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HB 2755: Blind & Visually Impaired Student Fund
House Interim Committee on Education

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History:

In 2009, the Oregon School for the Blind (OSB) was closed after 136 years of service to Blind and Visually Impaired (BVI) students in Oregon. At that time only 28 visually-impaired students were being served at OSB. The other approximately 800 students identified as visually impaired were being served in their home districts. During that 2009 Legislative Session, the Legislature established the Blind and Visually Impaired Student (BVIS) Fund to provide services to those students transitioning from the state school as well as enhance services for all BVI students; approximately \$2.8 million of General Fund was appropriated.

The sale of OSB added another \$2.5 million. The expenditure of these proceeds are limited by a stipulated judgment that created a trust fund and can only be used for one or more of the purposes that were described in ORS 346.315 on October 27, 2010.

The 2011-13 Legislature added \$1 million in General Fund. In addition, there is \$.8 million from donated OSB trust funds designated to be spent for specific purposes bringing the overall revenue including interest to \$7.1 million in the BVIS Fund.

Total BVIS expenditures over the three and a half years has been approximately \$3.4 million with \$1.3 million spent during the 09-11 biennium and \$2.1 million in the current biennium. The funds have been expended based on priorities listed in the law and with the input of an advisory committee.

There is currently \$3.7 million in the fund, but \$3.6 million of that total must be used for specific purposes to serve children who are blind or visually impaired.

Statewide Activities:

In addition to individual requests for funding or reimbursement from all regions of Oregon there are numerous statewide activities or events that have been funded.

2009-10

- Assigned the contract to the NWRESA with the primary charge that the first year's priority was to complete the closure of OSB and successfully transition the 28 BVI students to their home districts. That included inventorying, packaging, and the distribution of more than 800 pieces of equipment or adaptive materials, 40 boxes of books, and 65 Perkins Brailers to the resident

districts; attending IEP meetings, mediations, along with parent and teacher follow-up interviews throughout the year.

- Purchased new equipment needed specifically for the transitioning students and sent to the resident district.
- Developed policies and procedures to implement HB 2834. This included fiscal management (purchasing and reimbursement to districts); detailed guideline on appropriate use of the funds; and systems for requests for supports and materials and disbursement of OSB records and information.
- Planned and coordinated statewide events previously held at OSB such as the Goalball clinic, track meet, the Student Work Experience Program (SWEPE), in partnership with the Oregon Commission for the Blind, and the summer program.
- Held three Expanded Common Core (ECC) residential summer programs on the OSD campus.

2010-11

- Established a biennial BVI plan targeting each of the goals defined in ORS 346.315 with the representatives from the Oregon Commission for the Blind (OCB), National Federation of the Blind (NFB) in Oregon, Washington State School for the Blind (WSSB) and with the Northwest Association for Blind Athletes (NWABA) providing input.
- Established summer programs in each region and increased participation from nine students the previous year to 51 statewide.
- Assisted in the development and training for the new Braille interface for OAKS online assessment.
- Established a Braille website to provide ongoing support and training to both teachers of the visually impaired (TVI's) as well as general education teachers and provide information regarding how to access the BVIS funds.
- Held three statewide athletic events with more than 120 BVI students participating.
- Hired a VI Technology Specialist to manage all of the new software licenses, design and provides technology related trainings, and be a VI technology resource to all regional programs.
- Established community partnerships with the previously mentioned agencies along with the Oregon Lions Club to improve services and opportunities for students across the state.
- Reimbursed tuition for three students attending the Washington State School for the Blind (WSSB).

2011-12

- Provided a 40-cell refreshable Braille display, Braille embosser that can do tactile graphics, and Jaws 12 screen-reading software to all students using Braille.
- Continued communication and on-going visits to all former OSB students still in school.
- Provided low-vision evaluations to 129 students through Oregon Lions partnership
- Established a Goalball season with coaching, equipment, facilities use funded through BVIS
- Trained all Oregon TVIs on the specialized equipment and test administration of the new OAKS Braille assessment (58 teachers).
- Provided informational sessions about BVIS Fund at the Annual COSA Special Education Conference and at the NFBA -Oregon Annual State Convention.

- Held a Paralympic Experience (Goalball, Judo, Tandem Cycling), Goalball State Tournament and Track & Field Day in partnership with NWABA with more than 150 students participating between the three events.
- Increased summer ECC participation to more than 80 students not including the SWEF program.
- Reimbursed tuition for four students attending WSSB.

2012-13

- Provided 160 iPads to students who use large print as an option for accessing print.
- Supported Goalball season.
- Funded 22 Oregon TVIs to attend the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of Students who Blind or have Low Vision (AER) International Conference in Seattle, WA Summer 2012- All Oregon TVIs were given the opportunity to attend the Summer Technology Training at WSSB (4 Oregon TVIs attended).
- Provided training for approximately 100 general education teachers and IAs.
- Trained all Oregon TVIs on the use of iPads for students with low vision.
- Provided informational sessions about technology solutions for students who are BVI at the Annual COSA Conference, the BVI Fund at both NFBA and the American Council for the Blind state conferences.
- Held State Paralympic Experience at OSD for 68 participants.
- Sponsored a boys and girls Goalball team trip to compete at the Youth National Tournament in Florida. Participating athletes hailed from 6 or the 8 regions. Girls finish #2 in the Nation!
- Provided test administration and equipment training to all Oregon TVIs who have a student taking the OAKS Braille assessment.

Legislation:

HB 2755 establishes an advisory committee along with expanding the expenditure of the BVI funds to include vision screening for all students in Oregon rather than those who are blind or visually impaired. A vision screening pilot program (HB 3626-2010) that was conducted indicated a cost of \$10 per child screened. With approximately 43,000 students per grade level that would cost \$430,000 annually.

Current school district vision screening practice in most districts is to screen a primary grade along with an intermediate grade which would bring the total \$860,000 annually or \$1.72 million per biennium. If additional grades are screened as recommended in the pilot, costs would multiply accordingly. In addition, the pilot study recommended the purchase of equipment and materials at approximately \$11,000 per district which would be a one-time cost of a little over \$2 million.

