

TEXAS SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED PROGRAM COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES April 3, 2024

1. Call to Order

Beth Jones called to order the meeting of the TSBVI Board Committee on Programs at 8:10 a.m. on April 3, 2024, from the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, 1100 West 45th Street, Austin, Texas.

Board members Beth Jones, Elaine Robertson, and Lee Sonnenberg were present. Brenda Lee and Maghan Gautney were unable to attend.

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; Katie Barnes, O&M Supervisor; and Heather Withrow, O&M instructor and Transition Specialist with the Deafblind Project.

2. Consideration of Approval of Minutes of the February 2, 2024 Meeting

Beth Jones asked for consideration of the minutes from the February 2, 2024 meeting. Ms. Jones noted that she attended the previous meeting via Zoom and wondered if that was necessary to include. With that correction, Elaine Robertson motioned to approve the minutes and Beth Jones seconded the motion. The motion passed.

3. Recognition of the 2024 TSBVI Outstanding Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments

This agenda topic was presented in the full Board meeting. No action was taken in the Program Committee meeting.

4. Consideration of TSBVI's 2024-2025 School Calendar and Waiver of Instructional Minutes

Susan Houghtling reviewed the changes for the 2024-2025 school year calendar. She noted that the Calendar Task Force tries to align the calendar as much as possible with Austin ISD's calendar since some TSBVI students attend classes there and many TSBVI staff have children who attend class there. A calendar draft was presented to all TSBVI staff for feedback, then to the Instructional Planning Council that consists of TSBVI staff and students' parents. Some changes were made and then the final draft was presented to the Management Team for approval before going to the Board.

She reported that the calendar will be short on the number of required instructional minutes. Schools may submit waiver requests to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to reduce the number of required instructional minutes for up to 2,100 minutes for staff development purposes during the school year. This calendar displays six staff development days and additional hours of staff development occur on specific days of instruction. The Board would need to approve the submission of a waiver request to TEA. Lee Sonnenberg made a motion to approve the calendar and waiver request and Elaine Robertson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

5. Report from Comprehensive Programs Principal, Miles Fain

Miles Fain asked student and instructor guests to introduce themselves. Katie Barnes and Heather Withrow, along with two of their students, provided an overview of O&M instruction at TSBVI. They defined O&M and described skills they are learning in lessons and shared experiences that have been challenging and successful.

Lee Sonnenberg asked how the students transfer the skills at home and Elaine Robertson asked how instructors communicate with families about all the things students are learning. One of the students reported that she uses her cane at home and Ms. Barnes shared that she communicates with families about the skills students learn and families are able to visit campus as they can. Beth Jones asked if students ever had resistance to using their cane. One student reported that when she was younger she did because she felt that her peers made fun of her. Ms. Barnes stated that they haven't had much resistance from students or families because of the environment at TSBVI. She added that the ten O&M instructors have a combined service of 231 years and 100% of instructors provide direct services. Instructors serve students in three languages, English, Spanish, and ASL.

Heather Withrow reported that serving students in native languages is important. She explained that she serves students as a native ASL communicator, but she is also learning pro tactile signs for deafblind students. She noted that 18 students at TSBVI are deafblind. Not all of the students have expressive language and some may use calendar systems to support their communication. She reported that, this year at TSBVI, staff have had an opportunity to participate in a pro tactile sign professional development provided by a deafblind professional. She then demonstrated some pro tactile signs with a student. They demonstrated some basic signs, like greetings, yes, and no. They also demonstrated how the instructor might show the student directions.

Elaine Robertson asked how long Heather has worked at TSBVI. She noted that last year she was a full-time O&M instructor in Comprehensive Programs, but this year, as a member of the Outreach staff, she has two students for direct services. Ms. Robertson asked how many deaf people are serving as O&M instructors and Ms. Withrow responded that she is only aware of four certified Deaf COMS. Because she works in Outreach, she has the opportunity to share her skills and expertise with other districts.

6. Consideration of Approval of Recommendations of the Instructional Materials Committee

Angela Wolf overviewed recommendations from the Instructional Materials Committee for the adoption of Science and Personal Financial Literacy Textbooks for Proclamation 2024. She also overviewed the TEKS certification form that certifies that the instructional materials used by TSBVI cover 100% of the TEKS. Elaine Robertson made a motion to approve the recommendations from the Instructional Materials Committee, including the science and personal financial literacy textbook adoption, as well as the TEKS certification. Lee Sonnenberg seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

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

A. Short-Term Programs update

Sara Merritt reported that the department has six classes left for the year, including the upcoming City Travel class. She noted that when they scheduled the class, they did not know about the eclipse and

its potential impact. Austin has declared an emergency for the event, so they will work to ensure that the class can work around the events.

B. Update on Summer 2024 programs

Short-Term Programs (STP) received 345 applications for summer. They will be offering spots for 254 students with the hope of filling 240 slots and will work to accommodate families when possible and pull from the waiting list as needed. STP will be offering a credit art class and a credit PE class.

C. Announcement of new Short-Term Programs Principal

Ms. Merritt reported that her replacement has been hired. Dr. Eden Hagelman will be taking over as Principal of Short-Term Programs. Ms. Merritt will work the full summer and is looking forward to her retirement.

8. Report from Outreach Director, Kate Borg

A. Statewide VI Registry and Deafblind Child Count

Kate Borg introduced Brian Sobeck, who is responsible for the statewide VI registry. He reported on two big changes to the VI registry report. Out of the 10,930 students identified, 8,369 students qualify for America Printing House for the Blind (APH) quota funds which is almost double from last year. APH updated eligibility requirements to match that of IDEA. It is unclear whether the federal funding will increase as well to match the student increase. In the past, the per capita has been \$400 per student. This year the survey included an additional question related to braille instruction and 381 students were added as braille users. The total for this year including primary, secondary, and instruction was 847. They are also about to submit numbers for the deafblind child count, and the total this year increased to 873 deafblind students. Students in Special Education and birth-age 3 have also increased. Ms. Borg reported that the eligibility requirements for ages birth-3 children is being considered so that IDEA Part B would not be used to determine children who should be determined under Part C. The registry data will be uploaded to the TSBVI website.

B. Outreach Program update

Ms. Borg reported that this is her last year as the Outreach Director. She has accepted a position as principal of three elementary schools in Utah.

9. Adjournment

Lee Sonnenberg made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Elaine Robertson seconded the motion. The motion passed and the committee adjourned at 10:10 a.m.