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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)

Senate

Record of Committee Proceedings

Committee on Education

Senate Bill 310

Relating to: eliminating the Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped and making an appropriation.

By the Committee on Education, by request of the the Department of Public Instruction.

September 30, 1997 Referred to committee on Education.

December 16, 1997 **PUBLIC HEARING HELD**

Present: (7) Senators C. Potter, Jauch, Shibilski,
Grobschmidt, Darling and Roessler

Absent: (0) None.

Appearances for

- (See Committee Slips)

Appearances against

- (See Committee Slips)

Appearances for Information Only

- (See Committee Slips)

Registrations for

- (See Committee Slips)

Registrations against

- (See Committee Slips)

March 26, 1998 **Failed to pass pursuant to Senate Joint Resolution 1.**

Paul Rusk
Committee Clerk

SB
310

Vote Record

Senate Committee on Education

Date: Sept 24, 1997 Executive Session Public Hearing

Bill Number: LRB 3733/2

Moved by: Potter

Seconded by: Jauch

Motion: DPI - school for blind
Introduction Only

<u>Committee Member</u>	<u>Aye</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Absent</u>	<u>Present</u>	<u>Absent</u>
Sen. Calvin Potter, Chair	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sen. Robert Jauch	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sen. Kevin Shibilski	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sen. Richard Grobschmidt	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sen. Alberta Darling	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sen. Joanne Huelsman	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sen. Carol Roessler	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Totals: _____

Motion Carried

Motion Failed





WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

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

September 9, 1997

Dear Colleague:

You recently received a letter from State Superintendent Benson regarding his proposal to close the State School for the Visually Handicapped. Before you make any commitments on this issue, there are some considerations we would like you to examine.

In a meeting with Representative Wood, Superintendent Benson admitted that local school districts would never be able to offer the same level of programming that the State School offers. When he compares the cost of students in the local districts to the students in the State School, he does not mention that the level of programming is superior in the State School. This does not mean that local districts are negligent, it simply means that the economy of scale at the State School allows for the use of greater resources for each student.

In the evaluation by D.P.I., the summer school program for adults who experience failing eyesight is not mentioned. This past summer 74 adults attended the summer school program at the State School for the Visually Handicapped. If the school is closed, where will adults go to receive training to deal with reduced vision in their "Golden Years"? In fact, the Joint Finance Committee saw the wisdom of increasing the summer school from 3 to 5 weeks! Now under the Benson proposal it would close.

At the State School an apartment is maintained to teach visually impaired students how to live independently. Will local school districts provide this service?

It is alleged that local school districts are not allowing visually handicapped students to attend the school, in spite of the parents' desire that they do so. Is this true? We are in the process of verifying whether or not this is true. If it is true, the question to be answered is WHY?

There is more to this issue than "meets the eye". We are in the process of surveying the parents of visually handicapped students to see why attendance at the State School is declining. If, after receiving the results of the survey it is apparent that the parents and visually handicapped students prefer to attend their local school district, we will join in the request to close the school and send the dollar resources to local districts. If, however, the survey shows that students who desire to attend the State School are being denied this resource, we will do all we can to see that the enrollment is allowed to grow and the State School remains open.

We expect the results of the survey to be available within a few weeks. Please keep an open mind on this issue until all the facts are in.

Sincerely,

TIMOTHY WEEDEN
State Senator
15th Senate District

WAYNE W. WOOD
State Representative
44th Assembly District



SCHOOL DISTRICT OF CADOTT COMMUNITY

P.O. Box 310

Cadott, Wisconsin 54727

Fax 715/289-3748

September 15, 1997

John Benson
State Superintendent
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
P.O. Box 7841
Madison, WI 53707-7841

Dear Superintendent Benson,

The Cadott Community Board of Education and I discussed in open session at the regularly scheduled monthly school board meeting on Monday, September 8, 1997, your recommendation to close the Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped. We understand your rationale, however, we feel a need to speak out.

Yes the average costs to educate a pupil at the Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped of more than \$70,000 should be a concern. We have similar concerns about the cost to educate many of our EEN students but we have been under the impression that we could not cut programs or end service due to high costs. We, also, know that the Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped has made it more difficult to place students at that facility. Districts have had to work with their CESA's in order to attempt to place students at the Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped. Maybe reconsidering the entrance criteria would result in changes that would increase enrollment thus lowering the cost per pupil.

Other considerations which could be discussed would include combining the School for the Visually Handicapped with the School for the Deaf much as we do when we combine Junior and Senior High schools. The students can be separated but use common facilities such as lunch rooms, gyms, etc. Maybe some of the home districts of the current students have programs that can deal with these students, but if Cadott had such an involved student we do not have such a program. Given revenue caps and the difficulty of raising taxes even if under a transfer of service exemption it is not that easily done.

Additionally, besides visually or hearing handicaps that are beyond the resources that local districts can deal with there are other areas which should be looked at. Severe emotional, behavioral, medically involved, or other extremely unique low incidence students should be considered by the state to add to the population base of specialized state schools. Just the lack of properly trained local staff would justify this being considered.

We are concerned that the responsibility of educating the most seriously involved low incidence student is being passed from the state to the local districts in order to meet state or department budget needs. Maybe local school districts should also have this option of passing the responsibility and costs back to the child's parents?



Guy R. Habeck
Superintendent
715/289-3795

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

Daniel Strebig
Elementary Principal
715/289-4213

John Benson
State Superintendent
September 15, 1997
Page 2

The point is the buck has to stop somewhere and students with needs that occur in low incidence should be served as they have been in the past - by the state.

We might be a small lone voice speaking out for these unique children but they too have needs that our local district is just not able to provide for as well as the School for the Visually Handicapped or the School for the Deaf is able to. Maybe large districts can but we can not. Please reconsider your recommendation.

Sincerely,

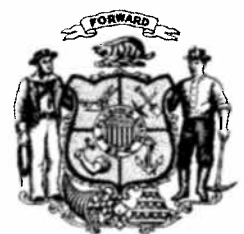


Guy R. Habeck
Superintendent

cc: School Board Members



WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE



Waterloo School District

"Preparing today's students for tomorrow's challenges"

CHARLES A. WHITSELL, *District Administrator*
813 N. Monroe St., Waterloo WI 53594-1175 920-478-3633
FAX 920-478-3821

JOSEPH HOUSTON, *Junior-Senior High School Principal*
865 N. Monroe St., Waterloo WI 53594-1100 920-478-2171
FAX 920-478-9539

SANDRA GAYNON, Ph.D., *Elementary School Principal*
785 N. Monroe St., Waterloo WI 53594-1176 920-478-2168

September 29, 1997

Mr John T Benson, Superintendent
Department of Public Instruction
PO Box 7841
Madison WI 53707-7841

Dear Superintendent Benson:

I am appealing to you in hope that I can in some way persuade you that the Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped needs to remain as a placement option for those students in our state who have unique and low incidence handicaps. We have a Waterloo youngster at the WSVH who presents such a handicapping condition. He only recently was placed there and, for the first time in his life, he has experienced a learning environment that is the least restrictive for his significant visual, motor and cognitive abilities. Because the WSVH environment can be managed and structured for his learning goals on a 24-hour basis, this student has finally begun to comprehend the aspects of "what, who, how, where and when" of his place in life.

Prior to being accepted at WSVH, this student was accommodated at Waterloo Elementary School from age three to age seven. During that time, he was provided his own physical/custodial aide, VI teacher and significant amount of services from an OT, PT and family social worker. This student was well accepted by his age group as well as his care providers and teachers. However, he made little, if any, gains in reaching the simplest of learning goals. Eventually, his caregivers/teachers and peers became frustrated with so little return for such tremendous efforts.

After placement at WSVH and his adjustment to that environment, this student's demeanor and attitude began to change. The staff assigned to serve him saw him with potential to learn many skills. This has finally begun to happen for him.

Without the WSVH environment, their staff with expertise in serving these uniquely-handicapped students and the supportive 24-hour care needed to maintain such children, this child would have not been able to succeed. If this environment cannot be replicated, this student will have lost his threshold to succeed ever again.

I do comprehend the excessive costs of maintaining the WSVH

facility and services. I also realize your decision to close the facility was not done without careful consideration. I do, however, request that more study be given as to the impact this decision will have upon these individual students and their families before WSVH actually closes its doors forever.

Very truly yours,

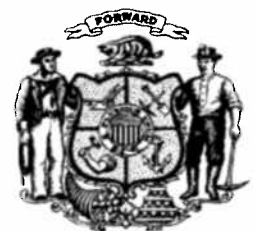
A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ron Anderson". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Ronald L Anderson
Director of Special Services

RLA/d
xc: Mr. Whitsell



WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE





State of Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 7841, Madison, WI 53707-7841
125 South Webster Street, Madison, WI 53702
(608) 266-3390 TDD (608) 267-2427 FAX (608) 267-1052
Internet Address: www.state.wi.us/agencies/dpi

John T. Benson
State Superintendent

Steven B. Dold
Deputy State Superintendent

October 1, 1997

*Paul
Harris
DPI
paper
WSVH*

Dear Parents:

We have seen a dramatic increase in the number of children statewide identified as having a primary or secondary disability in vision over the past ten years. During this same period we have also seen a steady decline in the placement of students with visual disabilities at our Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped (WSVH). As more programs have been developing throughout the state, parents (and their local districts) have decided to keep their children closer to home rather than enrolling them at WSVH. Because of these changes, you may know I have recommended to the legislature that WSVH be closed after the 1997-98 school year. See attached documents, please.

Many questions have been asked about the effects on the children at WSVH if the legislature should decide to close the school after the 1997-98 school year. I have indicated that our WSVH students would be able to receive appropriate services in local or regional programs. Clearly the majority (95%) of children with visual disabilities in the state are educated in their home districts or regional programs (see maps attached).

Agency staff have been reviewing our data from several sources to ascertain the level of need or severity of disability of students with visual disabilities in programs throughout Wisconsin. As a result of that analysis, I believe it is fair to say the nature and severity of visual disabilities of the students attending WSVH are quite comparable to those of students being served in local or regional school programs throughout the state. If 19 of every 20 students with visual disabilities in Wisconsin are being served in local or regional programs and their needs are similar to students at WSVH, I believe we can assure that, with additional support and capacity building, our WSVH students can be educated in their local or regional school programs.

As you may know, I have appointed a task force composed of individuals who are directly involved in educating children with visual disabilities or who are highly interested in the welfare of individuals who are blind or visually impaired, including parents of and students who are visually impaired. The task force began its work

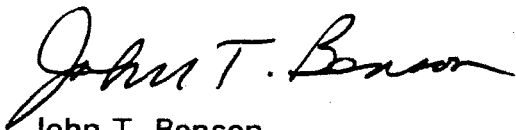
on September 25 with a charge to identify the program needs and make recommendations for more adequately serving the needs of students with visual disabilities statewide

Numerous news articles have appeared in the last month or so describing the importance of adequate learning opportunities for children at WSVH if the state school in Janesville is closed at the end of this school year. My concern for and commitment to these students remains strong. We will strengthen and expand outreach services to ensure support during the first few years of these students' transition into their local or regional programs. We will continue to provide the service center production of Braille and large print books statewide.

Our legislative proposal includes shifting substantial amounts of current state funding allocated for WSVH operations (except for the service center) to local districts as they expand programs and services. Under our proposal, the department would also continue to allocate federal funds to ensure assistive technology and other innovative programs for students with visual disabilities or training opportunities for staff to better meet student needs.

We must not only join forces to mobilize resources to educate the few students at WSVH, we must also mobilize legislative support to help expand the services and programs throughout the state for the many, many families and school districts which are deciding to educate their children with visual disabilities nearer their homes. In this way, there will be greater equitable educational opportunities for all of our children with visual disabilities. If you, too, believe we need to focus on the issues and needs statewide, your help and support will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,



John T. Benson
State Superintendent

klm

cc Director of Special Education or Pupil Services
Area legislator(s)

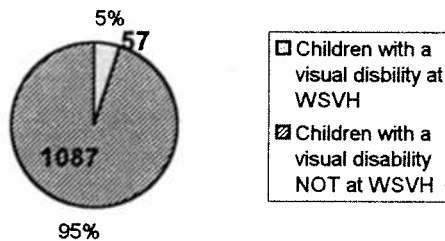
Attachments

Why It Makes Sense to Close the Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped at Janesville

1. The vast majority of students who are blind or visually disabled are served in local school district or regional programs.

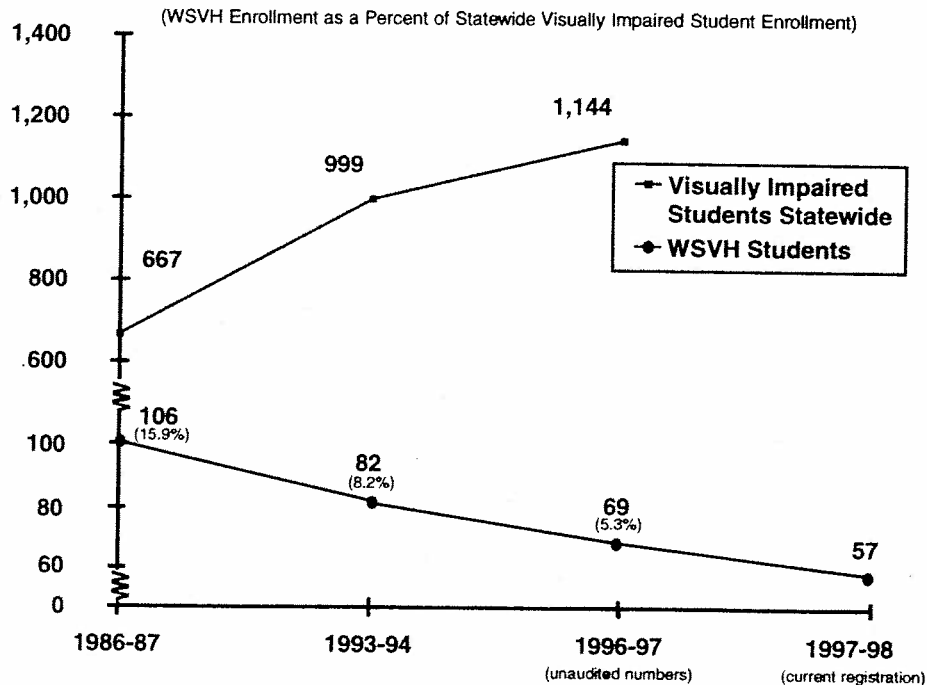
School districts have reported to the department that as of December 1, 1996, there were 1,144 visually disabled students in Wisconsin. There are 462 students with vision as their primary disability; there are 682 students with vision as their secondary disability. As of the beginning of the 1997-98 school year, only 57 of these students are enrolled at the Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped (WSVH).

**Students at WSVH as a % of all
children with a visual disability**



Between 1986-87 and 1996-97 the number of students with identified visual disabilities has increased from 667 to 1,144. During the same time the number of students enrolled at WSVH declined from 106 to 69 (57 at the start of the 1997-98 school year).

Wisconsin Visually Impaired Student Enrollment



As local programs and services have increased, creating more local educational options, parents are able to keep their child(ren) with visual disabilities at home without sacrificing their children's education. Parents no longer need to feel they must send their children away to get an education.

Twenty-six percent (15 of 57) of the WSVH students are 12th graders and are expected to graduate in the spring of 1998, leaving approximately 42 students enrolled.

There is an insufficient number of students to sustain a comprehensive educational program.

Current WSVH Student Enrollment (97-98)

School Category	Number of Children
Pre- school	2
Elementary School	9
Middle School(6-8)	19
High School	27
Middle School	
Grade 6	11
Grade 7	4
Grade 8	4
High School	
Grade 9	3
Grade 10	1
Grade 11	8
Grade 12	15

2. The range and severity of needs of students served in local and regional programs are similar to that of students at WSVH.

WSVH has been unable to serve certain students with visual disabilities because of the severity of their needs and particularly their residential needs due to behavioral and medical conditions. These students have been served by local school districts in cooperation with other agencies. The majority of Wisconsin students who are deaf-blind are served by local and regional vision programs.

Thirty-three percent (9 of 27) of the high school aged students at WSVH are mainstreamed into classes at the Janesville School District. Twenty percent (6 of 30) of the elementary-aged (preK-8) students are mainstreamed into classes at the Janesville School District.

Placements at WSVH are generally based upon parent preference rather than on severity of need. Illustrating this is the fact that Milwaukee County school districts serve 228 students with visual disabilities, including children with all ranges of severity of need. However, Milwaukee County districts, including the Milwaukee Public Schools, currently enroll twelve students at WSVH.

Some parents prefer placement of their child at WSVH in order to access certain co-curricular and recreational activities. Students at WSVH are offered opportunities to participate in certain co-curricular and recreational activities specifically designed for children with vision disabilities. Co-curricular and recreational opportunities are important to all students. The intent of the recommended proposal is to re-direct attention and funding to better meet the needs of all children with vision disabilities rather than concentrating resources at WSVH. This will result in better, more equitable services to all of these children.

3. Cost is a factor. The average cost of a placement at WSVH is three-to-four times the cost of educating visually disabled children in local school district programs.

The per pupil cost at WSVH during 1995-96 was at least \$70,000 compared to an average cost of approximately \$21,500 per pupil for tuition to place a student with a visual disability in a sample of urban school districts. The department does not collect per pupil cost data on students with disabilities. However, based upon informal discussions with school district staff, the department is confident that the average local district cost of serving visually disabled students is less than \$20,000 per year.

The overall operational costs for WSVH for 1995-96 were approximately \$5 million in GPR dollars and \$1.3 million in federal discretionary dollars.

The State Superintendent is proposing that the state GPR savings be used to fund a special five-year categorical aid program that would fully fund *new, expanded and improved* vision services for all of the 1,144 students in the state with vision disabilities.

Not all services provided by WSVH would be eliminated under the current legislative proposal. The State Superintendent is committed to: (1) maintaining the Educational Services Center for the Visually Impaired which produces Braille and large print books for students statewide, (2) expanding outreach services, and (3) maintaining adult summer school under some other administrative authority.

Federal discretionary dollars spent on WSVH would be redirected to expand outreach services, professional development/training and other services which would create more equitable opportunities for students with visual disabilities statewide.

- 4. WSVH has become primarily a regional program for students from the heavily populated southeastern region of the state. (There continues to be an inaccurate impression that students served at WSVH come from small, rural districts that would have difficulty serving the needs of their students.)**

Only six students currently enrolled (of 57) at WSVH live north of Portage county. All six are high school aged.

Twenty-one percent (12 of 57) of the total school enrollment comes from Milwaukee County.

Two-thirds of the total school enrollment comes from eight contiguous counties in the far south-eastern part of the state.

Over one quarter (28%, or 16 of 57) of WSVH students (ten elementary and six high-school-aged students) are day students and are transported home in the evening.

- 5. Information regarding services available at WSVH has been widely disseminated.**

Opponents argue that parents have not been informed about WSVH and its services, and DPI is criticized for not "promoting or marketing" WSVH.

Local directors of special education and pupil services KNOW about WSVH and the financial benefits to their districts if they choose to send their students with visual disabilities there. **Services at WSVH are at no cost** to the local district other than for transportation or tuition if the student is mainstreamed into the Janesville School District programs. Transportation costs are eligible for categorical and equalization aids under the state's current funding program.

Outreach staff from WSVH have participated extensively in evaluations of children with visual disabilities throughout the state over the years. They have a great deal of credibility and a strong ethical obligation to describe a student's needs and how those needs might be met. This includes describing services to the district and to the parents which would be available at WSVH if that is appropriate to the student's needs. Outreach staff do not market or try to sell WSVH; they provide professional services to the district and the family so that **locally** the best decision can be made for each child.

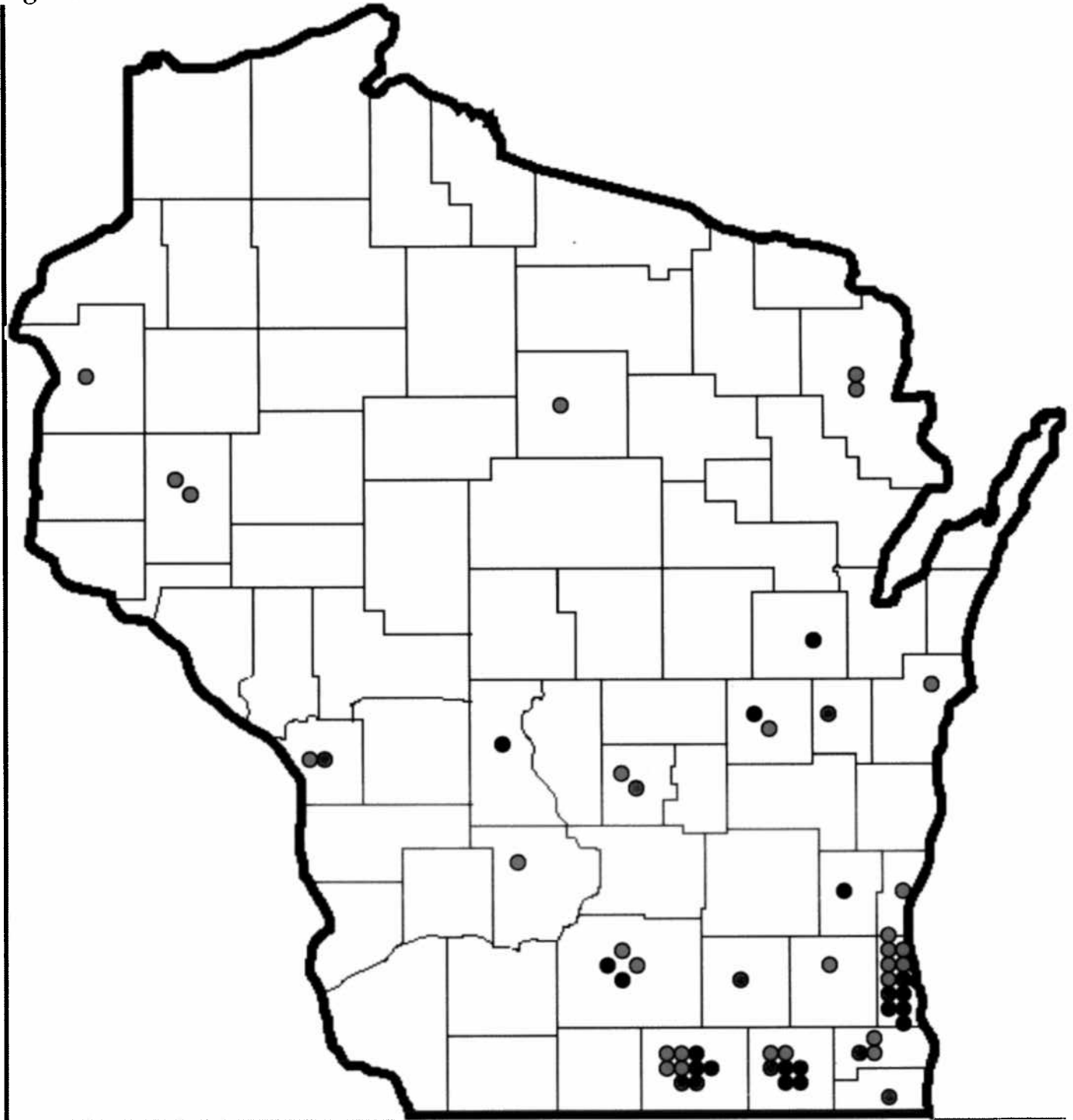
Under federal law, a child with a disability must be educated in the least restrictive environment. This means that, to the maximum extent appropriate, disabled students must be educated in the regular classroom with their nondisabled peers, provided that their individualized educational programs can be implemented in that environment with the use of supplementary aids and services. The regular classroom with supplementary aids and

services must be considered before a child is placed in a more restrictive setting. Each step away from the regular classroom must be justified based on the individual child's needs.

Further, in determining the least restrictive environment in which to carry out a child's individualized education program plan, multiple factors must be considered and balanced. For example, a district must consider the educational benefits to a disabled student in the regular classroom compared to the educational benefits in a special education classroom. A district must also consider the non-academic benefits to the disabled student from interacting with nondisabled peers. Decisions cannot be made based solely on the category of disability (including vision) or severity of disability.

County of Residence, Fall 1997
WSVH Students

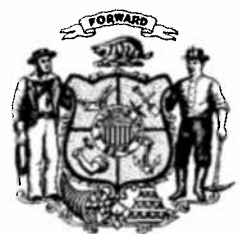
- Age 14 and up ●
- Age 11-13 ●
- Age 10 and under ●



9/11/97 4:17 PM



WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE





State of Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 7841, Madison, WI 53707-7841
125 South Webster Street, Madison, WI 53702
(608) 266-3390 TDD (608) 267-2427 FAX (608) 267-1052
Internet Address: www.state.wi.us/agencies/dpi

John T. Benson
State Superintendent

Steven B. Dold
Deputy State Superintendent

DATE: October 13, 1997

TO: Honorable Members of the Wisconsin Legislature

FROM: John T. Benson
State Superintendent

SUBJECT: Informational Letter to Parents of Students with Visual Disabilities

Recently I shared a copy of a letter with you which I sent to the parents of all students with visual disabilities throughout the state. I want to briefly reiterate my commitment to expanding and improving programs and services for **all** students with vision disabilities. I will continue to share that commitment with families and local school districts.

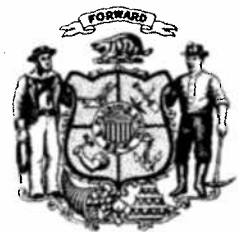
My recommendation to close the Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped (WSVH) was reached only after an intensive review of the school and of the availability of vision services to children throughout the state. I am convinced that there are appropriate educational alternatives for all of the children enrolled at WSVH. The severity and nature of disabilities of our students at WSVH are representative of the needs of students with visual disabilities throughout the state. There are a small number of the most severely handicapped children with visual disabilities who have not been able to be served at WSVH due to severe medical or emotional needs. These students are being educated by their home school districts.

I also believe the resources that are unnecessarily allocated to maintain placements at WSVH should be redirected to the local school district programs. Ninety five percent of children with visual disabilities are being educated in local school district programs because parents and local school district staff have determined these programs to be appropriate and because they permit children to live with their families during the school week.

While my recommendation to close WSVH has led to many strong and divergent reactions, I firmly believe I have raised a public policy issue which merits legislative review. I appreciate your willingness to support the introduction of this legislation and to engage in a public debate of the issues.

Please do not hesitate to call my staff, Juanita S. Pawlisch, Assistant State Superintendent, (266-1649), or Paul Halverson, Director, Exceptional Education (266-1781), if you have questions on the documents you received last week or if you need additional information.

klm



Carolyn Faye Fletcher

626 South Main Street ~ Janesville, WI. 53545-4850
Phone (608)745-5974 ~ Fax (608) 754-9483 ~ Email cpmill@inwave.com

October 30, 1997

Senator Calvin Potter
Senate Education Committee
Chair Person

Dear Senator Potter,

I am sending you a copy of a letter that I sent to John T. Benson, State Supt., DPI. I am asking that you please make sure that each Member of the Senate Education Committee have a copy of this letter by Dec. 16, 1997, for the HA Joint (Assembly & Senate] Committee meeting which has been set for that day.

I will be looking forward to hearing from you and hope to see you at the meeting. Thank you for your help in this matter.

Sincerely,


Carolyn Fletcher

cc: Representative Luther Olsen
Chair, Assembly Education Committee

Enc: 2

Carolyn Faye Fletcher

626 South Main Street ~ Janesville, WI. 53545-4850
Phone (608)754-5974 ~ Fax (608) 754-9483

October 29, 1997

John T. Benson, State Supt., DPI
125 South Webster Street
Madison, WI 53702

Dear Mr. Benson,

I heard you once say, "I shall leave no child behind." I truly hope you meant those words, Mr. Benson. I am writing to you today as a concerned employee, tax payer and parent, in hopes that your quote also applies to the visually impaired children and that no visually impaired student gets left behind as well.

If all the students that are currently enrolled at WSVH are transferred back to their local districts next year, will the local districts be **required** to hire all the appropriate teachers in order to deliver specific services (e.g., teacher of the visually impaired, Daily Living Skills teacher, Orientation and Mobility teacher, Vocational Education teacher, etc...) for each student in each district that has visually impaired students, **as required by law**? What will happen if a teacher of these special services can not be found in a specific district? These services are listed in each student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) and WSVH is required by law to provide a specific number of hours a week/month/year of these services to each student as the IEP requires. Are the individual school districts also going to have the capability to provide the same services as required? I highly doubt it.

Some students attend our school for socialization reasons as well as academic reasons. Will there be a class and/or support group of their peers in the local district for each student to provide them with the same social environment among their peers?

WSVH has a wide variety of technology-related equipment for example: (Perkins braille-\$885, Braille 'N Speak-\$1,349, Reading Edge-\$5,495, CCTV-\$1,595, Echo Speech Synthesizer-\$120, Magic Deluxe Screen Magnification Software-\$260 each copy, etc...). Will the local school districts be **required** to purchase this same equipment so that the students can continue to develop their up-to-date knowledge of technology for the visually impaired? Will there be a teacher in each district that has the proficiency skills to instruct visually impaired students in the use of this equipment?

WSVH has an excellent co-curricular program in which every secondary student from age 13 to 21, has and is guaranteed a chance to participate. There are no "try-outs" and there are no "cuts". Will these students be given the same guarantee in their local district to participate in these same kind of activities? Will they be encouraged to "try-out"?

WSVH has a strong Vocational Education department in which the teachers strive to instill a strong work ethic. Students are given a variety of jobs ranging from collecting recyclable materials on campus to working off campus. The student's are taught to be as independent as their ability will permit. Will these opportunities be provided in every school district? If this type of program does not exist or is not provided in each specific district, what will happen to the student's skills which they have worked so hard to develop?

Staff has been asked on numerous occasions at short notice to translate print into Braille. Will there be an individual in each school district (that has visually impaired students), who will have the skills to translate print into Braille instantaneously, **when** needed? Will the necessary equipment be purchased as well (e.g., Braille printer-\$2,555, Megadots software program-\$437 per copy, IBM computer and WordPerfect 6.1 software-\$2,000)?

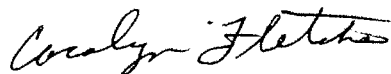
Has anyone done a cost analysis to provide the cost difference between operating WSVH as we do today or hiring all new teachers and purchasing all the required equipment for each district to enable them to provide these same services in **each district**? Will each visually impaired student be able to "keep up" with their sighted peers in their local school district or will they be **set aside** and **left behind**? WSVH has always been, is, and always would be a "safe haven" for students who did not, can not, and will not make it in their local district. Let's not leave **any** child behind.

One final question, for the sake of argument: What is the cost difference between one student per year at WSVH and one person on Social Security and Welfare for the rest of his/her life? If you fail in educating these students and providing them with the necessary skills to make it on their own, you are limiting their potential to becoming productive individuals within their communities.

I have heard the quote that "Education has no price tag".

All visually impaired students just got tagged.

Sincerely,

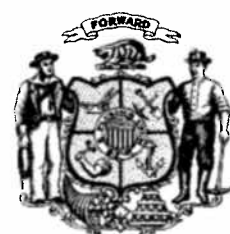


Carolyn Fletcher

cc:Governor T. Thompson
Senator T. Weeden
Rep. W. Wood
Dr. T. Hanson



WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE



Waterloo School District

"Preparing today's students for tomorrow's challenges"

CHARLES A. WHITSELL, *District Administrator*
813 N. Monroe St., Waterloo WI 53594-1175 920-478-3633
FAX 920-478-3821

JOSEPH HOUSTON, *Junior-Senior High School Principal*
865 N. Monroe St., Waterloo WI 53594-1100 920-478-2171
FAX 920-478-9539

SANDRA GAYNON, Ph.D., *Elementary School Principal*
785 N. Monroe St., Waterloo WI 53594-1176 920-478-2168

November 3, 1997

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

Dear Senator Potter:

I recently received a letter from a grandparent of a student whose grandson attends the Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped in Janesville, WI. He had obtained a copy of a letter that I had sent to Superintendent Benson at the Department of Public Instruction regarding the proposed closing of the school and the effects this would have upon a student that the Waterloo School District currently has placed at the school.

In the letter, the grandparent asked me if I would share the letter with you in preparation for discussing the proposed closing at your upcoming HA Joint (Assembly and Senate) Education Committee meeting on Tuesday, December 16, 1997. In response to this request, I am sending you a copy of my letter.

It is my plan to attend the December 16th hearing and, if possible, to provide testimony to the Joint Committee about our circumstances at Waterloo should the Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped be closed and our student returned to the local district for educational programming. When you review my enclosed letter, you will note that beyond concerns of space and financial needs, the issue of duplicating a five-day/week, 24 hour/day Individual Educational Plan (IEP) is paramount in resolving this dilemma.

It will be the primary issue to resolve in order to meet this child's exceptional educational needs in another educational program. To my knowledge, no other school district in Wisconsin currently offers such services, leaving us the choice of attempting to replicate the WSVH program locally for one student or to seek a residential placement outside the State of Wisconsin.

Hopefully, this matter will be discussed further at the hearing; I do appreciate your role in this matter and respect the task you have before you.

As Chairman of this Joint Committee, I would request that you would copy these two letters and distribute them to the other committee members for their knowledge as well, prior to the hearing.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ronald L. Anderson". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Ronald L Anderson
Director of Special Services

RLA/d
enclosure





November 18, 1997

Luther Olsen
Chairperson of the Assembly Education Committee
9 W Capitol
State Capitol
Madison, Wisconsin

Cal Porter
Chairman of the Senate Education Committee
100 N. Hamilton Room 407
Madison, Wisconsin

This letter is being written relative to Superintendent of Public Instruction Benson's recommendation to close the Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped (WSVH) in Janesville.

The Task Force on Exceptional Education and Supportive Services is an advisory group of parents, agency personnel, teachers and administrators which was established by the Milwaukee Board of School Directors (MBSD) in 1971 and which continues to function as advisor and monitor to the MBSD in all matters which affect the lives of the approximately 14,000 students with disabilities who are now served by the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS).

Five Milwaukee moms who were members of the Task Force were intimately involved in the writing of state legislation, Chapter 115, which in many respects became the model upon which the subsequent federal legislation (originally PL 94-142 and now the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was based. We fought long and hard for the rights of students with disabilities; first, to assure that they had equal access to educational opportunities and then to assure that quality programs and services were delivered to them. The state and federal laws have, for the most part, established equal access. Our fight for quality programs, however; is ongoing.

It is in that regard that we have reviewed Superintendent Benson's proposal and wholeheartedly support. The proposal was developed after considerable study and review, and after extensive discussion and analysis. We support Superintendent Benson's proposal from both a philosophical and an economic base. The very essence of the state and federal laws governing exceptional education is that students with disabilities deserve the right to be educated in the least restrictive environment, i.e., an environment which is the very closest, physically and conceptually, to that of the disabled student's peers.

While we agree with the need for an array of services to allow for program options for students with disabilities, it is our belief and our experience that most students, even those with multiple handicaps, can and should be programmed within their local school districts. Residential schools were appropriate in their time, i.e., before students with disabilities had access to appropriate services in their own school districts, in their own neighborhood schools. It is difficult, if not impossible, to justify their continued existence given the present intent of the law to program for students in the least restrictive environment. The continuation of these segregated environments is even harder to justify when one considers the exorbitant costs that are connected with such continuance.

The Milwaukee Public Schools have a long history of providing quality services to students with exceptional education needs. When the "deinstitutionalization" movement occurred and hundreds of students with severe needs were returned to their communities, MPS met the challenge and developed and staffed the needed educational programs for them.

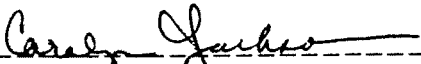
Buildings were modified, supportive services and medical staff were hired, staff was in-serviced and students were provided programming. We are not saying that everything is perfect. We are saying, and saying it strongly, that the local district is capable of providing the services. Financial support is needed, however.

With the decrease of reimbursement rates over the last twenty-five years from approximately 70% to the current rate of less than 40%, and with the spending caps imposed on school districts, it is increasingly difficult to serve students with disabilities. It is to this end that we cannot justify the continuation of a program at WSVH for 57 students (total enrollment) when that continuation means the expenditure of approximately \$78,000 per student. Within the MPS enrollment for the 1997-98 school year stands at 168, blind and visually impaired students, who need a wide range of services. The average cost of serving these children is \$8,000 per capita based upon a classroom with ten students, a teacher and a handicapped children's aide. A key recommendation of Superintendent Benson's proposal is the reallocation of over \$7,000,000 to support educational services for visually impaired students in local school districts. This budget consists of approximately \$3,500,000 of state GPR; the other half of the school's budget is derived from utilization of discretionary flow-through federal dollars. These federal dollars were really intended to permit local school districts to create new programs and innovative approaches outside of their already established programming.

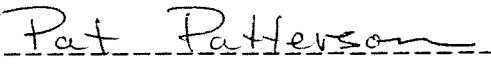
While it is not illegal to use the discretionary federal funds for WSVH, that was not the primary intent of this piece of legislation. The students with visual impairment within the MPS, which is clearly the largest visually impaired student population in the state, would benefit greatly from reallocation proposed by Superintendent Benson. All local districts serving visually impaired students would derive some benefit as well.

We sincerely hope that you support Superintendent Benson's proposal. It is a proposal that is cost effective, timely in its' educational approach, and appropriate within the framework of existing state and federal laws. It will be good for students with visual disabilities and their parents and will provide desperately needed financial resources to school districts.

Sincerely,



Carolyn Jackson
Co-Chair

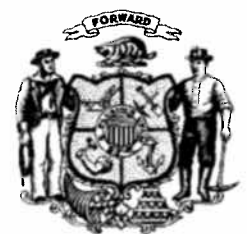


Pat Patterson
Co-Chair

CJ/SC/mh
12/8/97



WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE





WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

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

To: All Legislators
Fr: Sen. Tim Weeden and Rep. Wayne Wood
Date: November 18, 1997

SUBJECT: Resolution to study the mission and future of the Blind School

By now, most are aware of Superintendent John Benson's recommendation to close the Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped (WSVH). Rep. Wood and I intend to introduce this joint resolution calling for a Legislative Council Study on the role and mission of the WSVH.

We believe a decision to close the school is premature. Further, we believe the school has long been in need of direction. Most of the supporters of the School have agreed to consider any and all of the recommendations made by a Legislative Council committee.

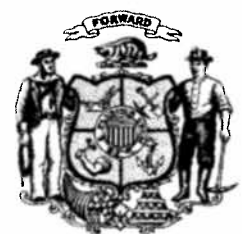
Should you wish to cosponsor this resolution please contact either Rep. Wood at 6-7503, or Sen. Weeden at 6-2253 by December 1.

Analysis by the Legislative Reference Bureau

This joint resolution requests the joint legislative council to study and report to the legislature on the current mission of the Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped and the impact that closing the Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped would have on the the lives of blind and visually impaired persons.



WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE



November 19, 1997

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

Dear Senator Potter,

Please, before you make any decision regarding the fate of the Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped in Janesville, visit the school. You will see the reality of what the school means to the visually impaired children of Wisconsin - the opportunity for a brighter future, full of possibilities. WSVH provides our visually impaired and blind children with the training to enable them to lead productive, independent lives.


Our daughter, Samantha Levering, is a student at WSVH. Samantha is a visually impaired, eleven-year-old child with a visual acuity with correction of 20/200 (she is "legally blind.") Samantha spent five and a half years in the public school system and experienced frustration and loss of self-esteem. Even with the services available to her through our local school district (Oak Creek-Franklin Joint School District), including the services of her itinerate vision teacher and classroom teacher, she was not able to function in a mainstream classroom. As parents, we began to doubt her ability to learn successfully in school and her future was looking bleak.

Samantha's fourth grade classroom teacher, Mr. Mike Papka and the Director of Pupil Services and Special Education for the Oak Creek-Franklin Joint School District, Dr. John Voorhees reported that Samantha was not able to learn and socialize effectively. We were given the option of a temporary placement (six months to a couple of years) at WSVH for Samantha to gain the skills necessary to re-enter a mainstream classroom. We had many discussions with the staff and teachers of the school, Samantha's former classroom and vision teachers and toured the campus. After seeing the facilities of the school and the broad range of services she could receive, we knew it was in her best interest to attend WSVH as a residential student. We do not regret our decision.

Our daughter has learned more in the nine months that she has been at WSVH than we could have ever hoped. She is learning to read and write in Braille. Samantha has received orientation and mobility training and is using a cane to become more independent. She is being taught daily living skills and is receiving counseling in social skills and for low self-esteem. She attends classes at the local public elementary school to define and refine her classroom skills. She is able to participate in sports and recreational activities that she never had the opportunity to experience and very importantly, she is able to associate with other vision impaired and blind children. For the first time, our daughter enjoys school and is gaining confidence and self-esteem.

Please let our visually impaired and blind children in this state have the opportunity to attend the Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped. It is not the answer for every one of them, but it has been a wonderful solution for our daughter. Because of this exceptional school, Samantha has a brighter future.

Sincerely,



Daniel and Janet Mallek
460 E. Pheasant Run
Oak Creek, WI 53154
(414) 570-9491
DMallek@MSN.com (e-mail)