

VI. STAFF TRAINING IN THE USE OF BRAILLE CODES AND FORMATS

Staff training in the use of braille codes and formats has been very limited. All licensed teachers of the blind and visually impaired take courses in the reading, writing, and teaching of braille and Nemeth code as part of their university training. Those teachers coming from out of state, which most do because Wisconsin does not have a training program, are required by legislation to pass the braille National Literacy Competency Test. Teachers already teaching in the state were required to either take the competency test or a course to demonstrate their competency. Opportunities for ongoing refresher courses have been extremely limited within the state. A workshop has been offered the past two years, but there is not a formal structure for keeping teachers of the blind and visually impaired or parents aware of the code and format changes nationally. Volunteer brailist groups in Madison have offered classes, but these have only been available for limited attendance by parents or professionals. Also, the state requires that the issue of braille be discussed at the IEP meeting of students who are visually impaired. Students may require instruction in braille as a supplement to their main reading mode or for functional activities. It is important that teachers have refresher courses in braille and learning media assessment to ensure they are making appropriate IEP recommendations.

The newly formed WisBraille organization, the *National Agenda* workgroup, and DPI are collaborating to promote the use of braille within the state. A needs assessment has been developed to address braille and braille production within the state. The survey will be used to identify the need for a brailist training program. It will respond to the needs of teachers to maintain their braille skills and the use of technology to serve children who are blind or visually impaired. With changing braille production technology and braille codes and formats, it is imperative for parents and professional staff to maintain their skills and knowledge of braille.

Proposed strategies to improve staff competency in the use of braille codes and formats

1. WCBVI will include in its strategic plan strategies to improve teaching of braille codes and formats. The strategic plan will establish high standards for the use of braille and will encourage all vision staff to attend workshops as part of their licensing plans.
2. Provide special workshops and classes for credit to teachers, braillists, classroom assistants, and other interested parties. The topics would include braille, format and material preparation, braille music, Nemeth code, learning media assessment, and computer software.
3. As part of the current vision teacher licensing review process, ensure that competencies for new and continuing teachers include teaching of reading, writing, and braille.
4. Include instruction in braille codes and formats as a part of the new university training program in the area of vision.
5. Establish a training program for braillists within the WCBVI or at a technical college.
6. Through collaboration with WisBraille and other brailist organizations, the WCBVI will develop a resource directory of experts and utilize them for statewide activities such as trainer-of-trainers and mentor programs

7. To promote awareness and interest in the field, make braille classes available in high schools for credit

VII. MATERIALS IN BRAILLE, LARGE PRINT, AND OTHER FORMATS

Students who are blind or visually impaired need to be provided materials that allow them to participate in an educational program with the same opportunities as their sighted peers, including text books, daily worksheets, and tests. Braille books and materials can be difficult to obtain in a short timeframe. The few districts that employ certified braillists (most districts in the State of Wisconsin do not have a certified braillist) need to order textbooks well in advance because of the time it takes to produce the book in braille. Although slightly more accessible, large print textbooks (especially color) may also be difficult to obtain. Taped textbooks can be ordered from the Recordings for the Blind and Dyslexic if a student is registered. This is a very effective system, yet some professionals working with students are unaware of this service.

The current system for ordering full or partial textbooks in braille, large print, or colored large print is through the ESC in Janesville. Districts put in an order for these books in April prior to the next school year. When the order is received, the ESC first determines if they have a copy of the book requested. In the case of large print, if they do not have the book, it can be produced at the ESC. If they do not have the book in braille, other braille sources are contacted. Cost estimates are obtained to provide the book at the lowest possible cost. The cost estimate is sent back to the district. The district then files a purchase order with the ESC, and the book is produced. However, many factors can interrupt this system, such as the book order coming in late for various reasons including:

- a. Student was not enrolled in the district the spring prior to ordering the book.
- b. The district is switching book series and does not know which book they will select.
- c. The classes the student will take have not been determined or changed in the summer.
- d. New teachers in the districts do not know the procedure.
- e. Purchase orders are not submitted.

Some teachers and districts obtain or produce materials on their own. However, many districts do not know where to obtain books and do not employ their own braillist. Efforts to increase braille and material production in the state have been made by training residents at the Oshkosh Correctional Facility to produce materials. However, the knowledge of this resource is also not widely known throughout the state. There is an effort nationally to make books more readily available by encouraging textbook publishers to provide text and braille files to a central repository through the American Printing House for the Blind. Each state has a designated person who can download a file, produce it in braille, and sell it to districts for the cost of the paper. This process is in the beginning stages and has many restrictions due to potential copyright issues.

When a district purchases a book from the ESC, they have the option to return the book when they have no additional need for the book. However, many districts keep the books in anticipation of other students' potential need of the book at a future time. Consequently,

many districts have textbooks in formats that are not in current use. There is no current system of sharing used books or records of books that districts have. Some individual districts or CESAs also have braille translation software or braille embossers (printers). However, the number of persons available trained in the use of these devices also is limited.

Daily materials also may be problematic. Time is always a factor when a worksheet, book, test, or other class material needs to be available in braille, large print, or another format. Teachers of the visually impaired typically have responsibilities in a number of schools or multiple school districts. Many times items are required at the last minute, and unless a teacher, brailist, or another staff member is available to produce the materials, the student ends up having to listen verses having their own copy. Students need to be provided with materials at the same time as their sighted peers in order to receive equal input and instruction.

Finally, there also are a limited number of individuals who have expertise in producing braille music, Nemeth code (math), computer code, and tactile graphics for braille students.

Consistency regarding obtaining materials in a timely manner varies among districts. Districts who are successful in communicating with parents and staff and provide materials to students at the same time as their peers can serve as models. Overall improvement of access to materials throughout the state is crucial to the education of students who are blind or visually impaired.

Strategies for improving access to materials in braille, large print, and other formats

1. Evaluate the current system for ordering textbooks, and make changes to that system to ensure that materials are delivered on time.
2. Utilizing evaluation information, increase the use of current sites or create a state-of-the-art product site or sites staffed by people who are knowledgeable of all alternative formats and technology.
3. Inform teachers, parents, and others about the use of the system production site(s) and other resources for materials.
4. Develop and disseminate a resource catalog of textbooks and other materials that districts or other facilities can share.
5. Develop a list of braille resources that specialize in the production of tactile graphics, braille music, Nemeth code, etc.
6. Develop a liaison relationship between WCBVI, transcribers, and other production sites such as the Oshkosh Correctional Facility to ensure there is an integrated system to utilize production sites.
7. Utilize and contribute to the repository system from the American Printing House for the Blind.
8. Provide training to all staff about the need of access to materials at the same time as sighted peers and to ensure qualified students are registered with the American Printing House for the Blind, Recordings for the Blind, the Regional Library for the Blind, and other appropriate organizations.

9. Make all of the above resources, along with a system to order materials, available on the web.

VIII. LIBRARY MATERIALS AND BOOK LOAN

Library books and book loans to students with visual impairments are available through various sources and services within the state. These include but are not limited to the Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, volunteer groups, DPI's Reference and Loan Library, and the ESC. In the last two years, s. 115.55, Wis. Stats., has permitted the loan of books from the collection at the library of the residential school in Janesville to children with visual impairments statewide. This collection includes the embossed, clear type or large type textbooks acquired by the Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped.

These books and those from the Regional Library and Reference and Loan Library have been placed on a cataloging system called WISCAT. WISCAT is a statewide database of library holdings that permits the user to access books through the Internet from their homes, schools, or local libraries. If a person wishes to obtain a book, the request can be made through a local library or resource address indicated on the date base. Because access to some of the resources require meeting eligibility criteria, there may be more than one contact address.

The addition of recreational books on WISCAT will allow parents and children access to what is available in their reading mode, level, and topic of interest. With more than one database, duplication of materials will be eliminated. Information about access to these services is not widely known throughout the state. There is a need to publicize these services so that all users can benefit or assist others who may benefit from the program. The various services need to be coordinated for maximum effectiveness.

With the advent of technology to download textbooks, personnel need to be aware of ways to access this and other technology advances for materials for children with visual impairments. This technology will increase the opportunity for acquiring library materials for visual users.

WCBVI will use the existing Badgerlink system to make a very wide range of library materials available to students with visual impairments and their parents and teachers.

Proposed strategies to improve access to library materials and books

1. WCBVI will allocate staff to coordinate the databases for WISCAT and textbooks, building on the work already completed at the center.
2. A marketing plan will be developed to include an information packet for educating staff and parents statewide on the various databases for serving children with visual impairments.
3. The WCBVI website will include updated information on the availability of books and other resources within and out of state.
4. WCBVI will provide training for parents and professionals on library material services available statewide to children with visual impairments.

5. Coordinate library and book services to the greatest extent possible to ease access and provide the greatest cost effectiveness.
6. WCBVI personnel will attend conferences on technology, i.e., Closing the Gap, American Printing House for the Blind Annual Meeting.
7. Seek modifications in the state special education categorical aid program to provide higher levels of aid for very high-cost children.

IX. LIBRARY SERVICES

The DPI is statutorily required to provide funding for the Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped which is located in the Milwaukee Public Library. The Regional Library provides statewide services to adults and children who are eligible and registered for this service. The library maintains a collection of recorded materials (books and magazines) in a variety of formats, loans equipment to use these materials, maintains an automated system to track user requests and loans, maintains a database of available materials, provides access to specialized equipment, services deposit collections in nursing homes, libraries and other organizations, and provides other services. Materials are supplied by the Library of Congress, National Library Service.

The Reference and Loan Library contracts for the operation of the Newslines for the Blind, which provides access to recorded daily newspapers (three national and three local papers). The recorded service is available via telephone in Madison and Milwaukee. There is a toll free number on the Madison server so eligible residents statewide can use the service.

Reference and Loan has a small collection of older large print materials and a collection of commercially recorded audio materials for adults and children. Reference and Loan also provides access to 5,000 full-text magazines and 41 full-text newspapers through a computer service called BadgerLink. BadgerLink provides access to WISCAT, a statewide database of library holdings that contains citations for many recorded audio materials. Blind users can access BadgerLink and WISCAT using the Internet and screen-reading software. This service is available to users in their homes and offices as well as in libraries, schools, and other locations.

Proposed strategies to improve library services

1. Provide all eligible users information about existing library services.
2. Coordinate services between the Regional Library, the Center, and other groups offering book-reading services to assure availability of materials.
3. Coordinate library services of the WCBVI with the Regional Library to assure that the most appropriate recorded materials are available and to assist in managing the inventory.

X. COLLABORATION WITH PUBLIC AND PRIVATE AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS THAT PROVIDE SERVICES WHICH MAY INCLUDE EMPLOYMENT SKILLS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Many services exist within the state to support the needs of persons who are blind or visually impaired, but not all individuals are aware of the procedures to contact these agencies. Individuals may locate services for individuals who are blind, providing an initial contact with the system. However, services vary depending on the agency that is contacted. If it is not the correct agency, the individual may not be provided information or simply be told the service they need is not available through that agency. Thus, the individual seeking assistance is dependent on the knowledge of the person receiving the call. While there are efforts to collaborate among local school district staff and other agencies, it is sporadic.

Educational services for children who are blind or visually impaired are mandated by law while services in the adult system are permissive and determined variably. Referral procedures to the adult services system vary within the state. Some agencies accept referrals at age 16 and others do not until the student is about to graduate from high school. Funding support depends on the budget and time of year. Because vision is a low incidence population, these contacts may not be readily available or, where personnel have changed, contacts may be unknown. These situations present challenges for any statewide effort to provide accurate information to parents, teachers, and other service providers. In spite of the challenges, interagency collaboration is essential for students who are blind or visually impaired. This need is emphasized by state and federal special education laws which require that a student's IEP include a statement of interagency responsibilities or linkages for children with visual impairments.

Other state and non-profit groups such as the North Central College, Badger Association of the Blind, volunteer groups, and other organizations assist students either through referral or direct contact. However, access to these resources depends on the awareness of the person seeking these services.

Proposed strategies to improve coordination of services

1. Develop the WCBVI web-based information system so parents and professionals require only one telephone number or computer access to obtain information on appropriate services for their child or young adult who is blind or visually impaired.
2. Establish a "working group" of representatives from major organizations and agencies that provide services to students who are blind or visually impaired and their families. This group should include key organizations outside the vision service groups, but who should include students who are blind or visually impaired and families in their service plan. Career education is one component of the *National Agenda*. Also, school-to-work, vocational, college preparation, and other transition programs exist within school districts. Students who are blind or visually impaired may require special skill training to achieve success from secondary to post-secondary education or to work. Many of these programs and adult services are not geared to students with visual impairments. These

students need the same opportunities to gain employment and self-advocacy skills to achieve all possibilities.

3. Develop a training package to address the provisions of federal nondiscrimination laws in employment practices.
4. Expand the expertise in the area of employment skills by increasing collaboration with adult services and blind organizations that can provide mentoring and expand opportunities for students who are visually impaired.
5. Promote interagency agreements that support children/youth who are blind or visually impaired educationally and financially.

XI. ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

An assistive technology device, as defined by federal law, means any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of a child with a disability. For students who are blind or visually impaired, the use of assistive technology devices provides opportunities for accessing information for educational and personal needs. A range of devices is available from low tech to high tech to assist a blind or visually impaired person. An example of a low-tech device is dark-lined modified paper to help a student see the lines in order to write; a high-tech device is a refreshable braille device to allow a student to read what is on a computer screen. Each of these can make the difference in allowing a student to complete a task to their fullest ability.

Successful adults who are blind or visually impaired use a variety of assistive technology devices on the job. Without access to these devices and knowledge of how to use them, the ability to complete work-related tasks might be unachievable without the assistance of another person. A clear understanding of how to use an assistive technology device can open the door to independence for a student who is blind or visually impaired.

There are a wide variety of high-tech devices created specifically for individuals who are blind or visually impaired. These include multiple types of screen readers, braille translation programs, screen magnification programs, refreshable braille devices, and stand-alone electronic braille devices (e.g., Braille-n-Speak), reading machines, and electronic magnification devices (e.g., Closed Circuit Television (CCTV)). These devices are expensive, and many of them require training to use. There are a limited number of vendors distributing these devices, and, therefore, technical assistance is difficult to obtain. For example, a school district purchasing an expensive device for a student may or may not have a teacher familiar with the use of the device. Secondly, even if a person is familiar with the device, that person probably is not available to the student all the time. Obtaining technical assistance from a company producing a device is also difficult. If a person who does not know braille calls regarding a braille device, the assistance offered may not help. Therefore, a useful, expensive device may sit unused. Sometimes choices are made for children without consideration of future needs; therefore, the time a device is useful to a child may be limited.

Most teachers of the visually impaired are familiar with these devices, but many of them have limited training in their use in order to provide instruction to their students. Parents and

Other professionals may have even less familiarity and rarely any training regarding these devices. Additionally, these devices are continually being upgraded, changed, or even discontinued, which also limits the capacity for obtaining assistance. There are experts in the state who are proficient in the use of these devices, but there is no consistent or formal system for accessing their expertise.

The department supports Wisconsin Assistive Technology Institute (WATI), which serves as a clearinghouse and library of devices for all children disabilities. Devices are available for loan, and specialists in each CESA can assist students and staff in the use of the loaned materials. There are many low-tech and high-tech devices created for students with other disabilities that can be adapted or modified for use by student with visual impairments. A very limited number of teachers, parents, and even the assistive technology specialists are knowledgeable about the potential use or modification of these devices for students with visual impairments. Likewise, because of the limited number of students requiring devices made specifically for blind or visually impaired, and because of the high cost, there are very few of these devices available for loan from WATI.

Proposed strategies to improve access to assistive technology services

1. Within the WCBVI, establish an expertise relative to the use of assistive technology for visually impaired students. Make this expertise available to parents and teachers through the WCBVI website (with accessible format standards) and toll free phone service. Regional inservice programs and direct consultation will be delivered out of both the central office and the regional centers of the WCBVI.
2. Develop a directory of experts in the use and modification of assistive technology devices, and list it on the WCBVI website.
3. Develop a state-of-the-art technology lab with a wide variety of devices that can be used to provide training. Loan equipment on a trial or short-term basis to students, parents, teachers, and other staff. This could be done as a WCBVI service and in collaboration with WATI.
4. Provide training sessions at a variety of times throughout the year, including nights and weekends, on a variety of technology devices.
5. Make use of the distance learning lab and the regional sites to provide training opportunities throughout the state.
6. Promote and communicate the training opportunities to potentially interested parties.
7. Develop collaborative partnerships with other organizations such as adult service providers to create assistive technology plans for students who are transitioning so that continuity is maintained.

XII. LENDING, RENTING, OR LEASING TECHNOLOGICAL MATERIALS AND ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY DEVICES

Currently, most assistive technology equipment that students who are blind or visually impaired are using is either borrowed from the ESC in Janesville or purchased by the local school district. The ESC currently has low-tech and limited high-tech devices available to loan. They have equipment from the American Printing House for the Blind such as

lightboxes and a few classic Braille-n-Speaks. The ESC also has Perkins Braillewriters and CCTVs. However, school districts must purchase items such as screen readers, braille translation programs, screen magnification programs, refreshable braille devices, Braille-n-Speak 2000, Braillelites, and reading machines. These items are very expensive and are sometimes purchased without a thorough evaluation of their usefulness for the student. Currently no equipment is rented or leased to districts.

Proposed strategies to improve access to assistive technology equipment

1. Develop and expand a comprehensive system for evaluating assistive technology equipment for students who are blind or visually impaired, and make the results of these evaluations available to parents, teachers, and administrators.
2. Develop an efficient leasing system for high-tech equipment and communicate and train district staff on their use.
3. Collaborate with Instructional Media Centers (IMCs) at CESAs, universities, or regional sites to coordinate the availability of equipment in each region.
4. Develop a system for recycling assistive technology equipment no longer in use.
5. Collaborate with private organizations and vendors to provide or share equipment.
6. Purchase quality tutorials and site licenses for software programs that can be tried in different districts.

XIII. CERTIFICATION TRAINING PROGRAM FOR TEACHERS OF THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

A teacher shortage in the area of the blind and visually impaired is acute in our state, as it is in the rest of the nation. Over one half of the states have no preparation programs for teachers of the blind and visually impaired. Wisconsin has been one of these states. Recruitment for teachers of the visually impaired involves a national search for a scarce commodity. Prospective teachers from Wisconsin must leave the state in order to obtain certification. Wisconsin is a rural state and has difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified, competent teachers for the blind and visually impaired.

Recommendations from State Superintendent John Benson's task force, the *National Agenda*, and the Legislative Council study for statewide services have led to the establishment of a training program in the area of vision. Silver Lake College was selected after two years of communications with the University of Wisconsin System. The University System declined to start a program because the small size of the program was not cost effective.

The goal of the Silver Lake College program is to develop ongoing options in Wisconsin for training and certifying teachers of the blind and visually impaired through distance learning technology. This will include the use of home study, videotapes, seminars, and Internet programs. Local distance learning centers will be utilized for class participation. The certification program involves two options. The first is for teachers who hold a current Wisconsin regular education license and want to add an initial special education teacher license with an emphasis in visual impairment. The second option is for special education

teachers who hold a current Wisconsin license in another area of special education and wish to add a certification in visual impairment. This program will allow instate special education teachers to enter the field and pursue certification without leaving their jobs or home. It is anticipated that the first class will have ten students starting in June 2000.

The certification/training program will consist of seven courses totaling 22 semester credits. The course work will extend over two years plus an additional summer, which includes field experiences.

It is the goal of the training program and the projected curriculum content design to support course offerings for ongoing staff development. The projected audience will be current licensed teachers of the visually impaired who wish to update their knowledge and skills and regular education teachers who will be working with students with visual impairments in inclusive classrooms. The distance learning delivery approach will support this statewide access.

It is the goal that, after the conclusion of three years, the department and Silver Lake College will determine the need for an ongoing training program that is self-supporting to train and certify teachers of the blind and visually impaired for Wisconsin. The need to expand the program to include orientation and mobility will be explored. The development and continuation of staff training for special and regular education teachers is another important element.

Proposed strategies to improve the number of qualified teachers of visually impaired students

1. Continue to collaborate with Silver Lake College to establish and maintain a high-quality teacher training program to include mentoring and followup for new teachers.
2. Establish ongoing staff development and training for visually impaired teachers.
3. Explore the establishment of a training program in the area of orientation and mobility.
- 4.
5. Market recruitment. Establish a state loan forgiveness program for teachers of the visually impaired and orientation and mobility teachers.

XIV. BIRTH THROUGH TWO

Early intervention for children with visual impairments is crucial. Much of what children learn incidentally through vision occurs at a very early age. Children who are blind or visually impaired need more exposure to experiences in a variety of ways to learn basic concepts that most sighted children learn from simple visual observation. Children who are within the age range of birth through two typically receive early intervention services from county birth-to-three agencies. These agencies do not have teachers of the visually impaired or orientation and mobility instructors on staff. They typically receive most of their vision consultation, assessment, and technical assistance from the ESC in Janesville. There is currently one consultant on the outreach staff at the ESC serving local school districts throughout the state.

A very limited number of county agencies are able to provide direct instruction from a teacher of the visually impaired for children from birth to three. The Wisconsin Center for Blind Children in Milwaukee is a private facility that provides vision and orientation and mobility services to children birth to three who live in the Milwaukee area. The Waisman Center in conjunction with Bridges for Families in Madison also employs a teacher of the visually impaired to work directly with students in Madison. A few county programs work with teachers who are employed by CESAs or school districts. However, most children of this age receive consultative services only from the WCBVI. Many students in this age range receive little or no orientation and mobility consultation.

Parents of students who are blind or visually impaired need a tremendous amount of support from qualified professionals who can assist them to access resources and educational planning for their child. Children have many different ocular conditions. Even children who have similar impairments may have very different needs. Birth-to-three providers generally do not have training in the area of vision. Without regular support from a professional in the area of vision, some significant early intervention opportunities may be missed. Classes relating to the needs of students who are blind or visually impaired have been offered for professionals working with children in this age range. However, these classes have only been offered on a three-year cycle and are available to only a limited number of participants.

Each year a preschool conference is held at the school at the WCBVI for parents. Currently, general information is presented and resources are shared to assist parents to prepare to address educational issues for their child. Notice of this conference is shared with birth-to-three agencies. However, parents of children who are not receiving services through these agencies may not have knowledge of this opportunity.

Finally, when and how children are identified can impact the services they require. Limited information on educational programming for children with visual impairments is available from pediatricians and pediatric ophthalmologists. Parents need support from the beginning. Helpful information needs to be available to them as early as possible. Because the area of visual impairments is a low incidence area, accurate information is limited.

Proposed strategies to improve birth-through-two transition

1. Develop a number of resources to increase public awareness, such as public service announcements, literature for pediatric offices, and educational brochures for parents.
2. Increase knowledge of educational information to pediatricians by providing inservices and collaborating with organizations conducting newborn screening.
3. Provide information about educational resources on the WCBVI website.
4. Increase collaboration with county birth-to-three programs and the Department of Health and Family Services to provide ongoing support and increased direct service from teachers of the visually impaired and orientation and mobility instructors.
5. Provide classes and seminars frequently to professionals working with children with visual impairments who are in the birth-through-two age range, including increased

offering of Visually Impaired Inservices in America (VIISA training), and other appropriate programs.

6. Develop a parent support or mentor system.
7. Provide parent seminars throughout the state utilizing distance learning labs in the state and through the WCBVI.

XV. SUMMER PROGRAMS

Experiences that create incidental learning opportunities for sighted students need to be provided explicitly to students who are blind or visually impaired. Instruction in concept development, orientation and mobility, braille, Nemeth code, independent living skills, social skills, use of assistive technology, recreational skills, and other compensatory skills should be considered when determining educational programming for these students. Incorporating these important skills into a student's academic year is a scheduling challenge. Instruction in academic areas may consume much of a student's school day. IEP teams have to prioritize the current needs of a student. Consequently, important skills that could lead to a student's success and independence may be missed.

In addition to the academic barriers, a student learning braille or how to travel with a cane may be the only such student in the school or the town in which they live. Children who are learning a specific skill benefit from having peers who are also learning the same skill. Summer programs will provide experiences that are often unavailable during the school year.

In the summer of 1999, three summer programs were provided in locations throughout the state to give students with visual impairments the opportunities they need to learn, refine, and use the skills that are difficult to address during the school year. Students were able to utilize technology, read and produce braille, and work on orientation and mobility skills with others who were working on the same skills. Parents of students who attended these programs saw benefits for the children.

Future summer programs will need to provide programs that address the needs of as many students as possible. Ongoing evaluation of the needs of the students will be important when providing programs to produce successful outcomes for students that will assist them in their education. This will require varying the types of programs to meet student needs according to the parents, teachers, other professionals, and the students themselves. Providing programs in different locations will allow more students to access these programs.

Proposed strategies to improve access to summer programs for students who are blind or visually impaired and their parents

1. Develop a comprehensive needs assessment statewide that can be conducted on an ongoing basis to determine the specific needs of children with visual impairments.
2. Coordinate the results of the needs assessment with local district programs and WCBVI to determine the ideal locations and content for supportive instruction to be delivered during the summer, weekends, and school-year breaks. Emphasize those areas identified in the *National Agenda's* expanded core curriculum, including compensatory skills such

as communication modes, orientation and mobility, social interaction skills, independent living skills, recreational and leisure skills, career education, use of assistive technology, and visual efficiency skills. Develop intensive programs to teach skills that are difficult to access during the year according to needs (e.g. braille music).

3. Promote the program in a timely fashion so parents and local school districts can effectively incorporate student attendance in their plans.
4. Provide specific opportunities for parents to participate in summer programming to enhance their role in the development of their child.

XVI. ADULT SUMMER SCHOOL

The adult summer school is a legislatively mandated program at the WCBVI. The program is funded by the DPI and serves from 50 to 80 adults with visual impairments statewide. The program is five weeks in length and provides adults with adjustment skills and knowledge to increase their quality of life. The program teaches functional skills for the newly blinded, including braille, orientation and mobility, techniques of daily living, and recreation and leisure skills. Eligibility for the program is assessed in coordination with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) in the Department of Workforce Development. Staffing for the program is obtained through the center's school or contracts with individuals with specific training expertise.

Proposed strategies to improve access to adult summer school programs

1. Develop an ongoing assessment plan with DVR for improving the services for adults with visual impairments.
2. Create a partnership with other agencies, public and private, that can provide support and services to adults with visual impairments.
3. Explore other training sites across the state to provide services during the year or summer.
4. Create a WCBVI website that is accessible to adults with visual impairments.
5. Create a program in collaboration with DVR and the Bureau for the Blind for transition planning into the world of work and independent living for young adults who will not attend a technical college or university.

XVII. INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS INCLUDING HOUSING ON THE GROUNDS OF THE CENTER IN JANESVILLE

It is important that a systematic independent living skills curriculum is included in a program for children with visual impairments. This curriculum should begin in early childhood and be expanded during the ensuing school years. Children with visual impairments must learn to access information that is acquired casually and incidentally by sighted learners. Most sighted learners learn through observation of their environment, but children with visual impairments need explicit instruction in all aspects of independent living skills. The core curriculum offered in most schools does not offer adequate training. The materials may appear haphazardly in learning materials, with little opportunity for hands-on experience. It is assumed a student has some basic level of knowledge acquired incidentally through visual

observation. This is not true for students who are blind or visually impaired. Students who are blind or visually impaired need a hands-on approach beginning with a basic assumption that they have had no prior training or exposure to the activity. This extends beyond the core curriculum into what is known as the expanded core curriculum addressing the specific needs of children who have visual impairments.

Most students with visual impairments do not have access to a comprehensive curriculum in independent living skills in the public schools. They may take consumer education, but this does not address their unique needs. Some programs offer specialized training in this area, but it is limited due to time constraints of the daily academic curriculum. Those students who attend the residential school are offered opportunities in the expanded core curriculum with instruction by certified staff who know the adaptations and accommodations needed for teaching. On campus are two apartments, home economics rooms, and an independent learning lab used by the students to learn independent living skills. This training includes all aspects of independent living skills to prepare student to live as independently as possible upon graduation. Many of the younger children with visual impairments are taught independent living skills during opportune times as lunch, classroom, break time, and in the dormitory.

All students in the state will have increased training opportunities in independent living, including sites where students with visual impairments can be assessed and decisions made that will address the needs in their IEPs. Learning opportunities can be designed for short-term services specific to independent living. Training sessions planned and organized by the regional site personnel can be developed and involve parents in teaching independent living skills in the early years. Weekend sessions and seminars can be planned involving families or students around identified areas of need, such as food preparation, financial management, personal hygiene, eating skills, and personal grooming. Independent living skills are among the most critical elements of the transition plan for students with visual impairments because their mastery determines the individual's ability to function and live independently and relates directly to their potential to be successful in other aspects of their adult life.

Proposed strategies to improve instruction in independent living skills

1. Complete a comprehensive needs assessment in each of the regional sites to determine needs for the use of the independent training areas at the center's school.
2. Expand opportunities for students, their families, and educators statewide to have knowledge of and access to the existing independent living skills areas at the center's school.
3. Develop an evaluation instrument at the WCBVI that can be used by local districts to evaluate a student in independent living skills for IEP planning.
4. Develop a plan for parents, siblings, and professionals to assist children with visual impairments to learn skills and techniques of independent living.
5. Develop expanded training opportunities statewide using distance learning or onsite locations, such as North Central Technical College, Center for Blind Persons, Badger Association, or local communities as learning sites for children with visual impairments.

6. Assign a person with expertise in independent living to oversee an independent living skills plan in partnership with statewide personnel in vision.

XVIII. REGIONAL SITES

Teachers of the visually impaired and orientation and mobility instructors serve many roles. They often serve as the sole resource to parents, administrators, regular and other special education teachers, and paraprofessionals. These teachers train school personnel on adaptations, modifications, and use of technology for their students in the educational setting. They are a resource for books and materials, recreational and leisure activities, social and independent living skills, and anything else their students or those working with their students require, not to mention that these teachers are also responsible for providing direct instruction to students. Caseloads of these teachers may require them to serve students in a number of schools and work with numerous curriculums. Consequently, providing training to all is difficult.

Regional consultant positions have been established as a part of the WCBVI to serve as a resource to meet the needs of students, parents, teachers, and other professionals. The state has been divided into five regions according to the population of students in each area. These consultants will work together to utilize the unique expertise of vision staff in their regions to assist other regions with their needs. These regional staff pull resources together for students in their areas, e.g., summer school, regional training opportunities for parents, social experiences for students.

Proposed strategies to develop regional sites to improve educational services for students who are blind or visually impaired

1. Hire consultants with expertise in educating students who are blind or visually impaired for the five CESA based WCBVI regional sites. These consultants will serve as key facilitators, networkers, and coordinators provide information and trouble-shooting, e.g., in obtaining materials or other support services. They will be knowledgeable of services in their region and statewide.
2. Regional consultants will work as a team and with other center staff to utilize their expertise and connections throughout the state.
3. Clearly communicate information about regional sites to local educational agencies (LEAs), CESAs, and parents statewide.
4. Regional consultants will examine the ongoing needs of their regions to determine areas of training, consultation, and expertise which would be valuable to the parents, staff, and students.
5. Regional consultants should actively participate in the development of summer programs that will meet needs of the students in their regions.
6. Regional consultants will develop and provide activities in their regions according to needs, such as technology inservices for parents, teachers, students, etc.
7. Link the regional centers and the WCBVI central office via the WCBVI website.

8. The regional staff will form a flexible statewide network to provide back up for cross training of staff and families on topics related to their areas of expertise and regional needs.
9. Develop and disseminate a coordinated plan for the regional centers.

XIX. THE CENTER'S SCHOOL

The WCBVI has as one of its components a school which is located in Janesville, Wisconsin. The center's school serves as both a day program and a residential school. The program serves children ages three through 21 in preschool through high school. Preschool children are on a day-program status. During the summer, as part of the WCBVI, the school can offer a summer program for school-age students. The school also offers an adult summer program. During the school year, the center's school offers a wide range of academic and nonacademic programs within the educational and residential components. The major focus of the curriculum addresses the expanded core curriculum, related services, co-curricular activities, and recreational/art activities. The expanded core curriculum includes braille, orientation and mobility, daily living skills, technology, socialization, and vocational education. Related services include occupational therapy, speech and language, physical therapy, counseling, and psychological services. Co-curricular activities from which students may choose are track and field, cross-country (WIAA affiliated), cheerleading, wrestling (WIAA affiliated), swimming, forensics, band, yearbook, student council, and recreational/art activities such as 4-H, woodworking, and ceramics. During this time, the student is maintaining the core academic curriculum either at the school or co-op program in the local school district. The program addresses those skills as identified by the child's IEP. The program should emphasize the acquisition and application of skills throughout the student's day, including after-school activities, recreation, and dormitory life.

The center's school recognizes the need to expand short-term placements. This short-term placement would emphasize vision-specific needs of the student, while maintaining their academic status in the local school district via tutoring. For those students who are residential, there needs to be a partnership for skill acquisition for students between the dormitory and the educational program. Emphasis should be placed on independent living skills in all environments for students attending the school for short-term placements. With data to suggest that the unemployment/underemployment of persons with visual impairments is at or about 70%, the center's school needs to develop opportunities for high school students to become exposed to the world of work and the skills in acquiring a job. This concept needs to be conveyed back to the local program and parents. The communication back to the parents and home districts is critical for the success of the program in serving students with visual impairments.

Proposed strategies to strengthen WCBVI's School for the Visually Handicapped

1. The continued development of comprehensive IEP services in serving students from local districts on a long- and short-term basis.
2. The development of a campus-wide technology plan to serve students on campus and be used as a teaching lab for statewide training of students, parents, and teachers.

3. Programs offered by the school should be clearly enumerated on the WCBVI website.
4. The development of the center's school library should be continued for statewide use.
5. Continue standards-based curriculum development to ensure alignment of instruction to Wisconsin's academic content standards that are being utilized by districts across the state.
6. In addition to these recommendations, a public information function is required for the WCBVI to promote program initiatives in the districts, in the regions, and at the center's school that can serve students, parents, and teachers needing specialized training in the expanded core curricular areas. These opportunities can occur during the school year, summer, weekends, or within the regional sites of the state. This person would work very closely with regional site personnel and agencies serving students with visual impairments.

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ACRONYMS

CCTV	Closed Circuit Television
CESA	Cooperative Educational Services Agencies
DPI	Department of Public Instruction
DVR	Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
ESC	Educational Services Center
IEP	Individualized Education Program
LEA	Local Educational Agencies
WATI	Wisconsin Assistive Technology Initiative
WISCAT	Wisconsin Cataloging System
WCBVI	Wisconsin Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired
WSVH	Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped