

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

BACKGROUND

At the request of the General Assembly, we conducted an audit of the South Carolina School for the Deaf and the Blind (SCSDB). The requesters had concerns about the school which focused primarily in two areas – education and student safety.

Some of our audit objectives were:

- Sample students' individualized education programs (IEPs) to review goals and compliance with state and federal requirements.
- Determine whether teachers, principals, and other educational staff are properly certified and how staff vacancies are filled.
- Determine if SCSDB policies and procedures for student safety and advocacy are reasonable and adequate.

In our September 2003 report, we made recommendations regarding the maintenance of documentation in the students' individualized education program (IEP) files and permanent files, improvement of transitional goals and services for students, the importance of the internal auditor reporting to the board, implementation of a central system for training, and assurance that staff obtain required training before working with the students.

During our follow-up review, we found that six of seven of our 2003 recommendations had been implemented; however, the school is still not ensuring that staff receive required training before working with the students.

Each of our 2003 recommendations is listed below and followed by its current implementation status.

1. The School for the Deaf and the Blind staff should:

- Ensure that if an IEP goal from a previous year is to be repeated in the current IEP, it is still an appropriate goal for the student.
- File progress reports in the student permanent file in a timely manner.
- Ensure that they document that local school districts were invited to eligibility meetings.
- Place assistive technology assessments into the student permanent file.

During our follow-up process, we reviewed a sample of 16 student IEP and permanent files to determine if the files indicated that documents were being filed properly and local school districts were notified, as recommended in our initial report. Our review found that our recommendations were implemented with few exceptions. The school is now ensuring that IEP goals are not repeated from year to year. Also, progress reports and assistive technology assessments are now filed in the student's permanent file. Lastly, we found that local school districts are being invited in a timely manner to eligibility meetings.

2. The School for the Deaf and the Blind should continue its plans to improve transition goals and services for students to ensure it provides for students' individual needs and helps students to live as independently as possible.

The school continues to improve its transition services for students. We noted in our file review that students, usually age 14 and older, had specific transition goals geared to independent living skills. According to agency officials, SCSDB's transition staff meets regularly to discuss students' needs. The school has a formalized assessment process which determines students' interests and skills. The staff then contacts businesses to help match students to jobs.



METHODOLOGY

We received information from the school regarding the implementation of the audit's recommendations and interviewed staff. We also reviewed samples of students' IEP and permanent files and employee training files and records.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Our September 2003 full report, its summary, and this document are published on the Internet at

www.state.sc.us/sclac

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- 3. The School for the Deaf and the Blind staff should place a copy of behavior intervention plans into the student IEP file and place the functional behavior assessments in the permanent file.**

During our follow-up review, we found functional behavior assessments in the students' permanent files. We found that only one student had a behavior intervention plan, which was in the student's file.

- 4. The South Carolina School for the Deaf and the Blind should ensure that local school districts receive sufficient notification when a change of placement for a student is being considered.**

We found that this recommendation was a direct result of the school's closing of a specific program for deaf middle and high school students whose behavior restricted them from learning in the regular special education classroom. In the files reviewed during follow-up, we determined that, with few exceptions, local school district notifications for meetings regarding their students were sent in a timely manner.

- 5. To emphasize the value of the internal audit function and enhance its independence, the internal auditor should also report directly to the S.C. School for the Deaf and the Blind Board of Commissioners.**

The school agreed with this recommendation. The internal auditor began reporting to the president on a regular basis and annually to the S.C. School for the Deaf and the Blind Board of Commissioners.

- 6. The S.C. School for the Deaf and the Blind should implement a central system for scheduling and documenting training within the human resources division.**

The school obtained grant money to develop a web-based "training tracker" system. This new system, which the school hopes will be fully operational for the 2005-06 school year, will allow staff to register for classes online, review their own training profiles to determine what training is needed, and send reminders of required training.

After our 2003 report, the school transferred all training records to the human resources division. This information is now recorded and verified by that division.

- 7. SCSDB should ensure that all staff who are required to have training receive this training before working with the students.**

The school has not implemented this recommendation. We reviewed 40 of 88 residential staff training records to determine if these staff members were current in their required training, such as CPR/First Aid, MANDT (behavior de-escalation techniques), and Positive Behavior Systems (PBS). We found 15 of 40 (38%) files indicated that staff were not current in at least one of these required certifications. The school responded that many of these employees have to be paid to come in for training, mainly during the summer, in order to assure proper coverage of their regular work shifts during the school year. The school estimates that it needs an additional \$480,000 annually to address this training issue.