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☞ Details: Legislative Audit Bureau Report 06-3: Wisconsin Educational Services Program for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Department of Public Instruction

(FORM UPDATED: 08/11/2010)

WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE ... PUBLIC HEARING - COMMITTEE RECORDS

2005-06

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



STATE OF WISCONSIN

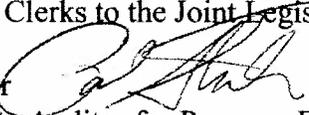
Legislative Audit Bureau

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Madison, Wisconsin 53703
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Janice Mueller
State Auditor

DATE: March 1, 2006

TO: Karen Asbjornson and Pamela Matthews
Committee Clerks to the Joint Legislative Audit Committee

FROM: Paul Stuiber 
Deputy State Auditor for Program Evaluation

SUBJECT: Report 06-3: An Evaluation of the Wisconsin Educational Services
Program for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Enclosed is our evaluation of the Wisconsin Educational Services Program for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, which is administered by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). This audit was performed based on a statutory requirement contained in 2001 Wisconsin Act 57, which created the program.

Although the program was created in 2001, one of its main purposes is to operate the Wisconsin School for the Deaf, a residential school founded in 1852. The primary change instituted by Act 57 was to provide greater emphasis on the provision of outreach services. Statewide, more than 90 percent of students who are deaf or hard of hearing are served by local school districts, rather than the residential school. In fiscal year (FY) 2004-05, the program spent \$11.0 million and was authorized 135.6 full-time equivalent positions. Outreach services accounted for \$1.1 million, or 10 percent, of total expenditures in that year.

The main concern raised by the audit is the continued decline in enrollment at the residential school, which decreased from 165 students in the 2000-01 school year to 142 students in the 2004-05 school year. If enrollment continues to decline, additional staffing changes may need to be considered.

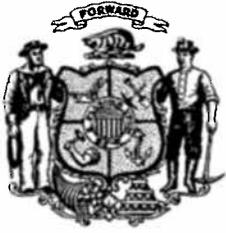
In keeping with the intent of Act 57, the program has significantly expanded outreach efforts statewide, including the expansion of distance learning courses in American Sign Language and consultations with local school district staff.

We include recommendations for DPI to report to the Joint Legislative Audit Committee on its efforts to monitor classroom staffing ratios and the results of its efforts to increase the technological resources needed to expand its provision of distance learning courses statewide.

The report will be released on Thursday, March 2, at 9:00 a.m. Please contact us if you have any questions.

PS/bm

Enclosures

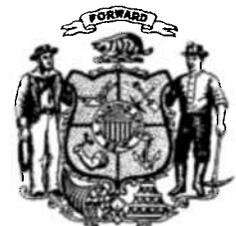


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1 East Main Street, Suite 200
Madison, WI 53703



**Report 06-3
March 2006**

An Evaluation

**Wisconsin Educational
Services Program for the
Deaf and Hard of Hearing**

Department of Public Instruction

2005-2006 Joint Legislative Audit Committee Members

Senate Members:

Carol A. Roessler, Co-chairperson
Robert Cowles
Scott Fitzgerald
Mark Miller
Julie Lassa

Assembly Members:

Suzanne Jeskewitz, Co-chairperson
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State Auditor - Janice Mueller

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STATE OF WISCONSIN

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Janice Mueller
State Auditor

March 2, 2006

Senator Carol A. Roessler and
Representative Suzanne Jeskewitz, Co-chairpersons
Joint Legislative Audit Committee
State Capitol
Madison, Wisconsin 53702

Dear Senator Roessler and Representative Jeskewitz:

As required by 2001 Wisconsin Act 57, we have completed an evaluation of the Wisconsin Educational Services Program for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, which is a statewide educational resource for students and their parents and teachers. The program is administered by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). As part of the program, Act 57 directed DPI to continue operating the residential Wisconsin School for the Deaf in Delavan, to offer youth summer programs, and to provide outreach services to school districts statewide. In fiscal year 2004-05, the program spent \$11.0 million and was authorized 135.6 full-time equivalent positions. Outreach activities accounted for \$1.1 million, or 10.0 percent, of all expenditures in that year.

Enrollment in the residential school decreased from 165 students in the 2000-01 school year to 142 students in the 2004-05 school year. If enrollment continues to decline, staffing changes may need to be considered. We include a recommendation for DPI to report to the Joint Legislative Audit Committee on its efforts to monitor classroom staffing ratios.

Outreach services have grown significantly, corresponding with additional statutory authority. Outreach staff now provide consultation services for local school districts. In addition, training sessions have increased, and distance learning courses in American Sign Language are provided. We include a recommendation for DPI to update the Joint Legislative Audit Committee on the results of its efforts to increase the technological resources needed to provide additional distance learning courses statewide.

We appreciate the courtesy and cooperation extended to us by DPI. Its response follows the report.

Respectfully submitted,

Janice Mueller
State Auditor

JM/PS/ss

Report Highlights ■

Program expenditures have increased primarily because of expanded outreach services.

Residential school enrollment has declined more than staffing levels.

Outreach expenditures totaled \$1.1 million in FY 2004-05.

The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) administers the Wisconsin Educational Services Program for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, which was created by 2001 Wisconsin Act 57. In fiscal year (FY) 2004-05, the program had 135.6 authorized full-time equivalent (FTE) positions and \$11.0 million in expenditures.

The program makes free residential education available to state residents from 3 to 21 years old who are deaf or hard of hearing and provides outreach services such as consultation, training, and mentoring to school districts, students who are deaf or hard of hearing, and their families. In addition, the Wisconsin School for the Deaf in Delevan offers a summer program.

Act 57 directed the Legislative Audit Bureau to conduct a performance evaluation of the program during FY 2005-06. To assess overall program performance and determine the extent to which DPI has implemented statutory changes, we analyzed:

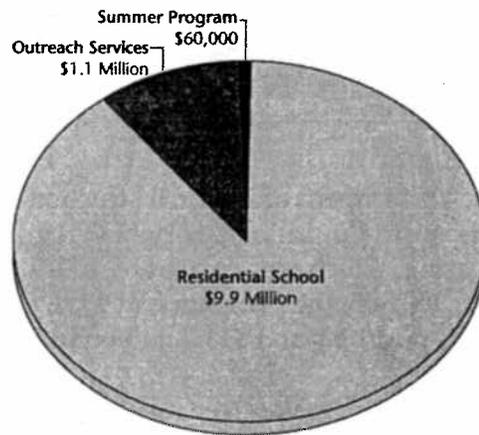
- program expenditures from FY 2000-01 through FY 2004-05;
- changes in staffing levels;
- enrollment trends at the school; and
- the extent to which outreach services have been expanded, and the types of services provided.

Program Expenditures

Program expenditures increased moderately from \$10.0 million in FY 2000-01 to \$11.0 million in FY 2004-05, primarily because of expanded statewide outreach efforts. As shown in Figure 1, in FY 2004-05, spending for outreach services was \$1.1 million. However, at \$9.9 million, residential school expenditures continued to represent the majority of the program's costs.

Figure 1

Program Expenditures FY 2004-05



Wisconsin School for the Deaf

During the 2004-05 school year, 6.3 percent of the 2,252 Wisconsin students who were identified as deaf or hard of hearing and were receiving special education services attended the Wisconsin School for the Deaf.

Enrollment at the residential school has declined in recent years, from 165 students in the 2000-01 school year to 142 students in the 2004-05 school year. Both instructional and residential staffing at the school have also declined, from 97.7 authorized FTE positions in January 2001 to 91.0 authorized FTE positions in September 2005. In contrast, outreach services have increased, and the number of authorized outreach positions increased from 4.0 FTE in January 2001 to 11.0 FTE in September 2005.

Students are placed in the residential school when an individualized education program (IEP) developed according to state and federal requirements deems it appropriate. The IEPs of nearly 80 percent of students who currently attend the school list more than one disability. A speech or language disability is the most prevalent after hearing disabilities.

Although the majority of its courses cover subjects similar to those provided by schools in local districts, the school's courses are taught by staff using American Sign Language. In addition, some students with significant disabilities attend ungraded classes that are specifically designed to meet their special needs.

Most of the school's students enroll for the full school year. Fifty students, or 35.2 percent, commuted daily from nearby communities in the 2004-05 school year. The remaining 92 students stayed at the residence hall during the week and were transported home on weekends.

Because enrollment has declined faster than staffing levels, the number of teachers exceeds the levels recommended under the school's guidelines. For example, in the 2005-06 school year, the school is serving 3.9 elementary students per classroom teacher, which is less than the 6.0 students its guidelines recommend. It is also serving fewer than one-half of the high school-level students per classroom teacher that its guidelines suggest. Given enrollment trends and staffing levels, we include a recommendation for DPI to monitor classroom staffing ratios.

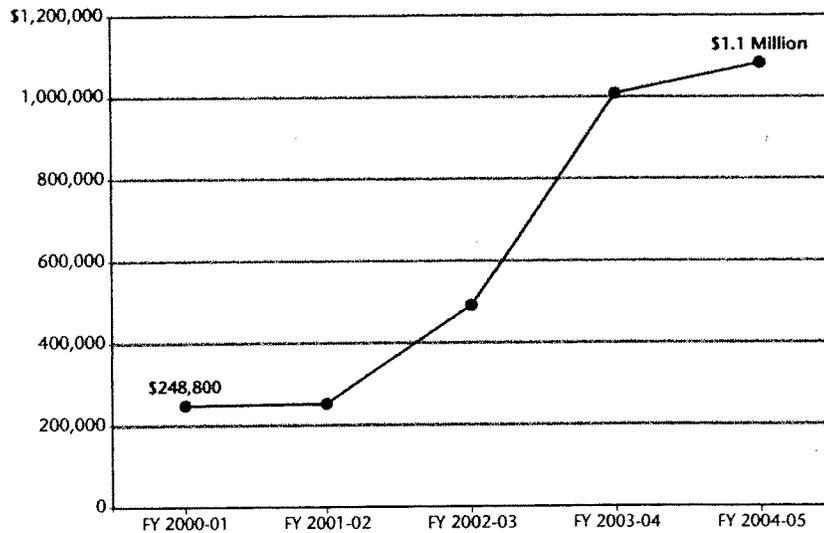
The school also offers a summer program for students who are deaf or hard of hearing, as required by Act 57. Enrollment increased markedly in the summer program's first two years, from 84 students in the summer of 2004 to 130 students in 2005.

A goal of the summer program is to provide an opportunity for students who otherwise do not attend the school to interact with peers using American Sign Language. Summer program enrollment for these students increased by 29 students from 2004 to 2005.

Outreach Services

As intended by Act 57, the quantity and the types of services provided by outreach staff have increased. As shown in Figure 2, outreach expenditures more than quadrupled from FY 2000-01, when they were \$248,800, to FY 2004-05, when they were \$1.1 million.

Figure 2
Outreach Expenditures



In FY 2004-05, outreach staff provided:

- consultations with educational staff regarding 64 students in 47 local school districts who are deaf or hard of hearing, and 2 children in Birth to 3 programs;
- conferences and training sessions for more than 300 local educational professionals and others;
- mentoring services that included in-home guidance in visual communication and sign language for 56 families, and support from trained parent guides for 35 families with children newly identified as deaf or hard of hearing;
- distance learning courses in American Sign Language for 75 hearing high school students in nine southeastern Wisconsin schools; and
- free captioned media materials for 1,425 registered users in Wisconsin.

Future Considerations

As allowed by Act 57, the program has broadened its focus from primarily serving students at the residential school to also providing outreach services statewide to students who are deaf or hard of hearing. However, we believe existing outreach services should be broadened as outlined in the program's current strategic plan.

Although there is an interest among the parents of students who are deaf or hard of hearing in receiving instruction in American Sign Language, the program has not yet expanded its distance learning courses beyond those offered to hearing high school students in southeastern Wisconsin.

Recommendations

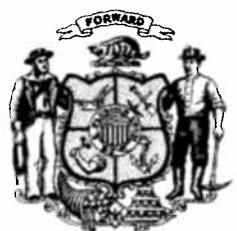
Our recommendations address the need for DPI to:

- monitor the school's classroom staffing ratios (*p. 31*) and
- increase technological resources to provide additional distance learning courses statewide (*p. 46*).

■ ■ ■ ■



WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE





State of Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

November 16, 2006

Janice Mueller
State Auditor
Legislative Audit Bureau
27 East Mifflin Street, Suite 500
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Ms. Mueller:

The Legislative Audit Bureau's most recent audit of the Wisconsin Educational Services Program for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (WESP-DHH), Department of Public Instruction (DPI), conducted during 2006, included two recommendations to the DPI. The recommendations require DPI to inform the Joint Legislative Audit Committee of DPI's efforts in response to the two recommendations. The DPI's proposed course of action for each recommendation is listed below following the relevant recommendation.

Recommendation – 1

We recommend the Department of Public Instruction report to the Joint Legislative Audit Committee by November 1, 2006, on its efforts to monitor classroom staffing ratios at the Wisconsin School for the Deaf.

The Legislative Audit Bureau (LAB) audit found that enrollment at the Wisconsin School for the Deaf (WSD) generally has declined faster than total staffing levels and the number of teachers exceeds the levels recommended under the school's guidelines resulting in a recommendation for DPI to monitor classroom staffing ratios.

DPI will implement an annual review of WSD's teacher/student ratio utilizing an updated ratio guideline. The annual review will occur in April and will include DPI's Director of Special Education and the WESP-DHH Director as well as other relevant WESP-DHH and DPI staff. This review will determine adjustments in order to maintain an appropriate teacher/student ratio. This allows sufficient time to implement any necessary adjustments prior to the next school term. It also has the advantage of occurring after schedules have been developed and an informed estimate can be made of enrollment for the following term.

The guidelines cited in the 2006 LAB audit were originally established during the 1980s; they were not developed by DPI. Since 1994, WSD has relied on guidelines developed after the 1994 LAB audit that use a minimum/maximum ratio range derived from the averages of a number of Midwest residential schools for children who are deaf. Unlike the 1980s guidelines, the 1994 guidelines utilize a formula based on the total number of teachers and students.

The 1980s guidelines break down the teacher/student ratio by elementary, middle, and high school levels. A number of factors lead DPI to conclude that the use of a guideline based on class levels such as middle school, high school, and elementary is not optimal. Factors influencing class size include individualized education program (IEP) requirements, curriculum and course of study requirements, and graduation requirements. In addition, enrollment at WSD fluctuates within grade levels as well as overall and mandates flexibility with teacher positions in terms of grade assignment. An example of that is the 8% increase in overall enrollment at WSD from the 2006 FY to the 2007 FY after two years of stable enrollment.

DPI will continue to use the 1994 guidelines to monitor WSD teacher/student ratios. Further, DPI will update the 1994 guidelines using information on teacher/student ratios from ten Midwest residential schools for children who are deaf during the spring of 2007. Data from residential schools in Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Pennsylvania will be averaged to determine a minimum/maximum ratio range.

Recommendation – 2

We recommend the Department of Public Instruction report to the Joint Legislative Audit Committee by November 1, 2006, on the results of its efforts to increase technological resources for providing additional distance learning courses statewide.

The DPI/WESP-DHH effort to provide additional distance learning courses statewide includes a 2007-2009 biennium budget initiative to provide additional funding for technological resources. This initiative requests a total of \$105,000 over the biennium.

Approximately \$60,000 is budgeted toward the establishment of a second distance learning classroom and \$40,000 is budgeted for upgrading the current distance learning classroom. The upgrade is necessary because of actual and anticipated technological changes in BadgerNet. In addition, the telecommunications equipment in this room has not been upgraded or replaced in ten years. Computers and other hardware/software should be replaced. These are one-time budget items. Additionally, annual funding of \$5,000 is requested for related operational costs such as BadgerNet fees.

Janice Mueller
Page 3
November 16, 2006

Another component of the effort to upgrade technological resources includes changing the American Sign Language (ASL) distance learning teacher position to an Outreach Program technological services coordinator. The technological services coordinator position is responsible to plan and implement training and inservice courses, including ASL and sign communication, for local educational agencies (LEAs) and the families of children who are deaf and hard of hearing. This position also is responsible to collaborate in various inservice and training opportunities offered by other Outreach staff in order to include distance learning opportunities when possible.

As a result of this change, WESP-DHH is offering fewer ASL distance learning courses to hearing high school students. WESP-DHH staff believes that although providing ASL to hearing students has value, it does not fit the mandates for WESP-DHH and reduces the resources available to provide services to children who are deaf and hard of hearing, their families, and the LEAs serving them. Some limited ASL is still being offered to hearing students for the 2006-2007 school year, but this opportunity will be eliminated for the 2007-2008 school year.

If you have any questions regarding the information contained in this letter, please feel free to contact Stephanie Petska, Director, Special Education Team, at (608) 266-1781 or by e-mail at stephanie.petska@dpi.state.wi.us. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Burmaster
State Superintendent

sks



WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE





WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE

Joint Legislative Audit Committee

Committee Co-Chairs:
State Senator Carol Roessler
State Representative Suzanne Jeskewitz

December 7, 2006

Ms. Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent
Department of Public Instruction
125 South Webster Street
Madison, Wisconsin 53703

Dear Ms. Burmaster:

Thank you for your letter, dated November 16, 2006, which responds to two recommendations presented by the Legislative Audit Bureau in its 2006 evaluation of the Wisconsin Educational Services Program for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (report 06-3).

We appreciate the Department's efforts to perform an annual review of classroom staffing ratios at the Wisconsin School for the Deaf, as well as your work to provide distance learning opportunities when possible. The Department's continued attention in both areas will help to ensure the effectiveness of programming and services for Wisconsin's children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Senator Carol Roessler, Co-chair
Joint Legislative Audit Committee

Representative Suzanne Jeskewitz, Co-chair
Joint Legislative Audit Committee

cc: Janice Mueller
State Auditor