TEXAS SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED
BOARD PROGRAM COMMITTEE MEETING
NOVEMBER 17, 2023

1. Call to Order

Brenda Lee called to order the meeting of the TSBVI Board Committee on Programs at 8:01 a.m. on November 17, 2023, from the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, 1100 West 45th Street, Austin, Texas.

Board members Brenda Lee, Beth Jones, Elaine Robertson, and Maghan Gautney were present.

TSBVI staff members participating in the meeting were: Miles Fain, Comprehensive Programs Principal; Angela Wolf, Curriculum Director; Sara Merritt, Principal of Short-term Programs; Kate Borg, Outreach Director; and Emily Coleman, TSBVI Superintendent.

2. Consideration of Approval of Minutes of the September 22, 2023 Meeting

Brenda Lee asked for consideration of the minutes from the September 22, 2023 meeting. Beth Jones motioned to approve the minutes and Maghan Gautney seconded the motion. The motion passed

3. Report from Comprehensive Programs Principal, Miles Fain

a. Residential and Recreation Program update

Miles Fain introduced Matt Schultz, Residential Director and Mark Gronquist, Recreation Director. Several students were present to share, as well.

Matt Schultz discussed the residential program and after-school recreation programs. There are eleven dorms housing 103 students and four independent student apartments. In the afternoons, students participate in cooking classes, arts, crafts, social skills, clubs, and some vocational prep activities. All dorms also participate in grocery store and restaurant trips. Mr. Gronquist reported that the Recreation Department provides programs during the school day and after-school. During the day, students participate in swimming and tandem bike riding. They also have improvisation class, karaoke night, rock climbing, and much more. Recreation staff provide opportunities for sports and adapt them for students who are blind. Sports include goal ball, wrestling, cheerleading and they will be piloting blind soccer.

Jackie, a high school senior, spoke about the Spanish Club. She serves as Vice President. They participate in games as well as cultural events around the city. She thanked the school and the Board for the opportunity to have clubs like this on campus.

Kailani, an EXIT student, reported on activities that EXIT students participate in like the variety dhow. She stated that they got a lot of great feedback, and she thanked the Board for making opportunities for students possible.

Mr. Gronquist then spoke on the goal ball tournament that took place a couple of weeks ago. He noted that it was the largest tournament they have ever had. He highlighted one of the games between the TSBVI Wildcat team against the Florida team because of how exciting it was and how hard the players played throughout the game. He reported that Darius and Chris were awarded All-American awards which will allow them to participate in the US competition team. The students shared some of their favorite things about participating in goalball.

4. Report from Curriculum Department Director, Angela Wolf

a. Consideration of Adoption of Curriculum Relating to the Prevention of Child Abuse, Family Violence, and Dating Violence

Angela Wolf overviewed the purpose of the request to approve the curriculum for instruction on the topics related to abuse prevention. She highlighted the two curriculum programs being proposed, *Expect Respect* and *UnHushed*. She noted that *Unhushed* was already approved by the Board for instruction in human sexuality. Both programs will require staff training in order to implement in the classrooms.

Elaine Robertson made the motion to approve the use of the *UnHushed* and *Expect Respect* curriculum for the instruction of topics related to the prevention of child abuse, family and dating violence, and human trafficking and Maghan Gautney seconded the motion. The motion passed.

b. Report on Curriculum Sales

Ms. Wolf reported on the sales of the Curriculum Department for fiscal year 2023. Sales increased this year from around $215,000 to $293,211.05. She stated that *Essential Tools of the Trade for teachers of Students who are Deafblind* has been very popular since it came out.

5. Report from Short-Term Programs Principal, Sara Merritt

a. Short-Term Programs (STP) Update

Sara Merritt reported that the summer program application will be launched in January and be due February 14th. She said that they often get asked why the applications are due so early and it is because of the time it takes to review all of the applications with the Health Center. As they planned for the schedule for the 2023-2024 school year, STP had dropped three courses, so numbers of students served may be lower. They are providing more individualized instruction. She stated that the services being provided are more intensive so that students can sustain their skills.

Brenda Lee asked if STP uses the Maker Space. Ms. Merritt reported that they have used it, and Chris Correll has agreed to extend his contract to run the Maker Space during the summer programs. She also reported that staff from the Alabama School for the Blind came last year to visit STP to see how the program is run. They will have a dedicated program for serving students in a similar way.

6. Report from Outreach Director, Kate Borg

a. Statewide Mentoring Program

Kate Borg introduced Chrissy Cowan to discuss the Mentor Program. The program has a long history that is funded by the legislature. There are other states who send professionals to participate in the

program. The goals are to provide mentors for pre-service teachers entering the field, those who have been out of the field and are returning, and those who have come to Texas to teach from out-of-state. Another goal is to continue the mentor match for a full year. The program is staffed by Ms. Cowan and one administrative assistant. She has an extensive database of individuals who have participated in the program through the years. State law requires that anyone on an emergency certification must have a mentor teacher trained in the discipline. She also explained the Mentor Center program, where professionals come to TSBVI to observe and meet teachers providing instruction in a variety of classrooms on campus. This happens three times per year for 2.5 days each. There are a total of around 300 trained mentors across the state. Mentors are selected by information provided by Education Service Center staff recommendations. They must have at least four years of experience as well as a nomination from another TSVI (Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments) or COMS (Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist). They must provide three references on the application. Mentors must have a minimum of 24 contacts per year either through contact visit, phone calls, or emails.

Elaine Robertson asked if it was required for a new certified TSVI to have a mentor. Ms. Cowan said that it was not required, but a district could request a mentor for that person. She conducts a mid-year check on the mentoring relationships and mentors must complete an activity log. At the end of each year, the participants complete a survey. She shared comments from participants in the mentoring program. Kate Borg showed the Board where to find information on the TSBVI website about mentoring programs.

b. Outreach Program Update

Ms. Borg shared information about the Instructional Resource Library page on the TSBVI website. It is a collaborative effort between programs at TSBVI. Currently there are just articles available, but more content will be coming soon. She spoke with SBEC (State Board of Educator Certification) regarding the TSBVI Outreach Department being willing to take on the Teachers of Students who are Deafblind mentoring program. She insisted that, if they do, they will need funding. She was confident that this will be written in code soon. The certification program would begin in 2025. TSBVI had advocated for individuals who have significant experience in the field be grandfathered in to be able to sit for the certification exam as long as they have graduated from the TTU (Texas Tech University) Deafblind Program. She noted that TEA (Texas Education Agency) and SBEC have been receptive to everything the TSBVI Deafblind Project has advocated.

Ms. Borg next reported on the recent SWOMA (Southwest Orientation and Mobility Association) conference. There were 390 people in attendance and it was all online. Next year, it will be in-person in Round Rock, Texas. She also highlighted upcoming events including the following:

- December: QPVI (Quality Programs for the Visually Impaired) and Mentor Center
- February: Texas Focus Conference which will focus on behavior

7. Adjournment

Beth Jones motioned and Elaine Robertson seconded the motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed and the Committee adjourned at 9:43 a.m.