

TEXAS SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED PROGRAM COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES February 2, 2024

1. Call to Order

Brenda Lee called to order the meeting of the TSBVI Board Committee on Programs at 8:00 a.m. on February 2, 2024, from the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, 1100 West 45th Street, Austin, Texas.

Board members Brenda Lee, Beth Jones, 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; Jeremy Coleman, Music teacher; Eden Hagleman, Assistant Principal; Eva Van Houten, Music Teacher; and Victoria Garate, Classroom Teacher.

2. Consideration of Approval of Minutes of the November 17, 2023 Meeting

Brenda Lee asked for consideration of the minutes from the November 17th meeting. Maghan Gautney motioned to approve the minutes and Beth Jones seconded the motion. The motion passed.

3. Report from Comprehensive Programs Principal, Miles Fain

Miles Fain introduced Jeremy Coleman and Eva Van Houten to provide a music program update. Ms. Houten overviewed the variety of classes and the different types of music for the student groups. She stated that she is a Suzuki certified teacher and noted that this program works well with students who are blind because it focuses on learning music by ear. Mr. Coleman described the classes he teaches including guitar, choir, and a general music class for high school. Both teachers went with students to the SCASB (South Central Association of Schools for the Blind) Fine Arts competition. Two students joined the meeting to perform songs.

4. Report from Short-Term Programs (STP) Principal, Sara Merritt

Sara Merritt reported that the department is still down a teacher aide position, which has impacted programming. During the school year programs, they have only been able to serve 16 students maximum per class. Also, illness has impacted programming, especially when multiple teachers and staff are out at the same time.

The Game of Life Program happened successfully two weekends ago. This was a collaborative program between STP and Outreach and included families. The Magical World of STEAM will be the next weekend class, taught by Kat Heitman. They will use the Maker Space area on campus.

The summer program application deadline is February 14. The current total of completed applications is 153. Ms. Merritt anticipates that more applications will be completed as the due date approaches. Elementary Programs are scheduled for the first two weeks of the summer and the Secondary program is the last two weeks. Vocational programs run for the entire four weeks of the summer program. After the applications come in, the Health Center will review them. In March, the department will have a summer acceptance meeting. Sometimes medical issues affect acceptance and sometimes there are family conflicts with the participation date a student is given. Ms. Merritt reported that they try to serve as many students from across the state as possible. Last year, they served students from 17 regions (105 districts). Because safety is a top priority, the medical portion of the application is very comprehensive. Staffing for the upcoming summer program is almost complete. They have hired an outside PE teacher to teach a credit PE class and they will also be offering an art credit class. Both will be three weeks long. Students in 8th through 12th grade will be eligible to apply for these classes.

Ms. Merritt reported that her position has been posted and acceptance of applications closes soon. She will work the full summer and is looking forward to her retirement. She asked if the board members are hearing any needs in the field that STP can address in the annual needs assessment. She noted that individualized instruction is definitely a need and having more staff would help to be able to serve students currently on the waitlist.

5. Report from Outreach Director, Kate Borg

Kate Borg reported on upcoming events including Texas Focus (February 22-24) and Discovering the Future, a transition conference for students with complex access needs in April. She reported that, in this year's action plan, they had included the opportunity for families to provide leadership and mentoring for new families. They are postponing this until the beginning of next year so there is not a lag between the series training for this year and the new series. Ms. Borg talked about all the work the family engagement coordinators, Yolanda Shaw and Edgenie Bellah, have been doing to support families around the state. She commented how impactful it was for individuals in the Game of Life class to see Yolanda Shaw, the family engagement coordinator, to show them how successful a blind person can be.

VI Registration and Child Count officially closed on January 21, but has been kept opened until today to catch any stragglers. A question was added to the surveys related to braille instruction based on concern from the Governor's office. This year, in addition to asking about a student's primary reading medium, they asked if the student is receiving braille instruction. The preliminary data results indicate that more people are indicating that braille instruction is being provided. In the Education Action Committee, discussions have been occurring around providing more robust braille instruction aligned to literacy best practice. Literacy for Little Ones is about to be available for distribution. The early childhood counts have been decreasing over the last several years, but preliminary data is showing an increase this year. There has been a push to increase these numbers because the state Early Childhood Intervention program numbers are much higher than the VI registry count. For students in private or home school, families can complete the VI registry. Outreach staff have been trying to capture these students. Suggestions were made about how to find these students, including

contacting eye care professionals (especially low vision centers), Education Service Center staff, and even TSBVI Short-Term Programs who serve these students. There is also an increase due to the new IDEA (Individuals with Disability Education Act) eligibility guidelines to qualify for APH (American Printing House for the Blind) quota funds. Ms. Borg will provide more official data in April.

6. Adjournment

Maghan Gautney motioned and Beth Jones seconded the motion to adjourn. The motion passed and the Committee adjourned at 9:10 a.m.