

## **Relocation of WSSB Makes No Sense and Saves No Dollars**

Governor Gregoire 's 2010 budget includes a proposal to relocate the Washington State School for the Blind (WSSB) to the Superintendent of Public Instruction with no explanation of how this will save state dollars. The Washington Council of the Blind urges the governor and the legislature to retain the School's current governance. WSSB ranks among the top 3 schools for the blind in the United States, along with Texas and Indiana and like those schools, is an independent state agency reporting to the Governor. Experience shows that running a school within the structure being proposed has challenges such as flexibility in making appropriate staffing decisions, purchasing restrictions and expenditure of funds.

**Residential Program:** Since the early 1990s, 67-76 students per year have been served. This program, emphasizing all aspects of specialized training for the blind as well as academics for students pre-school through grades 12 and beyond, teaches skills students may not receive in their local districts. Students learn faster because they live what they learn while immersed in the program. A waiting list for the residential program is not unusual; an average of 10% of WSSB student families have relocated here to allow their children to attend.

**Outreach:** WSSB serves approximately 450 visually impaired students statewide per month by contracting with LEA's and ESD's for itinerant/consultative services.

**Student Tracking:** Students are tracked for 8 years after graduation. Most other schools' tracking programs look only two years beyond graduation. Tracking enables assessment of which programs are working and which are not. WSSB tracking shows that currently, 80% of graduates are employed or in a vocational/technical/academic college program.

**Statewide Instructional Resource Center:** In partnership with the Department of Corrections, Department of Printing and the Department of Information Services, each year, WSSB provides large print, Braille and aids/appliances to approximately 1400 blind, deaf/blind, and blind multi-disabled children. Large print/Braille materials are provided to local school districts. The Braille Access Program, (a fee for services program), has provided over 14,000,000 pages of transcribed Braille to blind consumers and students. This represents a savings to the State of nearly \$250,000 per year in textbook costs.

**Learning Independence For Today and tomorrow, (LIFTT):** In response to requests from LEA's, WSSB provides additional blindness-related intensive training to students Transitioning from high school to a college or work environment. Graduates stay at the school for an additional year, working in the community, and learning daily living skills. The program has an 87.5% success rate.

**WSSB Foundation:** Foundation funds come through donations and bequests. Students may received costly adaptive technology otherwise unavailable to them; this private funding will be lost under the proposed realignment.

**Technology:** The assistive technology center offers training to all blind students in the use of computers, and other appropriate adaptive equipment. At least 207 comprehensive technology evaluations are provided each year. 6-8 technology training sessions are provided each month in ESD's for teachers who have blind students. Roughly 160 individuals receive weekly technology skills training. The Center provides the base for statewide software package site licensure, saving nearly \$60,000 per year.

**Low Vision Clinic:** In partnership with Lions Clubs and the Pacific University School of Optometry, 32 future optometrists receive training while aiding in providing roughly 100 low vision evaluations per year at no public cost.

**Distance/Digital Learning:** WSSB is a national leader in developing accessible online learning systems for blind and visually impaired students statewide, and training for adults who work with the blind.