

An Evaluation

**Wisconsin Educational
Services Program for the
Deaf and Hard of Hearing**

Department of Public Instruction

2005-2006 Joint Legislative Audit Committee Members

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March 2, 2006

Senator Carol A. Roessler and
Representative Suzanne Jeskewitz, Co-chairpersons
Joint Legislative Audit Committee
State Capitol
Madison, Wisconsin 53702

Dear Senator Roessler and Representative Jeskewitz:

As required by 2001 Wisconsin Act 57, we have completed an evaluation of the Wisconsin Educational Services Program for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, which is a statewide educational resource for students and their parents and teachers. The program is administered by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). As part of the program, Act 57 directed DPI to continue operating the residential Wisconsin School for the Deaf in Delavan, to offer youth summer programs, and to provide outreach services to school districts statewide. In fiscal year 2004-05, the program spent \$11.0 million and was authorized 135.6 full-time equivalent positions. Outreach activities accounted for \$1.1 million, or 10.0 percent, of all expenditures in that year.

Enrollment in the residential school decreased from 165 students in the 2000-01 school year to 142 students in the 2004-05 school year. If enrollment continues to decline, staffing changes may need to be considered. We include a recommendation for DPI to report to the Joint Legislative Audit Committee on its efforts to monitor classroom staffing ratios.

Outreach services have grown significantly, corresponding with additional statutory authority. Outreach staff now provide consultation services for local school districts. In addition, training sessions have increased, and distance learning courses in American Sign Language are provided. We include a recommendation for DPI to update the Joint Legislative Audit Committee on the results of its efforts to increase the technological resources needed to provide additional distance learning courses statewide.

We appreciate the courtesy and cooperation extended to us by DPI. Its response follows the report.

Respectfully submitted,

Janice Mueller
State Auditor

JM/PS/ss

Report Highlights ■

Program expenditures have increased primarily because of expanded outreach services.

Residential school enrollment has declined more than staffing levels.

Outreach expenditures totaled \$1.1 million in FY 2004-05.

The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) administers the Wisconsin Educational Services Program for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, which was created by 2001 Wisconsin Act 57. In fiscal year (FY) 2004-05, the program had 135.6 authorized full-time equivalent (FTE) positions and \$11.0 million in expenditures.

The program makes free residential education available to state residents from 3 to 21 years old who are deaf or hard of hearing and provides outreach services such as consultation, training, and mentoring to school districts, students who are deaf or hard of hearing, and their families. In addition, the Wisconsin School for the Deaf in Delevan offers a summer program.

Act 57 directed the Legislative Audit Bureau to conduct a performance evaluation of the program during FY 2005-06. To assess overall program performance and determine the extent to which DPI has implemented statutory changes, we analyzed:

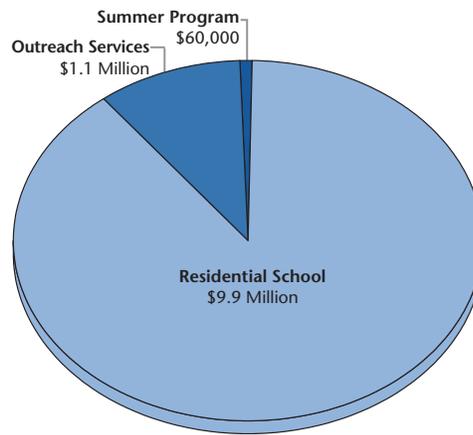
- program expenditures from FY 2000-01 through FY 2004-05;
- changes in staffing levels;
- enrollment trends at the school; and
- the extent to which outreach services have been expanded, and the types of services provided.

Program Expenditures

Program expenditures increased moderately from \$10.0 million in FY 2000-01 to \$11.0 million in FY 2004-05, primarily because of expanded statewide outreach efforts. As shown in Figure 1, in FY 2004-05, spending for outreach services was \$1.1 million. However, at \$9.9 million, residential school expenditures continued to represent the majority of the program's costs.

Figure 1

Program Expenditures FY 2004-05



Wisconsin School for the Deaf

During the 2004-05 school year, 6.3 percent of the 2,252 Wisconsin students who were identified as deaf or hard of hearing and were receiving special education services attended the Wisconsin School for the Deaf.

Enrollment at the residential school has declined in recent years, from 165 students in the 2000-01 school year to 142 students in the 2004-05 school year. Both instructional and residential staffing at the school have also declined, from 97.7 authorized FTE positions in January 2001 to 91.0 authorized FTE positions in September 2005. In contrast, outreach services have increased, and the number of authorized outreach positions increased from 4.0 FTE in January 2001 to 11.0 FTE in September 2005.

Students are placed in the residential school when an individualized education program (IEP) developed according to state and federal requirements deems it appropriate. The IEPs of nearly 80 percent of students who currently attend the school list more than one disability. A speech or language disability is the most prevalent after hearing disabilities.

Although the majority of its courses cover subjects similar to those provided by schools in local districts, the school's courses are taught by staff using American Sign Language. In addition, some students with significant disabilities attend ungraded classes that are specifically designed to meet their special needs.

Most of the school's students enroll for the full school year. Fifty students, or 35.2 percent, commuted daily from nearby communities in the 2004-05 school year. The remaining 92 students stayed at the residence hall during the week and were transported home on weekends.

Because enrollment has declined faster than staffing levels, the number of teachers exceeds the levels recommended under the school's guidelines. For example, in the 2005-06 school year, the school is serving 3.9 elementary students per classroom teacher, which is less than the 6.0 students its guidelines recommend. It is also serving fewer than one-half of the high school-level students per classroom teacher that its guidelines suggest. Given enrollment trends and staffing levels, we include a recommendation for DPI to monitor classroom staffing ratios.

The school also offers a summer program for students who are deaf or hard of hearing, as required by Act 57. Enrollment increased markedly in the summer program's first two years, from 84 students in the summer of 2004 to 130 students in 2005.

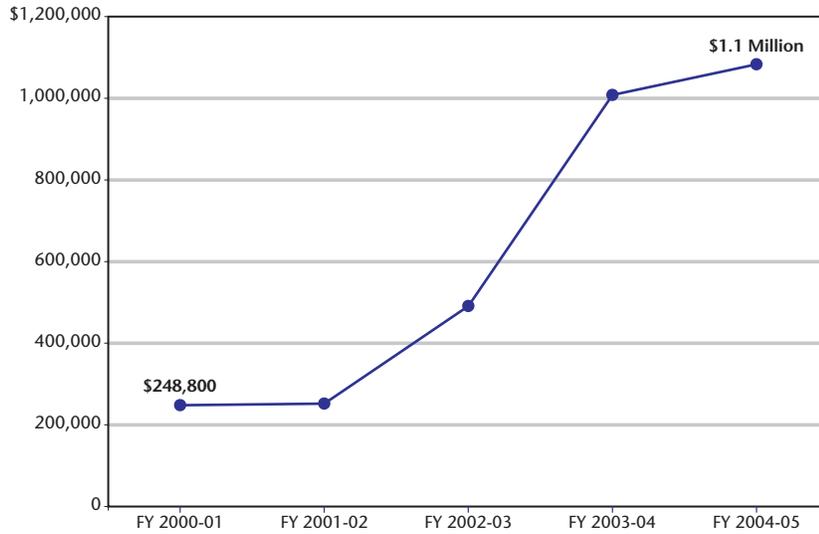
A goal of the summer program is to provide an opportunity for students who otherwise do not attend the school to interact with peers using American Sign Language. Summer program enrollment for these students increased by 29 students from 2004 to 2005.

Outreach Services

As intended by Act 57, the quantity and the types of services provided by outreach staff have increased. As shown in Figure 2, outreach expenditures more than quadrupled from FY 2000-01, when they were \$248,800, to FY 2004-05, when they were \$1.1 million.

Figure 2

Outreach Expenditures



In FY 2004-05, outreach staff provided:

- consultations with educational staff regarding 64 students in 47 local school districts who are deaf or hard of hearing, and 2 children in Birth to 3 programs;
- conferences and training sessions for more than 300 local educational professionals and others;
- mentoring services that included in-home guidance in visual communication and sign language for 56 families, and support from trained parent guides for 35 families with children newly identified as deaf or hard of hearing;
- distance learning courses in American Sign Language for 75 hearing high school students in nine southeastern Wisconsin schools; and
- free captioned media materials for 1,425 registered users in Wisconsin.

Future Considerations

As allowed by Act 57, the program has broadened its focus from primarily serving students at the residential school to also providing outreach services statewide to students who are deaf or hard of hearing. However, we believe existing outreach services should be broadened as outlined in the program's current strategic plan.

Although there is an interest among the parents of students who are deaf or hard of hearing in receiving instruction in American Sign Language, the program has not yet expanded its distance learning courses beyond those offered to hearing high school students in southeastern Wisconsin.

Recommendations

Our recommendations address the need for DPI to:

- ☑ monitor the school's classroom staffing ratios (*p. 31*) and
- ☑ increase technological resources to provide additional distance learning courses statewide (*p. 46*).

■ ■ ■ ■

Introduction ■

2001 Wisconsin Act 57 allows the program to emphasize statewide outreach services.

The residential school for the deaf has operated continuously since it was founded in 1852. However, because more than 90 percent of students who are deaf or hard of hearing in Wisconsin attend school in local school districts, 2001 Wisconsin Act 57 expanded statewide outreach activities for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Act 57 allows the Wisconsin Educational Services Program for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to operate regional satellite facilities and expands the program to include children under the age of three who are deaf or hard of hearing and their parents. In addition, Act 57 allows the program to provide outreach services to school districts, Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (CESAs), county children with disabilities education boards, private schools, teachers, and parents.

Outreach services may include:

- providing evaluation, technical assistance, and consultation;
- developing and disseminating curriculum and instruction materials;
- training teachers, other staff who work with students who are deaf or hard of hearing, and parents;

- providing access to educational materials for students who are deaf or hard of hearing;
- loaning books from the program's library;
- serving as a clearinghouse for information about children who are deaf or hard of hearing;
- teaching American Sign Language through distance education technology;
- renting or leasing technological materials and assistive technology devices; and
- providing assistance to teacher certification programs for instructing students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

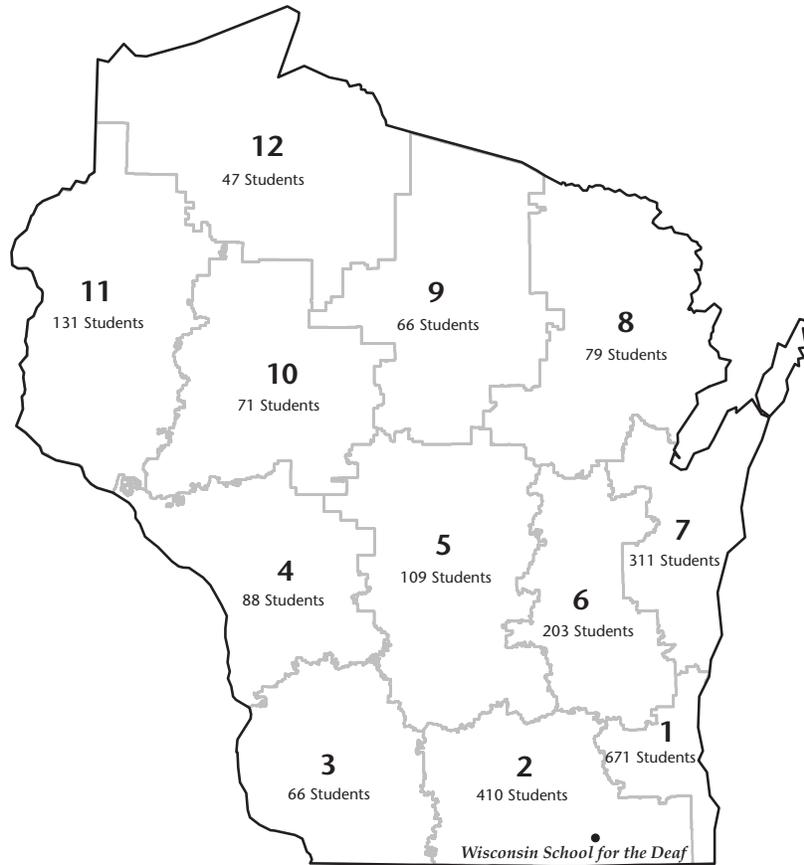
In conducting our evaluation, we examined the program's financial, staffing, and enrollment records and spoke with DPI officials. We also interviewed members of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education Council and educators at school districts and CESAs, and we discussed DPI's implementation of Act 57 with groups representing the deaf and hard of hearing community.

Special Education Services and Placement

As of December 1, 2004, 2,252 students who were deaf or hard of hearing were receiving special education services statewide, as shown in Figure 3. Of that total, 142 students from 66 school districts attended the residential school for the deaf in the 2004-05 school year. In contrast, 2,110 students, or 93.7 percent, received special education services through a local school district.

Figure 3

Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing by CESA¹
December 1, 2004



¹ The 142 students who are deaf and hard of hearing and attended the Wisconsin School for the Deaf in the 2004-05 school year are included in their home CESAs.

The services to be provided are determined when a student's IEP is developed.

Student service needs and placement decisions are made when a student's IEP is created. State and federal law require an IEP for every public school student who receives special education services. School district officials work with the student's teachers, other specialized staff, and parents to develop the IEP document. School districts are then responsible for ensuring the student receives all of the services outlined in the IEP.

For students who are deaf or hard of hearing, services vary depending on each student's range of hearing, cognitive development, and any additional disabilities. Respondents to a 2004 DPI survey, which was sent to teachers certified to provide instruction to students who are deaf or hard of hearing, indicated 32.5 percent of their students had additional disabilities.

DPI officials estimate that approximately 30 percent of students who are deaf or hard of hearing use a form of signed communication, such as:

- American Sign Language, which is a distinct and unique language that uses a set of hand signs, facial expressions, and body movements;
- sign-supported speech, which combines spoken English with hand signs;
- signed English, which is similar to American Sign Language but follows English sentence structure more closely; or
- a combination of these and other methods, such as a system of hand-shapes to clarify lip-reading, known as cued speech.

Students who do not use sign language typically use oral-auditory approaches, which may include lip-reading and the use of:

- hearing aids;
- cochlear implants, which include a receiver placed under the skin behind one ear, a headpiece worn behind the ear, and a speech processor that may be placed in a pocket or attached to a belt; and
- other assistive listening devices, such as personal radio systems that typically include a microphone for the person speaking and a speaker to enhance the sound for the listener.

Some students with additional disabilities may communicate with picture boards.

Students may be placed at their neighborhood school, at another school in the district or a nearby district, or at the residential school for the deaf. All special education student placements must comply with state and federal requirements to provide children with disabilities a free and appropriate education within the least-restrictive environment. Furthermore, special education placements must be based on the specific educational needs of each student, and not on the type of disability or on the existing availability of service. However, federal guidance stipulates that for students who are deaf or hard of hearing, opportunities for communication with peers and teachers may be considered in placement decisions. Therefore, placement in a statewide program, such as that offered at the residential school, may be appropriate to meet the educational needs of some students. For

example, students who communicate using American Sign Language have enhanced educational opportunities at the school because the students do not need an interpreter to interact with their teachers, counselors, or peers.

Local School District Services

The majority of specialized staff serving students who are deaf or hard of hearing are interpreters.

In their local schools, students who are deaf or hard of hearing may utilize specialized educational staff, including audiologists, teachers certified to provide instruction to students who are deaf or hard of hearing, and interpreters. As shown in Table 1, school districts, CESAs, and other local agencies employed 398.7 FTE staff to serve students who are deaf or hard of hearing in the 2004-05 school year. Local school districts employed 75.3 percent of these specialized staff. Interpreters were 53.1 percent of the total.

Table 1

Local Staff for Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing¹ FTE Positions 2004-05 School Year

CESA Location	Audiologists	Teachers Certified to Teach Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing	Interpreters	Total	Percentage of Total
1	3.0	58.7	57.3	119.0	29.9%
2	2.3	22.5	32.6	57.4	14.4
7	1.7	18.4	36.1	56.2	14.1
6	4.3	16.3	24.4	45.0	11.3
5	1.0	8.6	14.3	23.9	6.0
10	4.2	6.6	8.9	19.7	4.9
9	1.0	6.6	11.7	19.3	4.8
11	1.0	7.4	9.0	17.4	4.4
4	1.0	8.0	5.5	14.5	3.6
8	0.2	6.0	6.9	13.1	3.3
12	0.0	5.8	2.9	8.7	2.2
3	0.0	2.5	2.0	4.5	1.1
Total	19.7	167.4	211.6	398.7	100.0%

¹ Includes staff employed by school districts (300.2 FTE), CESAs (91.2 FTE), and County Children with Disabilities Education Boards (7.3 FTE). Excludes Wisconsin School for the Deaf positions.

Services performed by these staff include:

- suggesting changes in presentation or classroom setup that will facilitate visual and oral instruction;
- signed communication instruction and interpretation; and
- training in the use of assistive devices, such as personal auditory systems that amplify sound.

As needed, local educational staff may request on-site consultations by the program's outreach staff to evaluate individual students' educational needs. The majority of outreach training is intended to serve this group of local educational professionals.

We interviewed officials from 15 school districts to determine the types of services they provided to students who are deaf or hard of hearing in fall 2005. All of the districts reported providing speech and language therapy. Additionally:

- four districts provided vocational training, which could include job placement;
- four districts provided cochlear implant support, such as additional instruction in speech and language development to those with cochlear implants;
- three districts provided life skills training, such as instruction on how to obtain an interpreter and use a text telephone; and
- three districts provided American Sign Language communication instruction.

We found that districts with larger student populations typically provide a wider variety of services to students who are deaf or hard of hearing. This may be a reflection of the greater number of students with varying needs. Such districts often provide instruction to students who are deaf or hard of hearing from surrounding districts.

School districts frequently contract with regional CESA staff to serve students who are deaf or hard of hearing. CESAs provide specialized staff, such as interpreters, on a contracted basis to school districts, particularly smaller districts. Some CESA interpreters are assigned to a single student, while others travel to serve several students in different schools.

We surveyed all 12 CESAs to determine how they assist school districts in meeting the needs of students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Besides providing contracted staff, CESAs typically offered technical assistance and training to local school districts. Additionally, CESA 5 and CESA 6 operated resource programs to gather students in a central location for services. For example, CESA 6 had two resource programs for ten area students, one in Lomira and another in Berlin. The services offered at each resource program varied based on each student's needs. Some students attended the resource program solely for reading and language instruction and attended general education classes for the remainder of the day. Other students attended the resource program for all of their classes, with the exception of physical education and art. In addition to providing direct instruction to students, the resource program's instructors for the deaf and hard of hearing acted as liaisons between the students and general education teachers. The resource program also offered students who are deaf or hard of hearing opportunities for greater interaction with peers who are deaf or hard of hearing and to serve as mentors to younger students. The Green Bay, Madison, and Wausau districts reported operating similar programs that attract students from nearby school districts.

■ ■ ■ ■

Expenditures and Staffing ■

Expenditures have increased in recent years for the Wisconsin Educational Services Program for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, primarily because of the expanded outreach activities allowed by 2001 Wisconsin Act 57. Staffing changes also reflect an increased focus on outreach responsibilities.

Expenditure Trends

Total expenditures increased 10.7 percent from FY 2000-01 through 2004-05.

Total expenditures increased 10.7 percent from FY 2000-01 through FY 2004-05, as shown in Table 2. The 57.1 percent increase in federally funded expenditures resulted from the expansion of outreach services funded by Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) grants.

Table 2

Expenditures by Funding Source

	FY 2000-01	FY 2001-02	FY 2002-03	FY 2003-04	FY 2004-05	Percentage Change
General Purpose Revenue	\$7,156,000	\$ 7,192,600	\$ 7,216,200	\$ 6,445,500	\$ 6,918,400	(3.3%)
Federal Revenue	2,259,100	2,670,600	2,833,700	3,381,400	3,548,900	57.1
School District Revenue ¹	488,700	477,500	413,500	462,400	506,300	3.6
Other Program Revenue and Gifts/Grants/Trusts	74,900	41,200	46,300	50,100	70,200	(6.3)
Total	\$9,978,700	\$10,381,900	\$10,509,700	\$10,339,400	\$11,043,800	10.7

¹ The residential school's costs for weekend transportation are reimbursed by local school districts.

As shown in Table 3, expenditures for residential school-related activities, such as instruction, buildings and grounds expenses, and weekend transportation, totaled \$9.9 million in FY 2004-05, or 89.7 percent of total expenditures for the year. From FY 2000-01 through FY 2004-05, residential school expenditures increased 1.8 percent, while outreach service expenditures increased 335.3 percent.

Table 3

Program Expenditures

	FY 2000-01	FY 2001-02	FY 2002-03	FY 2003-04	FY 2004-05	Percentage Change
Residential School						
Staffing ¹	\$7,157,800	\$ 7,282,200	\$ 7,319,700	\$ 6,954,600	\$7,143,700	(0.2%)
Supplies and Services	821,500	1,144,000	913,900	995,300	965,400	17.5
Capital Costs	706,400	711,800	703,200	242,100	628,300	(11.1)
Weekend Transportation	488,700	477,500	413,500	462,400	506,300	3.6
Professional/Contractual Services	246,000	244,500	290,500	329,500	315,200	28.1
Utilities	250,100	207,800	279,600	260,200	283,100	13.2
Travel and Training	59,400	62,000	98,400	81,600	63,300	6.6
Subtotal	9,729,900	10,129,800	10,018,800	9,325,700	9,905,300	1.8
Outreach²						
Staffing ¹	175,200	200,200	320,600	718,200	718,700	310.2
Supplies and Services	53,500	16,300	124,800	187,900	220,400	312.0
Professional/Contractual Services	10,600	29,900	27,900	57,300	86,400	715.1
Travel and Training	9,500	5,700	17,600	44,700	57,600	506.3
Subtotal	248,800	252,100	490,900	1,008,100	1,083,100	335.3
Summer Program²						
Staffing ¹	–	–	–	5,500	46,700	–
Supplies and Services	–	–	–	100	8,700	–
Subtotal	–	–	–	5,600	55,400	–
Total	\$9,978,700	\$10,381,900	\$10,509,700	\$10,339,400	\$11,043,800	10.7

¹ Staffing expenditures include salaries and fringe benefits.

² Outreach and summer program expenditures do not include a small portion of the program’s administrative overhead costs, which were difficult to quantify.

Staffing costs accounted for 72.1 percent of expenditures in the residential school, 66.4 percent of expenditures in outreach, and 84.3 percent of expenditures in the summer program. It should be noted that summer program expenditures in FY 2003-04 are low because they include only planning expenses for the summer program that was first held in FY 2004-05.

As shown in Table 4, the cost per student at the residential school increased 18.3 percent from FY 2000-01 through FY 2004-05. This increase can be attributed largely to a decline in enrollment. The number of students fell by 13.9 percent, while expenditures increased slightly.

Table 4

Wisconsin School for the Deaf Cost per Student

	FY 2000-01	FY 2004-05	Percentage Change
Residential School Expenditures	\$9,729,900	\$9,905,300	1.8%
Number of Students	165	142	(13.9)
Cost per Student	\$59,000	\$69,800	18.3

Staffing Levels

Most instructional staff are teachers and teacher assistants.

Nearly one-half of the program's authorized positions are instructional staff who work at the residential school. This category includes teachers and staff typically found in most schools, such as library staff, guidance counselors, and IEP coordinators, as well as staff who address the specific educational needs of the school's students, such as American Sign Language specialists and speech and language therapists. More than two-thirds of all instructional positions are classroom teachers and teacher assistants at the residential school.

Outreach staff include an American Sign Language specialist, an audiologist, a sign communication specialist, and staff who coordinate services for children from birth to age six who are deaf or hard of hearing. Statewide outreach services include providing individual student consultations, offering training to educators, and running programs for children who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families.

Authorized staffing levels declined from January 2001 through September 2005.

As shown in Table 5, while total authorized staffing levels declined from January 2001 to September 2005, the number of authorized outreach positions increased by 7.0.

Table 5
Authorized FTE Positions, by Category

	January 2001	September 2005	Change
Outreach	4.0	11.0	7.0
Medical	4.2	4.6	0.4
Meal Service	6.6	6.6	0.0
Administration	7.8	6.5	(1.3)
Residential	30.2	27.2	(3.0)
Instructional	67.5	63.8	(3.7)
Building and Grounds	18.0	14.0	(4.0)
Total	138.3	133.7	(4.6)

During this period, general purpose revenue (GPR)-funded positions decreased by 12.0 while federally funded positions increased by 7.4, as shown in Table 6. Most of the reduction in the program's GPR positions resulted when positions were eliminated through the biennial budget process:

- 4.8 positions were eliminated in 2001 Wisconsin Act 109, the 2001-03 budget adjustment bill;
- 3.3 positions were eliminated in 2003 Wisconsin Act 33, the 2003-05 Biennial Budget Act; and
- 1.9 positions were eliminated in 2005 Act 25, the 2005-07 Biennial Budget Act.

Table 6

Authorized Positions, by Funding Source

	January 2001	January 2005	September 2005	Change	Percentage Change
GPR Positions	112.0	101.9	100.0	(12.0)	(10.7%)
Federal Positions	26.3	33.7	33.7	7.4	28.1
Total	138.3	135.6	133.7	(4.6)	(3.3)

Position vacancies have declined with declines in authorized positions. As shown in Table 7, 7.2 percent of authorized positions were vacant in January 2001, compared to 5.3 percent in September 2005.

Table 7

Authorized and Vacant FTE Positions

	Number Authorized	Number Vacant	Percentage Vacant
January 2001	138.3	9.9	7.2%
January 2005	135.6	8.7	6.4
September 2005	133.7	7.1	5.3

Transportation Costs

Students attending the residential school during the academic year either reside in on-campus dormitories in Delavan or commute on weekdays if they live nearby. During the 2004-05 school year, 92 students lived on campus and 50 students commuted from home. Students living on campus at the school and at the Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped in Janesville are transported home each Friday afternoon and then back to the residential schools on Sunday. They travel either in privately contracted vehicles or in state-owned airplanes, depending on cost and distance. Students are met by their parents or other authorized adults at predetermined locations along the route.

Weekend transportation costs are reimbursed by local school districts.

Weekend transportation costs are paid by the school and reimbursed by students' local school districts, which are charged a flat per mile rate for the transportation. Local school districts can claim reimbursement for the student transportation costs under state special education categorical aid. In FY 2004-05, the reimbursement rate was 30.0 percent; unreimbursed costs are paid for by the local property tax or other sources available to the districts. School districts do not receive state equalization aid for students who attend the Wisconsin School for the Deaf or the Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped because the only costs they incur are transportation costs and costs to take courses off-campus, such as at the local technical college.

As shown in Table 8, per mile transportation charges to local school districts for both residential schools have remained fairly stable over the past several years. However, it is possible that increases in fuel costs in 2005 will result in higher expenditures in FY 2005-06.

Table 8

Weekend Transportation Revenues and Expenditures for the Residential Schools¹

	FY 2000-01	FY 2001-02	FY 2002-03	FY 2003-04	FY 2004-05
Beginning Cash Balance	\$ 1,100	\$ 51,300	\$114,900	\$154,500	\$ 64,500
Revenue	765,700	802,800	762,300	689,400	760,100
Expenditures	(715,500)	(739,200)	(722,700)	(779,400)	(787,500)
Final Cash Balance	\$51,300	\$114,900	\$154,500	\$ 64,500	\$ 37,100
Per Mile Rate	\$0.74	\$0.74	\$0.68	\$0.66	\$0.79

¹ Includes the Wisconsin School for the Deaf and the Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped.

A private company provides van and bus transportation.

The residential schools contract with a private company to transport students in vans and buses along seven routes. To assist the students and provide supervision, the company hires a chaperone who is fluent in American Sign Language for each route. The company bills the residential schools once per month for the number of trips made, including surcharges for fuel increases. In FY 2004-05, the company was paid \$518,100 by the residential schools.

The residential schools also pay the Department of Administration (DOA) for use of state-owned airplanes to transport students who

live in northern Wisconsin. Two of the school's childcare counselors drive students in DOA fleet vehicles to the airport in Janesville and accompany the students on the plane routes. In FY 2004-05, the residential schools paid DOA \$242,800 to transport students on airplanes, and \$3,100 for fleet vehicles. The two schools also paid the childcare counselors a total of \$23,000 in salaries, fringe benefits, and meals.

For the 2004-05 school year there were six bus routes, one van route, and two airplane routes, each making three to four stops. The exact number of students on each route varies from weekend to weekend because of absences and students remaining on the campus for extracurricular activities. Table 9 shows the number of students on each route for a representative trip in May 2005.

Table 9

Weekend Transportation Numbers
Weekend of May 13-15, 2005

Route	Wisconsin School for the Deaf	Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped	Total
Vehicle Routes			
Black River Falls	13	6	19
Green Bay	9	11	20
Milwaukee	7	13	20
Racine	16	2	18
Wausau	4	3	7
Appleton	9	3	12
La Crosse	2	2	4
Subtotal	60	40	100
Airplane Routes			
Northwestern Wisconsin	5	3	8
Northcentral Wisconsin	2	1	3
Subtotal	7	4	11
Total	67	44	111

Wisconsin School for the Deaf ■

The Wisconsin School for the Deaf serves students statewide, as statutorily required. The majority of the students attend the school for the full academic year, and there is a summer program. However, because total enrollment for the academic year has declined, DPI will need to carefully monitor staffing levels.

Enrollment

Residential school staff and students communicate without interpreters using American Sign Language.

A student's IEP specifies the particular skills he or she needs to develop while enrolled at the residential school. In addition to general academic courses, the residential school offers courses in American Sign Language; deaf studies, which address accessibility laws and deaf history; and courses to assist students in planning for college, employment, and living independently. The residential school also offers prevocational and vocational training, special services for students with severe multiple disabilities, and extracurricular activities.

The most significant difference between the residential school and students' local schools is the environment in which learning occurs. The classes and activities at the residential school are presented in American Sign Language directly by the teachers, with no need for interpreters. All teachers, teacher assistants, residence hall staff, nurses, and office personnel are skilled in using American Sign Language, which allows direct communication with students.

Enrollment declined to 142 students in the 2004-05 school year.

The school’s enrollment decreased from 165 students in the 2000-01 school year to 142 students in the 2004-05 school year, as shown in Table 10. At the beginning of the 2005-06 school year, 133 students were enrolled.

Table 10

**Wisconsin School for the Deaf Student Enrollment
2000-01 and 2004-05**

	2000-01	2004-05	Percentage Change
Students Living in the Dormitory	126	92	(27.0%)
Students Living off Campus	39	50	28.2
Total	165	142	(13.9)

The number of students living off campus and commuting to the school increased 28.2 percent, from 39 students in the 2000-01 school year to 50 students in the 2004-05 school year. In contrast, students living in the school residence hall decreased by 34 students, or 27.0 percent. However, staff noted that many of the students who live off-campus typically stay at the dormitory one to two nights per week, as staffing levels permit, for extracurricular activities or social interaction.

Students are organized into grade levels, with the majority working with the same level of educational materials as their peers in traditional public schools. As shown in Table 11, class sizes are typically larger in the upper than in the lower grades. Staff explained that many students begin attending the school for the first time during their middle school and high school years.

Table 11
Students by Grade Level

Grade Level	2000-01	Percentage of Total	2004-05	Percentage of Total
Ungraded Students	10	6.1%	7	4.9%
Pre-kindergarten	3	1.8	4	2.8
Kindergarten	4	2.4	1	0.7
Grade 1	3	1.8	6	4.2
Grade 2	7	4.2	7	4.9
Grade 3	7	4.2	6	4.2
Grade 4	10	6.1	6	4.2
Grade 5	9	5.5	5	3.5
Grade 6	7	4.2	16	11.3
Grade 7	14	8.5	12	8.5
Grade 8	14	8.5	12	8.5
Grade 9	20	12.1	14	9.9
Grade 10	19	11.5	16	11.3
Grade 11	15	9.1	17	12.0
Grade 12	23	14.0	13	9.1
Total	165	100.0%	142	100.0%

Residential school students participate in standardized testing as appropriate. In addition to the standard state requirements for graduation, the school requires additional courses in English, language arts, and other subjects to address English language delays, which are common among students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Almost 80 percent of students have more than one disability.

Nearly 80 percent of students currently attending the residential school have more than one disability listed on their IEPs. Second to a hearing disability were speech or language disabilities. Other disabilities, such as cognitive disabilities or autism, were noted in less than 10 percent of the students' IEPs. Some students with significant disabling conditions are educated in ungraded adaptive education classes that are designed for children with significant disabilities. Others may be at a grade level lower than would be considered age-appropriate, primarily because of secondary disabling conditions. As shown in Table 12, there were

fewer ungraded students in the 2004-05 school year than in the 2000-01 school year. In 2004-05, 19.0 percent of students were at a grade level lower than would be considered age-appropriate.

Table 12

Students at Age-Appropriate Grade Level

	2000-01		2004-05	
	Number	Percentage of Total	Number	Percentage of Total
Ungraded Students	10	6.1%	7	4.9%
Students at Lower Grade Level than Age-Appropriate				
Elementary School	5	3.0	2	1.4
Middle and High School	19	11.5	25	17.6
Subtotal	24	14.5	27	19.0
Students at Age-Appropriate Grade Level				
Elementary School	38	23.0	33	23.3
Middle and High School	93	56.4	75	52.8
Subtotal	131	79.4	108	76.1
Total	165	100.0%	142	100.0%

The school's attendance rate was 91.2 percent in the 2004-05 school year.

Most of the students who attend the school enroll for the entire school year, with 89.1 percent of students in the 2000-01 school year and 86.6 percent students in the 2004-05 school year enrolled for the full 180-day period. The attendance rate was 92.8 percent in 2000-01 and 91.2 percent in 2004-05. In comparison, the statewide attendance rate was 94.2 percent in 2000-01 and 94.6 percent in 2003-04.

According to the school's staff, the attendance rate is lower than the statewide rate because of the distance students must travel to attend the school. When students are ill, parents keep them at home until the following week if the family lives some distance from the school because long-distance transportation services are not available on a daily basis.

Staffing Guidelines

Since 2001, 6.7 instructional and residential positions have been eliminated.

Declining enrollment would typically signal an opportunity for staff reductions, and authorized instructional and residential staff did decline by 6.9 percent from January 2001 to September 2005, as 6.7 FTE positions were eliminated. However, IEP requirements for specific types of educational services, particularly for students with multiple disabilities, influence staffing patterns and the potential for additional reductions at the residential school. For example:

- students with limited language skills may require an expert American Sign Language user along with an English user, to focus on improving language proficiency;
- classrooms with students at different levels of language development may use an aide to assist the teacher in providing instruction; and
- students who are unable to conform their behavior with general classroom rules may have classroom aides.

In addition to educational staff in the classrooms and child care counselors in the residence hall, the school employs staff who provide meals, health services, and educational support, including librarians, guidance counselors, and reading specialists. Some school district and CESA staff we spoke with expressed concern with the adequacy of services provided to students with emotional and behavioral issues. However, we found that the school currently employs a school psychologist, a behavioral specialist, and a social worker. The school is currently recruiting for a second social worker. In addition, the school recently converted two vacant positions into psychologist assistant positions. One of these positions plans, develops, and coordinates mental health services in the residence hall, while the other provides additional counseling at the school. According to program staff, these positions allow the school to provide additional crisis management and other ongoing support services, such as counseling, to students.

Classroom Staffing

Although the placement of students within classrooms is largely driven by the requirements specified in each student's IEP and a student's particular course of study, staff also use guidelines to ensure that teacher-to-student ratios are within recommended levels for effective learning. The guidelines are based on the premise that

students who are deaf are visual learners who learn better in small groups. The recommended ratios are at least one teacher for every:

- 4 students in classrooms for students with severe disabilities;
- 6 students in elementary school classrooms;
- 8 students in middle school classrooms; and
- 12 students in high school classrooms.

The number of teachers exceeds the level recommended under the school’s guidelines.

We examined staffing levels and student course assignments for the current school year. As shown in Table 13, we found that the school is serving 3.9 elementary students per classroom teacher, which is less than the 6.0 students specified under its guidelines. Similarly, at the high school level, the school is serving 5.3 students per classroom teacher, which is less than one-half of the 12.0 students its guidelines suggest. Therefore, the current number of teachers exceeds the level recommended under the school’s guidelines.

Table 13

**Number of Students per Classroom Teacher
2005-06 School Year**

Educational Level	Actual Students per Classroom Teacher	Guidelines for Students per Classroom Teacher	Difference
Students with Severe Disabilities	3.3	4.0	0.7
Elementary School	3.9	6.0	2.1
Middle School	6.9	8.0	1.1
High School	5.3	12.0	6.7

The school’s staffing guidelines are comparable to those used by residential schools for the deaf or hard of hearing in other midwestern states we contacted. For example, the guideline in Minnesota and Ohio is eight students for each classroom staff person. Like Wisconsin, Illinois staffing guidelines vary by age group, ranging from ten students per classroom staff person for 9th to 12th grade students to five students per classroom staff person in kindergarten. Iowa’s staffing guideline is lower overall, with

five students per classroom staff person. Staff from other states' residential schools noted that their actual staffing levels may include fewer students per staff person than recommended by their guidelines when classrooms include students with multiple disabilities. Nevertheless, because the Wisconsin School for the Deaf's staffing levels exceed the level recommended in its classroom staffing guidelines, DPI officials should ensure their appropriateness by monitoring, particularly if enrollment continues to decline.

☑ Recommendation

We recommend the Department of Public Instruction report to the Joint Legislative Audit Committee by November 1, 2006, on its efforts to monitor classroom staffing ratios at the Wisconsin School for the Deaf.

Residence Hall Staffing

Students who live on campus are assigned to floors within the residence hall based on grade level, and on each floor students are grouped by gender. Currently, the school has one floor with 17 elementary school students, a second floor with 22 middle school students, and a third floor with 50 high school students. The remaining 44 students live within commuting distance of the school but, as noted, may stay overnight one to two nights per week.

Several years ago the school began using staffing guidelines for its residence hall to ensure adequate and safe staffing levels are maintained. During the overnight sleeping hours, there is at least one staff person for each group of students, male and female, on each floor. In addition, staffing guidelines are maintained for waking hours after the school day to provide supervision and to conduct activities with the students. These residence hall ratios are one child care counselor for every:

- 4 students with severe disabilities;
- 8 elementary school students;
- 10 middle school students; and
- 12 high school students.

We looked at the number of students by age, gender, and disability and determined the number of staff needed to meet its staffing guidelines. As shown in Table 14, the staffing levels on all six wings of the residence hall generally met the adopted guidelines.

Table 14

**Comparison of Residence Hall Placements and Staffing Ratios
2005-06 School Year**

Floor	Number of Students	Staff Needed to Meet Established Ratios	Assigned Staff During After School Hours
Girls Elementary	6	1 to 2	1.9
Boys Elementary	11	2 to 3	2.3
Girls Middle School	14	2 to 3	2.3
Boys Middle School	8	2	2.3
Girls High School	22	3 to 4	3.5
Boys High School	28	4 to 5	4.0
Total	89	-	-

Summer Programming

In addition to providing residential school services during the academic year, the school provides summer programming for students who are deaf or hard of hearing who may or may not attend the school during the school year. The school implemented summer programming in 2004, as required by 2001 Wisconsin Act 57. The summer program provides an opportunity for students who are deaf or hard of hearing to learn and use American Sign Language, thereby improving their communication and interpersonal skills. In summer 2005, six one-week sessions included activities such as basketball, canoeing, and hiking. In addition, one 3.5 week session for driver education was offered. Although program officials considered offering more academic topics, they decided to focus on providing other activities that would attract students while also providing the opportunity for language development.

Summer program enrollment increased 54.8 percent.

As shown in Table 15, total enrollment in the summer program increased 54.8 percent from 2004 to 2005. One goal of the summer program is to provide students who do not attend the school during the school year with the opportunity to interact using American Sign Language. Attendance by these students increased from 42 to 71 students, or 69.0 percent, while attendance by the school's students increased 40.5 percent.

Table 15

Summer Program Enrollment
By Student Placement during the Academic Year

	2004	2005	Percentage Change
The School's Students	42	59	40.5%
Other Students	42	71	69.0
Total	84	130	54.8

■ ■ ■ ■

Outreach ■

***In FY 2004-05,
the program's outreach
expenditures totaled
\$1.1 million.***

Outreach staff provide a variety of services intended to reach the more than 90 percent of deaf or hard of hearing students who attend their local school districts. In FY 2000-01, before Act 57 took effect, expenditures for these activities totaled \$248,800. By FY 2004-05, outreach expenditures totaled \$1.1 million.

Outreach services can be grouped into five main types:

- consultations, in which outreach staff typically meet with local school district officials to provide information on how to address the needs of a specific student who is deaf or hard of hearing;
- conferences and training sessions, which are offered to educational professionals and parents;
- mentoring services, which provide support to children who are deaf or hard of hearing and their parents;
- distance learning, which provides American Sign Language courses to hearing high school students using telecommunications technology; and
- captioned media, through which individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, students, parents, and educators may obtain captioned educational and entertainment materials.

Consultation Services

Consultation services are a resource for local educational agencies, particularly smaller school districts that have few students who are deaf or hard of hearing and may not have the staff expertise to address each student's specific educational needs. Outreach staff may provide consultations to local school districts, CESAs, private schools, and others. Consultations commonly include activities such as:

- providing information on a student's communication needs;
- providing information to educators and parents on resources, such as interpreters;
- conducting a student evaluation or offering advice regarding appropriate evaluation tools; and
- recommending changes in instructional practices or modifications to the general curriculum.

Act 57 allowed the program to provide services at regional satellite facilities throughout the state. Outreach staff include a sign communication specialist, a speech-language consultant, a deafblind coordinator, a diagnostic education specialist, and an educational audiology consultant. Although they have offices in Delavan, Milwaukee, Fond du Lac, Wausau, Baraboo, and Madison, these staff do not serve specific regions. Instead, they travel throughout the state to provide consultation services, or as required for training sessions and conferences.

Consultations are done at the request of a teacher, a special education director, or a school district administrator. The consultation process, which may include classroom observations and interviews with teachers, the student, and the student's parents, requires approximately four weeks from the initial request through completion of a written report. Outreach staff share information about placement at the school when appropriate. It is the responsibility of school district staff, including the IEP team, to determine appropriate placement. Outreach staff may serve on a student's IEP team at the district's request.

In addition to consulting with school districts, outreach staff provide consultation services to local Birth to 3 programs. These programs, as permitted by s. 115.52(3)(c)1, Wis. Stats., allow outreach staff to provide services to children younger than age three who are deaf or

hard of hearing and do not yet receive educational services through the school district. Birth to 3 programs are managed at the state level by the Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS) and are provided locally by agencies designated by each county. Birth to 3 program consultations might include discussions with parents regarding the unique needs of children who are deaf or hard of hearing, home visits, or training for local service providers.

In FY 2004-05, outreach staff provided 47 local school districts with consultation services.

In FY 2004-05, outreach staff provided consultation services for 64 students in 47 districts, in addition to two consultations with Birth to 3 program staff. Outreach staff noted that their services may be more critical to rural districts, where resources to serve students who are deaf or hard of hearing may be less readily available. Larger districts typically have at least one teacher who specializes in deaf and hard-of-hearing education, whereas smaller districts may have only a special education teacher with limited experience working with students who are deaf or hard of hearing. As shown in Table 16, 54.7 percent of consultations in FY 2004-05 were provided to districts in rural, small, and medium-size municipalities, where 37.3 percent of all students who are deaf or hard of hearing attended school.

Table 16

**Individual Consultations for
Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing by Locale Type¹
FY 2004-05**

Locale of School District	Number of Consultations	Percentage of Total	Number of Students Statewide	Percentage of Total
Rural, Small, and Medium-size Municipalities	35	54.7%	841	37.3%
Urban Municipalities and Immediately Surrounding Areas	29	45.3	1,411	62.7
Total	64	100.0%	2,252	100.0%

¹ Thirty-nine districts with schools in more than one locale type were classified according to the locale type with the most students.

Conferences and Trainings

In FY 2004-05, more than 300 educational professionals and others attended conferences and training sessions.

In FY 2004-05, more than 300 professionals and others attended conferences and training sessions that were funded or organized by the program. Among the attendees were teachers, audiologists, special education directors, other professionals who work with students who are deaf or hard of hearing, and parents and families of students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Outreach staff routinely review DPI and DHFS mailing lists to distribute information on upcoming conferences and training. Staff also maintain e-mail lists of teachers, educational interpreters, speech pathologists, educational audiologists, administrators, and parents to distribute information on conferences, trainings, and other deafness-related events.

In FY 2004-05, outreach staff offered six main activities:

- The Annual Statewide Parent Conference was created in FY 2002-03 at parents' request. Outreach staff worked in collaboration with DHFS staff, other professionals who serve the deaf and hard of hearing, and parents to organize the conference. The conference offered parents a forum to discuss social and educational issues with other families. In FY 2004-05, the conference included 16 workshops for parents, arts enrichment activities for siblings, and "support group" discussions for deaf youth and their hearing siblings. Attendance increased from 35 families in FY 2002-03 to 125 families in FY 2004-2005.
- The Annual Summer Institute for Educators was attended by 36 individuals, primarily teachers. Three courses were provided: one on sign language; another on speech, language, and auditory development; and a third on educational interpretation.
- A cued-speech workshop taught 17 participants about using hand-shapes and mouth movements to represent sounds being made.
- A visual phonics workshop taught 51 participants about this system of hand signs and written symbols that represent letter sounds.

- Cochlear implants training for educational audiologists was attended by 13 professionals.
- A course for the University of Wisconsin-Madison Teacher Enhancement Program discussed educational implications and strategies for working with children with sensory impairments. The one-credit course, which had 30 participants, was presented jointly by outreach staff and staff from the Wisconsin Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

In addition, outreach staff conduct training for small groups upon request. For example, additional training in visual phonics was provided to the Green Bay and Milwaukee school districts. Also, outreach staff attend relevant conferences and professional meetings provided by other groups and make presentations to educational professionals about outreach services in order to promote program awareness. For example, staff made a presentation about outreach services at the State Superintendent of Public Instruction's 2004 fall leadership conference for special education directors.

Mentoring Services

Mentoring services have been expanded.

Mentoring services were provided to nearly four-times as many families in FY 2004-05 as in FY 2000-01. Two principal mentoring services are provided. First, a deaf mentor project matches trained deaf mentors with children from birth to age six who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families. The deaf mentors provide in-home instruction and guidance in visual communication and sign language. Deaf mentors teach parents and family members to interact using American Sign Language comfortably and naturally. The program is funded through an IDEA grant to CESA 2 and through the DHFS Birth to 3 program. Outreach staff provide program coordination and partially fund training for the mentors. The number of families served by this program has grown steadily over the last five years, from 23 in FY 2000-01 to 56 in FY 2004-05. The program's goal is to extend services up to age 12, with a focus on literacy.

Second, Guide by Your Side is a program created in FY 2003-04 to match families whose children are newly diagnosed with hearing loss with trained parents, who provide support by answering questions and connecting the family with local resources. The parent guides provide up to six hours of home visits to each family and are reimbursed by the program for travel and incidental costs. Currently, outreach staff rely on an informal system of referrals

from physicians and audiologists. Over the next year, DHFS will be implementing a new referral system that will provide outreach staff with automatic referrals to families with children who have been newly diagnosed with hearing loss. Since Guide by Your Side was created, 20 trained parent guides have served 35 families. In addition, staff have made presentations about the program at state and national conferences, and the model has been adopted by a national nonprofit organization that serves individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Distance Learning

In 2004-05, American Sign Language courses were offered to 75 hearing students through distance learning technology.

In FY 2004-05, the distance learning program provided American Sign Language instruction to 75 hearing high school students in nine schools—eight public high schools in eight school districts, and one parochial high school—via the distance learning lab located at the residential school. Telecommunications equipment allow connection with a maximum of three locations at one time.

Distance learning courses are offered as a foreign language credit to hearing high school students. All of the participating schools are part of the Southeastern Wisconsin Instructional Network Group (SWING). SWING is a consortium of elementary and secondary schools, technical colleges, museums, and higher educational institutions in Kenosha, Racine, Walworth, and Milwaukee counties that share educational opportunities, such as American Sign Language instruction, using distance learning technology.

The outreach distance learning program is currently serving the maximum number of students possible given one distance learning lab in Delavan and 1.0 FTE distance learning teacher. According to outreach staff, demand for the program is high, both from high schools and from parents who have requested access to sign language instruction through distance learning. In addition to offering American Sign Language, outreach staff noted that it may be useful to provide some of their other training, such as technical assistance for educators, via distance learning.

School districts and parents could benefit if the number of distance learning courses increased.

In the program's 2003-07 strategic plan, a stated goal for the 2005-06 school year was to develop distance learning courses for school districts outside of the SWING consortium, as well as to determine the feasibility of offering distance learning programs for parents. Outreach staff have considered the possibility of also using the distance learning room at the Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped in Janesville. However, to date there are no specific plans to increase distance learning courses or training.

Captioned Media

There are 35 free, captioned media program libraries nationwide. One is located in Delavan on the campus of the Wisconsin School for the Deaf. The captioned media program is a national program that began in 1958. It is funded by the United States Department of Education and administered by the National Association for the Deaf, a nonprofit organization that provides information about captioning, maintains a list of approved captioned service vendors, and acquires and lends captioned material free of charge.

The captioned media program has 1,425 registered users in Wisconsin.

The captioned media library at the residential school serves residents of Wisconsin and Michigan and currently has 1,425 registered users in Wisconsin. It is operated by outreach staff. Materials loaned by the program include videotapes, DVDs, and CD-ROMs, which are available to all persons who are deaf or hard of hearing, their relatives, and professionals who work with students and adults who are deaf or hard of hearing. Materials are mailed to the requester and can be ordered through the Internet or by mail, phone, or fax. In addition, many videos are available through Internet streaming, and some are available with Spanish-language captions. Materials cover a wide range of subjects, such as the arts; biographies; careers; health and safety; self-help, home, and family; sports and recreation; religion; and educational topics such as history, mathematics, and science.

■ ■ ■ ■

Future Considerations ■

As a result of changes initiated by Act 57, the program has successfully broadened its focus from serving students enrolled at the Wisconsin School for the Deaf to also providing outreach services statewide. In addition, it has established procedures to assess its performance through surveys. However, additional services could be provided to help achieve the program's statutory mission.

Assessing Program Performance

Two of the strategies DPI uses to assess program performance are input received from the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education Council and surveys completed by parents, students, and school district staff.

The Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education Council was created to advise DPI staff.

The Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education Council was created by Act 57 to advise DPI on statewide services for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. The State Superintendent appoints its 12 members, which include parents, teachers, other educational staff, and other individuals interested in the education of students who are deaf or hard of hearing. The Council is charged with providing advice to DPI on the program's services, as well as on the level and quality of services statewide. It receives information from DPI staff on program accomplishments and future plans through quarterly meetings. Staff indicated that the Council offered advice regarding development of the program's 2003-07 strategic plan. Both

program staff and members of the Council we interviewed expect the Council to become more active as current members' three-year terms progress.

Survey results indicate parent satisfaction with the school's programming.

Recently, the residential school has begun to conduct surveys of parents and graduating seniors to assess satisfaction with the services it provides. A parent survey has been conducted annually since the 2001-02 school year. The survey uses a five-point scale, with 1 indicating "dissatisfied" and 5 indicating "satisfied." As shown in Table 17, satisfaction with the quality of overall services has increased from an average score of 3.9 for the 2000-01 school year to an average of 4.4 for the 2004-05 school year. Scores for each of the individual measures increased from 2000-01 to 2004-05, including quality of academic services and several measures related to IEPs. However in each year, satisfaction with transition services, such as making realistic post-graduation career plans, assisting students to pursue postsecondary education, and developing independent living skills, had the lowest level of satisfaction.

Table 17

Parent Satisfaction Survey Results
Average Scores

	2000-01	2004-05	Difference
Quality of Academic Services	4.0	4.5	0.5
Quality of Residential Services	4.3	4.5	0.2
Comfort Level with IEP Process	3.9	4.4	0.5
Evaluation of Child	3.7	4.6	0.9
Development of IEP	4.1	4.5	0.4
Placement Decisions	4.2	4.7	0.5
Opportunity for Input During IEP Process	4.1	4.6	0.5
Amount and Type of Information Received During IEP Process	4.2	4.6	0.4
Amount, Regularity, and Type of Information Received During the Year	3.7	4.2	0.5
Transition Services	2.8	3.7	0.9
Overall Average	3.9	4.4	0.5

In 2005, a survey was mailed to students who graduated from the residential school from 2001 through spring 2005. Responses regarding the school's courses, the IEP process, and the employment of former students will be collected and used by staff to improve transition services.

The program also uses surveys to evaluate its outreach activities. For example, after each consultation with local school district staff and parents, surveys are sent to the school district staff and the parents. Survey results for the 2004-05 school year indicate that the majority of respondents were satisfied with the outreach services provided and would use them in the future. However, some respondents commented that the time between their initial contact with outreach staff and receipt of the final report was too long.

Program Enhancements

A number of the program's strategic plan goals have been accomplished.

In response to changes made by 2001 Wisconsin Act 57, the program created a strategic plan to guide program enhancements. The current strategic plan contains programmatic goals and evaluation methods in 28 specific areas covering school initiatives, public relations efforts, and outreach services for 2003 through 2007. The majority of goals set for the 2003-04 through 2004-05 school years have been met. For example:

- Teaching staff received specialized training in bilingual education, crisis and suicide prevention, and autism.
- Administrators explained the mission of the school and outreach services to CESA and district officials.
- Outreach staff implemented an additional mentoring program, Guide by Your Side, and increased participation in the deaf mentor project.
- Attendance at the main conferences and training sessions supported by outreach staff increased from approximately 65 educational professionals and 35 families in FY 2002-03 to 147 educational professionals and 125 families in FY 2004-05.

Goals not met include improving the outreach services Web site, completing limited buildings and grounds repairs, and developing a technology plan and a data-based improvement system to integrate student and programmatic data.

The program has been working on two additional goals for the 2005-06 and 2006-07 school years that would provide more services to students who do not attend the school, and to their parents. First, the strategic plan has a 2005-06 goal to develop additional distance learning courses for students who are deaf or hard of hearing and for their parents. As noted, American Sign Language courses are currently offered to hearing high school students in several southeastern Wisconsin school districts through distance learning technology. However, under the current staffing pattern, which includes 1.0 FTE distance learning instructor and technological resources that connect a maximum of three remote sites per class, the program's ability to offer additional courses is limited. Therefore, at this time no additional course offerings are planned for the 2005-06 school year.

The strategic plan also has a goal to develop summer programming for students who are deaf or hard of hearing at satellite sites, with establishment of one site in FY 2006-07. Outreach staff noted that they have begun discussing ideas for the summer satellite program with staff from the Wisconsin Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired, which has several satellite programs, and with staff from the Wisconsin School for the Deaf. While the Wisconsin School for the Deaf's current summer program provides opportunities for students who do not otherwise attend to spend time with others who use sign language, expanding summer programming to additional locations could provide services to a greater number of students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Other opportunities for students who do not attend the school to interact with members of the deaf or hard of hearing community include:

- participating in the deaf mentor project and Guide by Your Side, which primarily provide support to children and their families from birth through age six; and
- the annual Statewide Parent Conference, which offers separate sessions for students.

However, additional mentoring or group activities provided through a satellite summer program could be useful for school-age children who are deaf or hard of hearing, particularly those who attend schools with few other students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Recommendation

We recommend the Department of Public Instruction report to the Joint Legislative Audit Committee by November 1, 2006, on the results of its efforts to increase technological resources for providing additional distance learning courses statewide.

A QUALITY
EDUCATION
FOR
EVERY
CHILD



State of Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

February 24, 2006

Janice Mueller
State Auditor
Legislative Audit Bureau
22 East Mifflin Street, Suite 500
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Ms. Mueller:

I have reviewed the recently completed evaluation of the Wisconsin Educational Services Program for Deaf and Hard of Hearing (WESPDHH) operated by the Department of Public Instruction. WESPDHH is a statewide educational resource for students who are deaf and hard of hearing as well as their parents and teachers. Wisconsin Act 57 (2001) created the center and directed the department to continue to operate the Wisconsin School for the Deaf (WSD), to offer youth summer programs, and to provide outreach services to school districts in Wisconsin.

The audit represents a comprehensive and insightful analysis of the department's progress in meeting the goals contained in legislation for the establishment and operation of the center. We commend the auditors for their recognition of the complex needs of students who are deaf and hard of hearing, some of whom have other impairments as well.

We were pleased with your treatment of the residential school program and expanded outreach program as well. The goals for the outreach program are outlined in a strategic plan that was developed based, in part, on work by the State Superintendent's Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education Council, a broadly-based group of stakeholders required in Wisconsin Act 57. The strategic plan represents the best thinking regarding the needs of this group of children and includes goals to meet those needs. We view the plan for the school and outreach programs and services as evolutionary; with increasingly better understanding of the needs and resources in the state, it will evolve to maximize service delivery options for children who are deaf and hard of hearing. The audit report supports the need to expand our efforts to increase technological resources for providing additional courses statewide.

We believe the audit report identifies the critically important relationship between WESPDHH, including its outreach efforts, and school district staff and parents in the state. We appreciate the finding of satisfactory progress in implementing the majority of goals established in the strategic plan.

Janice Mueller
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We believe the report is constructive and will assist legislators, school districts, the department, and the public to better understand the progress made and the critical work that still needs to be accomplished to improve results for the children we serve. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "E. Burmaster" with a stylized flourish at the end.

Elizabeth Burmaster
State Superintendent

EB:sks