93% in local districts. In Indiana 10% of our students are returned to their local schools each year, and like a revolving door, our programs bring in and return children who need and benefit from both options.

Realistically, there will always be a need for alternative placements. While laws promote regular education placement to the maximum extent possible, they do not require, or did not intend it as the only placement. One size (or option) typically can not fit all children. Schools for the blind are for some kids all of the time, and for some kids some of the time.

One parent wrote: "Do not lump our children into one basket. They are individuals. Some do well mainstreamed---- some do much better in a school for the blind."

President Clinton proclaimed 1997 as the Year of the Specialized School ---- at the same time the recommendation to close WSVH came out.

The President stressed: "America's schools for the blind have played a vital role in enabling people throughout the United States to become independent and to make their own vital contributions to our society."

"We celebrate and promote the history of excellence, the commitment to quality specialized services, and their successes---- past, present, and future. (They) are a critically necessary and vital part of the continuum of options necessary for the appropriate education of children with visual disabilities--- and as the least restrictive environment for many children." (End of quote)

Nationally schools are undergoing a strong upsurge in enrollment. The Indiana School for the Blind's enrollment, currently at 204 students, increased 13% in the past 5 years and 25% in 10 years. WSVH's enrollment in 1978 was 125 students and one factor was the ever-present DPI Vision Consultant on campus at least weekly familiarizing parents with WSVH.

Because of Indiana's DPI, state legislative, and local district cooperation and support, our enrollment is steadily increasing---- and we are undergoing a legislative mandated study to determine how we can better serve even more students.

Nationally, however, only 28% of the parents had a school for the blind placement explained to them, and only 55% of the local administrators admitted they did not explain this option to parents (McMahon, 1997). In America, mandated services are not being fully disclosed to tax paying parents.

In Indiana most referrals for outreach and short term services come from districts that have strong VI programs. Those who know the most about blindness know that a one specialist program can not always meet all of the complex needs of all blind children.

The National Agenda and a Policy Guidance Statement from Washington emphasize the unique and scarce blindness services that are often not available in local districts, not because of unavailability of funding, but because of the unavailability of trained and certified staff.

This critical national VI and O & M teacher shortage, where the demand is far greater than the supply, even in Texas which has three training programs, concerns the National Association of State Directors of Special Education Task Force.

Wisconsin, not having a teacher training program would have an impossible task, recruiting the required number of certified specialists if students left WSVH, where they are already receiving comprehensive services, to districts that could not meet their needs initially.

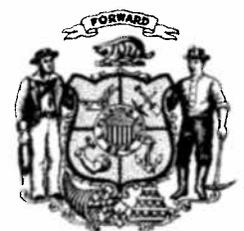
Efforts to strengthen existing programs are in the better interest of children, their families, and Wisconsin's communities than mounting initiatives to eliminate a proven and vital option such as WSVH.

Hearing from my WSVH colleagues, I am struck, but not surprised, by their advocating to keep WSVH open not to save their jobs, and not to save their school, but to save Wisconsin's school which is clearly needed for Wisconsin's blind children.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee.



WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE



WISCONSIN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION COUNCIL

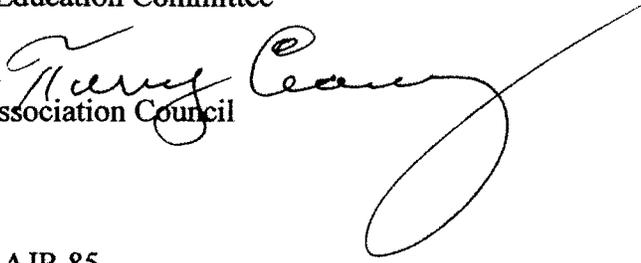
Affiliated with the National Education Association

TO: Members of Senate Education Committee
Members of Assembly Education Committee

FR: Terry Craney, President
Wisconsin Education Association Council

DA: December 16, 1997

RE: Support for SJR 37 and AJR 85
Opposition to SB 310 and AB 603



Please be advised that the Wisconsin Education Association Council is in opposition to Assembly Bill 603 and Senate Bill 310 but supports the alternatives, Assembly Joint Resolution 85 and Senate Joint Resolution 37.

WEAC believes that the proposal to close the School for the Visually Handicapped puts in jeopardy Wisconsin's commitment to ensure a full continuum of services for visually impaired children in our state. We are convinced that to meet the IEP needs of visually impaired children an array of placement options is necessary including a residential school. The teachers of the visually impaired throughout the state struggle to provide quality service to their students. The closure of the school would only add to their burden.

We are convinced that the declining enrollments at the school over the last few years are the result of a lack of parental information and the inability of parents to choose WSVH as an option. Additionally, the lack of a children's summer school program has severely curtailed the recruitment ability of the school.

The Wisconsin Education Association Council urges the members of the committees to reject the measures designed to close the school and support the more thoughtful process of a study to analyze the entire range of services for visually impaired children in our state.

Terry Craney, President
Charles N. Lentz, Executive Secretary

To the Senate and Assembly Education Committees of the Wisconsin State Legislature

December 16, 1997

My 12-year-old son Lucas has been blind and autistic from birth. From the beginning he lived in a world of his own, though unlike some autistic children he did not shun touch. His speech was infrequent, fragmented and echolalic. About the time he started school in Madison he retreated even further, speaking only in an almost inaudible whisper.

His first few years in school--first in Madison, then in a private residential school in another state--did little to draw him out. Finally in the fall of 1995 he was placed at WSVH. The first year there was sometimes difficult for him, but he began to make noticeable progress, especially in the area of self care. In his second year, he made remarkable progress. Barb Ditscheit, a Madison school district vision services coordinator, remarked that she had never seen a child meet as many goals on his individual education plan as Lucas did that year.

The most dramatic breakthrough occurred last January, during a community outing that was part of teaching his class life skills. When asked what he wanted to order for lunch at a restaurant, he replied clearly and audibly "Fish sandwich and fries!" He has not gone back to whispering since then, and can communicate verbally when he needs to. He's made great strides in other areas as well: self care, social skills, even pre-vocational skills. I attribute this progress to the unique program provided by WSVH. Lucas needed specialized teaching in an adaptive residential learning environment to thrive. Every day he spends there is part of an invaluable total learning experience that cannot be measured in the minutes-per-week of services specified by his IEP. In addition, the self-esteem he has gained as part of the supportive WSVH community has helped provide the self-confidence he needed to try to master new skills.

Recently I was able to observe Lucas during part of a typical school day. I saw his teacher Nancy Arndt and her assistants working patiently with him and the other children at simple skills they need to learn such as sorting coins, learning to get zippers started, and being able to answer simple questions about their families, where they lived, and where they went to school. I saw him make his way entirely unaided through the baffling maze of hallways and stairways between his dorm and the gym at the opposite end of the campus, using his memory, his white cane, and tactile clues, some of them built into the walls of the school itself. I saw his dedicated and inspiring gym teacher John Csonka have Lucas demonstrate the beginning swimming skills he had learned to other members of his class. I saw him taking pleasure in completing his tasks in the vocational education workshop. And I saw him included in and participating in a regular music class. (He has, it turns out, a fine singing voice, and I expect to hear him participate in this year's Christmas program, to be held this Thursday evening. Perhaps some of you will join us for the open house and program, beginning at 6 pm.)

In closing, I want to recount something I heard a couple of weeks ago on WHA radio during a national call-in show devoted to the problem of inclusive special education. The two guests were a father who is very active in the inclusion movement and a teacher's representative who presented the view that many teachers already are overburdened with paperwork, large classes, violence in the schools, and have inadequate support staff. Several parents called in to express the view that school districts should spend any amount of money necessary to include their children in the regular classroom, and that views to the contrary amounted to discrimination.

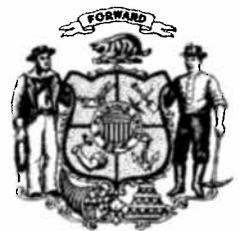
Then a man called in to say that he had been the first person to graduate from a regular high school his state, and that he has been successful in his career. He was called in by his local school district, which had inadequate resources to teach blind children, to mentor a middle school student who had been recently blinded. After a few months the boy decided that Braille was too difficult to learn and dropped out of school. The moderator of the program pointed out that the caller had apparently been successful in a public school environment. "Yes," he said. "I was very well prepared for my senior year in high school...by my previous 11 years in a state school for the blind."

I am asking you not to allow the DPI to close WSVH; rather to do what you can to make it better, to make it part of a continuum of services for educating blind children and adults in our state.

Lester Doré • 5710 Forsythia Place • Madison Wisconsin 53705 • (608) 238-8473



WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE





American
Foundation
for the Blind

AFB Midwest
401 North Michigan Avenue
Suite 308
Chicago, IL 60611
Tel: 312.245.9961
Fax: 312.245.9965
E-mail: chicago@afb.org

*Incorporated
in 1921*

TESTIMONY
BEFORE THE
JOINT EDUCATION COMMITTEE
WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

In Opposition to S.B. 310

In Support of legislative Council Study

Prepared by

Paul W. Schroeder

Director

Midwest Office

American Foundation for the Blind

Tuesday, December 16, 1997

The mission of the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) is to enable people who are blind or visually impaired to achieve equality of access and opportunity that will ensure freedom of choice in their lives. For 76 years, AFB has touched the lives of more people with visual impairments than any other organization. AFB, headquartered in New York, maintains field offices in Atlanta, Washington, D.C., Chicago, Dallas, and San Francisco.

Midwest Regional Board

David H. Margulis
Chairman
Robert A. Bury

Casey Eike
Don Harkins
William M. Johnson
Mike Keller

Darrell Lauer
Alfred Rosenbloom, O.D.
Stephanie Skurdy
Hon. William C. Stratton

Richard B. Teitelman
David Westbrook
Paul W. Schroeder
Director

Introduction

On behalf of the American Foundation for the Blind, I commend the Wisconsin legislature for its thorough and comprehensive consideration of the recommendation to close the Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped (WSVH) and respectfully urge the legislature to maintain and strengthen this important statewide resource. Every professional organization serving blind or visually impaired individuals, every organization of parents of visually impaired children, and every consumer organization of visually impaired adults supports a continuum of placement options for all students who are blind or visually impaired. The attached resolution on WSVH and the statement on full inclusion attest that there is unanimity of opinion in the field that we must maintain specialized schools for visually impaired students. Wisconsin's students who are blind or visually impaired deserve a full array of educational placement options, including special schools, special classes, resource rooms, and regular education classes. When provided with timely and adequate specialized services by appropriately certified teachers, students who are blind or visually impaired can develop skills that will enable them to achieve success and independence as responsible citizens in a fully integrated society. If these students do not receive appropriate instruction designed to develop competencies that meet the sensory deficits of blindness and low vision, critical learning opportunities will be lost thus diminishing the potential for future accomplishments.

The Role of Schools for the Blind

Throughout our nation, specialized schools play an integral and vital role in meeting the educational needs of all children who are blind or visually impaired. Services and programs offered by these schools, many of which are residential in nature, extend far beyond just those students enrolled on their campuses. Virtually every visually impaired student within the state, whether enrolled in their neighborhood public school or a special school, benefits from one or more of the programs operated by his or her state's specialized school for the blind. Unquestionably, our nation's forty-plus schools for the blind are much more than merely a place for some blind children to be educated.

Recently, schools serving students who are blind or visually impaired have responded to changing attitudes and educational trends by transforming from primarily residential centers of comprehensive education and training to statewide centers of excellence and expertise supporting the provision of education and related services in both the local and residential setting. While the residential, long-term program offered by most special schools remains critical for many blind or visually impaired students, the wide and varied role played by these schools is far broader. Special schools provide resources and outreach programs to support educational services in public schools. These include clearinghouses for the production of specialized material such as Braille documents, low vision clinics, training in specialized technology, diagnostic centers, teacher education practice sites, and centers for professional development. In addition, through short-term placements, summer school programs, and seminars, special schools play a very important role in the provision of specialized education and training in blindness-related skills to students throughout the state who are blind or visually impaired .

The field of blindness was the first disability area to develop a broad range of special education service options beginning in 1829 with the initiation of special schools for the blind or visually impaired and then mainstreaming children with visual impairments into regular classrooms beginning in 1900. We must build upon this success in making optimal use of both special and public school programs to meet the complex and difficult challenges we face today in serving those who are blind or visually impaired who often have additional disabilities. The need for an array of educational options was underscored in the 1995 policy guidance paper, "Policy Guidance on Educating Blind and Visually Impaired Students," issued by the United States Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS). This policy paper clearly states that public schools and specialized schools are critical to the educational progress of children with visual impairments. For example, at different times in the child's Individual Education Plan (IEP), a specialized school may be absolutely critical for providing the appropriate environment for instruction in the specialized skills needed by children with serious visual impairments.

Schools for the blind offer a traditional core curriculum blended with specialized instruction for children with visual impairments. These schools are staffed by specially trained professionals who provide daily instruction in academic, social and specialized blindness-related skills, adapted for the child's unique needs. In addition, these schools possess a tradition that expects students to reach their highest potential. Equally important, the blind or visually impaired student attending a specialized school has the opportunity to participate in a wide range of recreational activities and pursue social interactions with his or her peers, enabling the student to build the self-awareness and confidence necessary to compete alongside sighted peers.

Providing an education for visually impaired students that puts them on an equal footing with their sighted peers is expensive. This unavoidable fact must be acknowledged regardless of the type of educational placement. For example, the cost per pupil at special schools seems high. However, when the amount of intensive instructional time provided by these schools and the variety of opportunities that are available to the students to enhance their education is considered, the investment is well worth the price. Alternatively, ineffective services are also quite costly. A student who has intensive needs for training in Braille, orientation and mobility, or independent living skills, but who receives only an hour of instruction per week from a local district, is likely to be ill-prepared for life. Finally, when these specialized schools are seen as the statewide resource center and service provider to all children who are visually impaired, the cost per pupil becomes lower and more realistic.

Legislative Council Study

AFB supports requests for the Wisconsin legislature to conduct a legislative study of WSVH. We wish to emphasize that this study should be designed to determine how to improve WSVH's service to the students and educational system in Wisconsin through traditional residential programs, short-term placements, and enrichment activities such as seminars and summer programs. In addition, WSVH should be strengthened to improve the services it can provide to public schools throughout the state. These services include outreach (including training for local teachers), Braille and other specialized document production, and technology training.

Conclusion

As I stated in an Op-ed article published last month in The Capital Times:

"The proposal to close the Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped appears to be motivated more by fiscal concerns than by what is best for blind students and their families. However, the touted cost savings are illusory - educational costs will be passed along to local school districts.

'Services for students with low incidence disabilities such as blindness do not come cheaply. The need for specially trained teachers, support personnel, and adaptive equipment will not vanish with WSVH's closing.

'Local schools will be faced with educating an increased number of students who are blind or have low vision, often in conjunction with additional disabilities - which will demand additional resources these schools simply don't have.

"This is a 'penny-wise, pound-foolish' way to try to save money."

Full Inclusion Position Statement

"Full inclusion," a philosophical concept currently advanced by a number of educators, is not a federal requirement of special education law. Proponents of "full inclusion" nevertheless take the position that all students with disabilities must receive their total instruction in the regular public school classroom regardless of individual needs. Unfortunately, "full inclusion" would eliminate all special placements, including "pull out" services, resource rooms and specialized schools. Such an arrangement would be seriously detrimental to the educational development of many students with disabilities.

We, the national organizations of and for the blind listed below, are firmly committed to appropriate educational opportunities designed to provide students with the competencies necessary to ensure full participation in society. It is significant to recognize that our field was the first to develop a broad range of special education options beginning with specialized schools as early as 1829, and extending to public school programs since 1900. These options have provided critically important educational preparation for several generations of highly successful and independent blind people. Based on this long and impressive record of success in making optimal use of both special and public school programs to meet the diverse needs of blind students, we

strongly agree upon the following:

- If provided with timely and adequate specialized services by appropriately certified teachers, students who are blind or visually impaired can develop skills that will enable them to achieve success and independence as responsible citizens in a fully integrated society. If these students do not receive appropriate instruction designed to develop competencies that meet the sensory deficits of blindness and low vision, critical learning opportunities will be lost, thus diminishing the potential for future accomplishments. In this context, ample opportunities for instruction in such areas as braille, abacus, orientation and mobility, and use of prescribed optical devices must be made available to students, as needed.

- Educational decisions must be made on a case by case basis consistent with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) which guarantees a Free Appropriate Public Education in the "Least Restrictive Environment" (LRE) from among a "Full Continuum of Alternative Placements," based on the Individual Education Plan for each student. Educational decisions should not be made simply on the basis of philosophy, limited school budgets, administrative convenience, or concerns about socialization.

- Full inclusion in regular education classrooms for all students with

disabilities irrespective of individual needs is in sharp conflict with procedural guarantees of IDEA.

- Least Restrictive Environment and Full Continuum of Alternative Placements are critically important IDEA provisions. LRE is not one sole physical location. It is, rather, a principle, which if properly applied, matches the need of the student with an appropriate school setting which provides meaningful challenges, realistic expectations, and maximum opportunities for achievement and development of healthy self-esteem.

- The regular education classroom may be considered the LRE if the student possesses sufficient readiness and survival skills and can be provided adequate supports, specialized services (from personnel trained in education of the visually impaired), and opportunities to develop skills commensurate with his or her potential. Extreme caution must be exercised so that full inclusion does not result in "full submersion," social isolation, "lowered" self-esteem, poor performance, or a setting in which services are unavailable.

- In cases where the needs of the student cannot be met in the regular classrooms, an alternative education placement must be provided and be recognized as the LRE for that particular student. Such alternative placements should not be negatively viewed as discriminatory or as "segregated" settings when legitimately warranted to develop the needed skills for future integration in school

and society.

- Since it has been clearly demonstrated that blind children benefit from interacting with disabled and non-disabled children, both interaction opportunities should be fully encouraged in whatever setting that is considered appropriate. We believe that the mandate in IDEA which states that, "to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities [should be] educated with children who are non-disabled," does not intend that blind children avoid interaction with each other.

We strongly urge that decision makers carefully consider and be sensitive to the impact of reform initiatives on the education of students with visual disabilities. Caution must be exercised to insure that educational philosophy and trends such as full inclusion do not seriously endanger appropriate and specialized services for students who are blind or visually impaired. If properly implemented, IDEA can provide legal safeguards to insure that all individual children can realize their full potential for independence and success.

American Council of the Blind
American Foundation for the Blind
Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired
Blinded Veterans Association
Canadian Council of the Blind
Canadian National Institute for the Blind
National Federation of the Blind
National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped

**A RESOLUTION FROM CHOICES FOR CHILDREN IN SUPPORT OF
THE WISCONSIN SCHOOL FOR THE VISUALLY HANDICAPPED**

WHEREAS

Federal law guarantees a free and appropriate education for all children and youths who are blind or visually impaired, and

WHEREAS

Federal regulations call for a continuum of placement options for all students who are blind or visually impaired, and

WHEREAS

All parent, consumer, and professional organizations associated with the education of children who are blind or visually impaired concur that specialized schools must be a part of this continuum, and

WHEREAS

Students who are blind or visually impaired and their parents in Wisconsin must have a full continuum of placement options available to them, and

WHEREAS

The Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped has had a long and successful history in meeting the educational need of students with blindness or visual impairment,

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT

Organizations whose titles are affixed strongly support efforts to increase the quality of services for all children and youths who are blind or visually impaired in the State of Wisconsin, including the vital instructional option of a specialized school for the blind.

**ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTING A RESOLUTION FROM
CHOICES FOR CHILDREN
IN SUPPORT OF
THE WISCONSIN SCHOOL FOR THE VISUALLY HANDICAPPED
DECEMBER 1, 1997**

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 and Visually Impaired

Association of Instructional Resource Centers for the Visually Handicapped

Council of Exceptional Children, Division on Visually Impaired

Council of Schools for the Blind

National Agenda Advisory Council

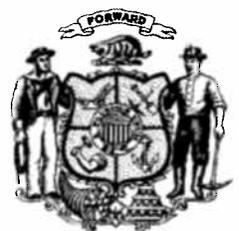
National Association for Parents of the Visually Impaired

National Industries for the Blind

State Vision Consultants



WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE



Memorandum

STATE OF WISCONSIN
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION



DATE: December 22, 1997

TO: Honorable Members, Senate Education Committee
Honorable Members, Assembly Education Committee

FROM: John T. Benson,  State Superintendent of Public Instruction

SUBJECT: Information Base Leading to Decision to Close WSVH

At the December 16 joint hearing of the Senate and Assembly Education Committees, Rep. Nass and others asked me to furnish information regarding studies and other activities which led to my decision to propose closing the Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped (WSVH).

I recognize it is a difficult proposal that I have put before the Legislature. It was no less difficult for me to forward this proposal and this certainly was not a decision made in a vacuum. I made my recommendation only after carefully considering numerous studies, which had been conducted over the course of several years by the department and by the Legislative Audit Bureau, and after carefully considering several alternative courses of action.

The following studies contributed to my decision to close WSVH:

- In 1987 the Legislative Audit Bureau (LAB) issued a report which raised serious concerns about the declining enrollment and increasing per-pupil costs at the state schools.
- In 1994 the LAB issued another evaluation of the state schools and asked for additional actions to reduce costs at the schools.
- In May of 1995 the department conducted a study of WSVH compliance with state educational standards.
- In the summer of 1996 the department conducted an on-site monitoring review of WSVH compliance with state and federal special education law.

- In 1996 the department conducted a comprehensive review of the state school outreach services.
- In June of 1997 the department completed a comprehensive staffing analysis of WSVH.

In addition to those studies, the department has regularly acted to control costs and to address other concerns with WSVH. Those actions include the following events:

- In March of 1994, in a continuing attempt to control costs at the two state schools the department restructured the non-educational management teams at the schools.
- In January 1995 the department submitted a comprehensive report to the June 1994 LAB report. A major feature of that response was the establishment of staff-to-student enrollment commitments.
- In September 1995 the department submitted to the LAB a progress report on implementing the Audit Bureau's management recommendations.
- In the summer of 1996 a new position of Director of State Schools was created largely to assist in reviewing the status of the state schools.
- In May 1996 the department updated its progress in implementing LAB recommendations related to state school staffing ratios.

Finally, before I made my recommendation to close WSVH, I first considered, analyzed and ultimately rejected several alternative courses of action. Those alternatives included:

- Operating the school at the authorized level of 110 staff despite rapidly declining enrollment.
- Reducing WSVH staff through attrition and only hiring new staff when it is determined that staff is necessary to maintain the health, welfare and safety of the students enrolled at WSVH.
- Reorganizing WSVH to consolidate or eliminate programs.
- Establishing shared services with the Wisconsin School for the Deaf in Delavan in an attempt to further reduce costs.
- Operating WSVH within the staffing commitments established in January 1995.

Ultimately, none of these alternatives would have stemmed the tide of declining enrollment nor did they address the larger concern of allocating scarce resources to all visually handicapped children in Wisconsin. In August 1997, based upon all the previous studies and events and many personal visits to the state schools and meetings with WSVH staff and DPI staff in Madison, I made the determination that the best way to serve all visually handicapped children in Wisconsin was to close WSVH and to reallocate the school's GPR funds to expand and enhance local school district programs serving children with visual disabilities.

I hope this information is useful to you as you consider acting on my proposal.

cc: All Legislators