

LEGISLATIVE AUDIT DIVISION

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Legislative Audit Committee Members
FROM: Angie Grove, Deputy Legislative Auditor
CC: Kori Minckler, Performance Auditor
DATE: June 2009
RE: Performance Audit Follow-up (09SP-21): Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind (orig. 07P-13)
ATTACHMENT: Original Performance Audit Summary

Introduction

In June 2008, we presented our performance audit of the *Montana School of the Deaf and Blind (MSDB)*. The audit made two recommendations to the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind; one of which required working in conjunction with the Office of Public Instruction (OPI). In May 2009, we began gathering information from MSDB and OPI about their progress in implementing the recommendations. This memo summarizes the results of our follow-up work in addition to presenting background information on the school operation.

Overview

Audit recommendations focused on the school's potential eligibility for additional federal funds and the other recommendation addressed improving the school's workload management. The Montana School for the Deaf and Blind has implemented the recommendations from the audit.

Background

MSDB is a state supported special purpose school, which serves as a center of technical expertise for the education of deaf and blind children, providing programs and assistance throughout the state. MSDB originally opened in Boulder in 1893, but moved to Great Falls in 1934. MSDB functions as a day school, residential school, and outreach program. The school operates under the authority of Title 20, Chapter 8, MCA, and the governance of the Board of Public Education (BPE). MSDB has 74 students enrolled at the school and serves an additional 410 students through their outreach program.

MSDB focuses on providing educational opportunities for deaf/hard of hearing and visually impaired children, enabling them to become independent and self-sustaining members of their communities. MSDB uses specialized instruction and training in order to provide education for a deaf and blind child that is appropriate to their needs.

Follow-up Audit Findings

The performance audit report included two recommendations. The first recommendation was directed to MSDB and OPI and focused on the school's potential eligibility for additional federal funds. The second recommendation was directed to MSDB and related to improving the outreach program's workload management. The following summarizes information relating to follow-up audit work and the implementation status of recommendation.

Recommendation #1

We recommend the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind work with the Office of Public Instruction to:

- A. Examine the efforts required to comply with Title I of No Child Left Behind and if appropriate, use free and reduced lunch counts as the poverty factor to ensure the school receives equitable distributions of Title I and state-at-risk funds.**

Implementation Status - Implemented

MSDB and OPI have worked together to examine the issue of securing Title I of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) funds, and MSDB completed the OPI on-line survey for initial application for Title I funds for 2009-2010 in April 2009.

However, receiving Title I funding is dependent on the school making Average Yearly Progress (AYP) status. AYP is configured from yearly student exams at each grade level and does not differentiate between standard school programs and special education programs. MSDB students require specialized education and are not instructed at particular "grade levels" because of their impairments. Since MSDB has not been able to make AYP status for the last two years, the school would be placed in "Program Improvement" status. MSDB and OPI agreed they would not continue the application process for Title I funding since the tests required for AYP status do not accurately assess how special education programs operate.

- B. Secure Individuals with Disabilities Education Act moneys for the school based on the poverty factor.**

Implementation Status – Implemented

MSDB was able to secure additional Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) moneys for fiscal year 2010. The poverty factor has been used to calculate fiscal year 2010 IDEA funding. The poverty factor contribution to IDEA funding for fiscal year 2010 was originally calculated at \$4,659 for a poverty enrollment count of 37 students. However, the American Recovery Reinvestment Act allocated a portion of the stimulus package to help low-income families and increased the poverty factor contribution for IDEA funding. Therefore, the actual poverty factor contribution to IDEA funding for fiscal year 2010 is \$12,162.

Recommendation #2

We recommend the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind:

- A. Determine workload factors for outreach.**

Implementation Status – Implemented

MSDB has expanded workload factors for their outreach consultants. In the past MSDB management used data on the severity of a student's impairment, geographic location of the student, and review of weekly data of the consultant to determine workload figures. Currently, MSDB is also considering the following factors:

- ▶ Travel time for each consultant based on geographic location.
- ▶ Level of service the student requires based on a model developed by MSDB.

- ▶ Amount of time required in providing supportive services to students.
- ▶ Age of the student.
- ▶ Respective training and skills of each consultant.

The outreach supervisor is now using these factors when assessing and distributing outreach consultant workload. The outreach supervisor requires consultants to meet once a month so they can discuss both the consultants' workload and the different activities they are conducting with their students. These meetings provide an added means of assessing staff workload.

B. Collect data on relevant activities for outreach consultants.

Implementation Status – Implemented

MSDB now collects data on relevant work activities for outreach consultants. Data collected includes:

- ▶ Weekly log that lists contact made with student's school, family, and other professionals.
- ▶ Weekly contact reports are sent by each outreach consultant to the supervising consultant reporting the details of all activities related to each student.
- ▶ In-service data sheet documents staff training, or presentations by the outreach consultants.
- ▶ Supervising consultant and outreach consultants assess and monitor caseload numbers at monthly outreach meetings.
- ▶ Supervisory consultant conducts evaluations on each consultant.

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