

SUMMARY

Education and Safety Issues at the South Carolina School for the Deaf and the Blind

INTRODUCTION

Members of the General Assembly requested that the LAC audit the South Carolina School for the Deaf and the Blind (SCSDB). The audit requesters were primarily concerned with students' educational outcomes and issues of student safety.

The SCSDB is governed by a board of ten members appointed by the Governor. The primary mission of the school, located in Spartanburg, is to provide comprehensive educational, vocational, and developmental services to students who are deaf, blind, or multi-handicapped.

SCSDB also operates a statewide outreach and early intervention program and a post-secondary program. We concentrated our review on the program for K-12 students, 68% of whom board at the school during the week and are bused home on weekends. Total enrollment for FY 02-03 was 413, including the post-secondary students.

September 2003



EDUCATIONAL ISSUES

We conducted a statistical sample of 105 individualized education programs (IEPs) and student permanent files, including those for students in each of the three schools (deaf, blind, and multi-handicapped). We found no significant non-compliance with the requirements of federal or state law. There were three areas where we recommend improvements.

- ! The IDEA requires transition planning for all special education students when they turn 16 in order to help them adjust to work or post-secondary education after they graduate. All of the transition plans in our sample were vague and not individualized.
- ! The law also requires that, if a child's behavior is interfering with his or her education, the school must deal with the behavior in order for the child to learn. In our review of IEPs, we found only two behavior intervention plans. The school has recently begun expanding its behavior program.
- ! The law requires schools to provide assessments and education-related assistive technology devices and services, such as Braille-writing computer software, to children who need them. In our IEP review, we did not find documentation of a single assistive technology evaluation.

Federal Requirements

The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) establishes educational requirements and safeguards for children with disabilities to ensure that all children receive a "free appropriate public education." Schools show that they comply with the act by developing an individualized education program (IEP) annually for each student. The IEP is developed by a team that determines the child's level of educational performance and specifies the educational goals and services to be provided.

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

Many graduates of SCSDB do not attain high school diplomas. In FY 01-02, only 26% of graduates from the deaf school and 78% of graduates from the blind school received a high school diploma (graduates of the multi-handicapped school receive certificates of attendance). Many students have significant academic delays because of their hearing or vision problems.

We found that SCSDB has improved its process for helping students make the transition from school to work or further education. SCSDB follow-up surveys track students for two years after leaving the school. Over a three-year period, 70% of students were either employed, in post-secondary education, or attending a sheltered workshop.

STUDENT ADVOCACY ISSUES

In 1999, a parent alleged, in part, that SCSDB was failing to provide a safe facility for its students and filed a complaint against SCSDB with the federal Department of Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights (OCR). The OCR requested the school to address the issues raised in the complaint, and the school complied and signed a settlement agreement in May 2002. The school must submit monitoring reports to OCR every 45 days. We found that the school has made progress in addressing safety issues in recent years, although problems still exist with its facilities.

- ! We reviewed a sample of student advocacy files, including accident/injury reports, internal investigations, and cases that were referred to the Department of Social Services, and found that the cases we reviewed were handled properly and documented according to policy.
- ! The SCSDB safety division was placed under the office of human resources in the spring of 2002, and several measures have been taken to enhance safety. The crisis management plan has been updated, safety committee meetings are held regularly, and there is now a mobile text-page telephone system campus-wide.
- ! The school has taken measures to ensure bus safety for the students.

We noted that the OCR has not reviewed the monitoring reports submitted by SCSDB. Also, we reviewed a sample of residential advisor personnel and training files to determine if this staff was properly trained and found that just 5 of 12 residential advisors in our sample had all of the required training.



Walker Hall

We reviewed SCSDB's master facilities plan and the on-going capital improvement projects on the campus. After the school had begun a \$12 million renovation to Walker Hall, the school's "focal point," SCSDB obtained a master facilities plan that showed key buildings used or occupied by students had problems meeting safety and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. The estimated cost to renovate or replace six of these buildings was \$23 million.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Our full report, including comments from SCSDB, and this document are published on the Internet at

www.state.sc.us/sclac

A Braille copy is available for loan; paper copies can also be obtained by calling

(803) 253-7612

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COST PER STUDENT

The average per pupil cost for SCSDB's residential students for FY 01-02 was approximately \$16,764. The instructional cost per student (\$16,764) was more than student instructional costs for students educated in their own schools (\$11,000 for deaf and \$8,000 for blind students).

RESIDENTIAL PER PUPIL COSTS FY 01-02

