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Governor Baxter School for the Deaf

Review Committee Report

Maine Department of Education

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INTRODUCTION

The Governor Baxter School for the Deaf (GBSD) Board of Directors and Superintendent Roy Bishop III, requested that Commissioner of Education, J. Duke Albanese, dispatch a team to the school to conduct an inspection in accordance with Title 20-A, Section 258-A, for the purpose of addressing compliance with basic school approval regulations, and to provide recommendations for school improvement. A team was identified (see Attachment1) and a pre-inspection meeting was held at the school on Friday, November 13, 1998. The meeting included Roy Bishop III, Superintendent GBSD, Ms. Jane Hecker-Cain, Coordinator of Interpreter Services at GBSD, Dr. Edwin N. Kastuck and Ms. Ethel Macklin, of the Department of Education, Co-chairs of the inspection team (hereafter referred to as the Review Committee). The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the review schedule, to identify school approval and school improvement concerns, and to provide information to assist with the coordination of interpreters.

A comprehensive school review was conducted by the Review Committee on December 3-4, 1998 and included a review of the following:

1. GBSD Board documents
2. Special Education statistical information
3. Results from a statewide Special Education Director's questionnaire
4. Results from a parent questionnaire
5. GBSD Handbook
6. Curriculum and instructional materials
7. Report to the Commissioner of Education of the Review Team of Governor Baxter School for the Deaf – August 11, 1993

In addition, private interviews were conducted (12/3/98 & 12/4/98) with 89 adults, and 41 students. Telephone and TTY interviews were conducted by Dr. Edwin N. Kastuck after the on site review was conducted. An evening forum was held (12/3/98) at which 12 adults presented information pertaining to GBSD.

The following commendations, findings, and recommendations are based upon the review of GBSD documents, policies, statistics, and interviews in a process that engaged 142 people. The report, based on the aforementioned evidence, represents unanimous positions and conclusions of the Review Committee.

COMMENDATIONS

The Review Committee commends:

1. Members of the GBSD Administration, faculty, staff, student body, and parents, who without exception, were cordial and cooperative. They went beyond reasonable expectations in making information available to the Review Committee and were completely responsive to questions and comments during interviews. Special commendation for Ms. JoAnna Luksha, Academic Secretary and Ms. Jane Hecker-Cain Coordinator of Interpreters for GBSD, for their critical roles in assisting the Review Committee with the scheduling of interviews and interpreters.
2. The interpreters who demonstrated excellent interpreter services in a professional and personable manner.
3. Roy Bishop III, GBSD Superintendent for his concern, compassion, integrity, and expertise which are viewed as going a long way toward beginning genuine improvement of the conditions at GBSD. Superintendent Bishop stepped in at a time of crisis and has provided significant leadership.
4. The GBSD students who exhibited a significant degree of sophistication not commonly found among young people.
5. The impressive qualifications and abilities of the support staff, particularly those involved in the food service, security, and building maintenance programs, who make outstanding decisions deploying resources and staff.
6. The teaching staff for their dedication in spite of the administrative turnovers with four superintendents in the past five years.
7. The GBSD Board and Superintendent for requesting this review indicating their desire to create an exemplary program for students who are deaf and hard of hearing.
8. The well organized and strong volunteer program.
9. The Communication Garden (the program for preschool hearing children who are speech and language delayed), which clearly demonstrates that GBSD is focusing on community needs.
10. The members of the GBSD community who expressed a strong commitment to the education of students who are deaf and hard of hearing and the desire to see the institution resolve pressing issues and improve its programs.
11. Parents who, though critical of some of the GBSD programs and practices, expressed strong support for GBSD as a much-needed resource in the State and held out hope that the current activities by the State Legislature and the Department of Education would result in constructive change. They were particularly supportive of the Infant and pre-school

programs as being high quality and unique within Maine. There appears to be willingness on the part of parents to assume advocacy roles for GBSD in constructive efforts to achieve improved programs and services.

12. The new facility for the Parent/Infant Program, Pre-school, and Early Elementary programs and for the outstanding design and functionality of the building.
13. The technology programs at GBSD, which should be nurtured and continued. The GBSD site for the ATM system is a significant achievement and a potential "breakthrough" for the state in its responsibility to deaf and hard of hearing students. It is a state of the art facility and a unique resource among special schools in the country.
14. The leadership of the Maine Legislature and the support of Maine citizens for the recent GBSD bond issue that initiated improvements at the educational building and in the capacity for state-of -the-art Distance Education Technology.

SCHOOL APPROVAL

FACILITIES

1. Finding

The GBSD campus is beautifully located and is spacious. Despite the considerable improvements which have been made to the physical plant, the campus buildings run the gamut from new and beautiful to old and in need of significant repair.

Throughout the older buildings on the campus, paint is peeling, the caulk and sealant are dried up and breaking away, and some buildings cannot be occupied due to recent flooding from leaking roofs. Water damage, mustiness, and suspected air quality issues are pervasive. Overall, the appearance of the school is dismal. The ceilings are in the process of falling down or have fallen and many wallboards have been damaged by water. These conditions often time lead to serious air quality issues. Numerous windows are inoperative and require glass and caulking. The Middle School and High School are in dire need of renovations. The science labs are inadequate for the proper instruction of secondary level sciences. The heating system is quite old and is not properly maintained, resulting in significantly uneven heating. Most of the classrooms and dorm rooms are overheated and present a difficult environment for learning and residential life for students and staff. The enclosed walkways have leaking roofs, which result in icing in cold weather.

Of additional concern is the lack of a contemporary, comprehensive campus wide fire alarm system. The buildings lack contemporary strobe light warning alarms and the directions for evacuation require an update and need to be placed in more prominent locations. The bathrooms in the school do not have visual fire alarms. In addition, there is no fire alarm alert system at the gatehouse, the mansion building does not have a fire alarm system, and the enclosed walkways do not have emergency lighting.

Numerous security concerns exist at GBSD and on Mackworth Island in general. For example, it was reported, (but not observed by the Review Committee) people often walk by the dorms and look into the windows. In addition, the gatehouse is not staffed from Sunday night until Monday noon or while security personnel are making rounds, due to staffing shortages.

Recommendation

The GBSD needs to conduct a thorough physical plant needs assessment for all the buildings and grounds. Title 20-A M.R. S. A. Section 15918 and subsequent regulations (Chapter 064, Section 2B) should be used as a guide when developing a maintenance plan. A Master Facilities plan must be developed which includes immediate attention to safety and cleanliness issues. Staffing patterns need to be reviewed to determine adequacy and effectiveness. A performance-based system for monitoring the maintenance of all buildings should be co-developed by the maintenance, school and administration at GBSD, in cooperation with the Bureau of General Services and include a study of possible alternate uses of available space.

The fire alarm system for the entire facility should be updated and all components should be made compatible. This should include a fire alarm system to be installed in the mansion building and a fire alarm alert system to be placed at the gatehouse.

The emergency exiting information should be replaced with updated and prominently posted descriptive evacuation information. Strobe light visual fire alarms should be placed in the school bathrooms. Emergency lighting should be placed in the enclosed walkways.

A thorough review of safety and security practices and procedures should be conducted immediately. The review would include persons with security and safety expertise. Recommendations for improvements would be reviewed and implemented as soon as possible.

CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, AND ASSESSMENT

1. Finding

There is no consistent curriculum at GBSD. Some people, including many parents, insist that there is no curriculum. Others admit to having a school curriculum that is not followed in a consistent manner. The results of a survey of GBSD faculty by staff member Barbara Keefe sums up the situation rather well. It states that there is an “official” curriculum guide, which may or may not be complete and totally relevant to the program as it is currently structured. Neither the guide nor any other specific guide appears to be used consistently by the faculty. Additionally, there appears to be only minimal progress in integrating the curriculum with Maine's *Learning Results*, as mandated by law. Although there was a large three ring binder in the Review Committee work site that held curriculum for GBSD, some of the teachers reported that they had never seen it nor do they have their own copy. One teacher reported that she had assisted in the development of one section of the curriculum. However, after it was completed, the teacher had not seen it again until the Review Committee showed it to her. None of the faculty interviewed was aware of any expectations by the GBSD administration to adhere to an established curriculum. Instead, the faculty reported that they draw upon several curricula used in other schools for the deaf and adjust these to suit specific needs from year to year.

Recommendation

The GBSD should assure curriculum coordination to include curriculum development, with Maine's *Learning Results*. In addition, it should be assured that GBSD teachers are supported with curriculum applications in a consistent manner across all grade levels. Other schools, such as the Maryland School for the Deaf in Frederick, could be contacted to discuss the approach they use to develop and implement curriculum for students who are deaf and hard of hearing.

2. Finding

Course offerings are too limited and offer little support for student aspirations. For example, there is no pre-calculus, no history (such as modern European or world history), no access to

higher level courses, and no long term options for student academic planning. One student reported repeating courses taken at their previous high school because nothing else was available at GBSD.

Recommendation

Expand the course offerings so that GBSD students may be assured a secondary level educational experience at par with other public schools in the state. The ATM system should be employed whenever possible to provide course offerings from other Maine high school sites.

3. Finding

Teachers and parents expressed concerns about the low literacy rate of the GBSD students. Parents and staff reported that the reading levels are often far below expectations.

Recommendation

GBSD should develop a literacy action plan with goals, strategies, and measurable outcomes focused on improvement of literacy skills. Comparisons between the literacy rates of GBSD students and students in similar schools for the deaf and hard of hearing should also be made; such comparisons could inform the literacy plan.

All action plans and subsequent academic programs must include a process which measures student progress.

The GBSD should continue to emphasize the importance of reading. The faculty should investigate reading programs that are used for programs for deaf and hard of hearing students and agree upon one that meets the needs of the students. This program should also be shared with families and the GBSD Residential Advisors so that reading can be reinforced in the home and in the dorms.

4. Finding

One hundred percent (100%) of the students at GBSD are exempt from taking the Maine Education Assessment (MEA). The Director of Special Education reported that all students at GBSD are special education students and have IEP's stating that the student should be excused from taking the MEA. In general, the assessment of the *Learning Results* in the form of specific knowledge (what students should know) and skills (what students can do) does not appear much in evidence. As mentioned, neither the MEA program nor alternative assessment strategies, e.g., portfolios of performances, were brought to the Review Committee's attention. GBSD is conducting some assessment, but as with curriculum, not always in ways which are consistent, easily quantified, and applicable to known and accepted standards.

Recommendation

All students at GBSD should not be automatically exempt from taking the MEA. This decision must be made on an individual basis. If the MEA is to be administered in the 1999-00 academic year, preparation must begin immediately. The question about special education identification of the students is linked to the prep work. The students, staff, and parents must be included in preparation and planning administration of the MEA. The Department of Education should be contacted immediately to begin the initial phase of MEA planning.

5. Finding

In general, the instructional materials on display for the Review Committee were current. Some of the materials were of very high quality, reflecting the current research in best practices and promoting the *Learning Results*. Art, for example, was an area that stood out, with varied materials, use of technology, and hands on, engaging activities. However, other subject areas, such as secondary level math, were of concern. Several of the math texts were over 5 years old and one was over 10 years old. The Reading Milestones series on display is known to be successful with students who are deaf or hard of hearing. However, many of the teachers interviewed reported that they did not actually use it.

Recommendation

GBSD should inventory the instructional materials and develop a cycle for identifying quality instructional materials and purchasing them. Once identified and purchased, administration should develop a system to ensure they are used consistently throughout the campus.

The system of selection of textbooks and other instructional materials should be established by the Superintendent (with the assistance of the professional staff) and approved by the school board. Textbooks should be up-to-date. Social studies and science textbooks should not be older than five years unless up-to-date supplemental instructional materials are also available.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

1. Finding

The need exists for a clear, focused plan regarding professional development. The present system appears to lack organization and effectiveness. Although there has been committee work in this area, it loses focus through the lack of leadership and time limitations. Some reported that allocations for staff development ranged from funding some years to no funding in other years.

Although there are eleven staff development days in the 1998-99-school calendar, it was reported that teachers had little input into the design, development, or evaluation of these days. Several teachers expressed frustration at the amount of time required to find out about off-site conferences, courses, workshops and the availability of appropriate educational experiences. There was confusion about the approval process for attendance at staff development activities

that occur apart from the 11 scheduled days. It should be noted that eleven staff development days is double what most schools have scheduled into their calendars.

There has been a significant investment in technology (hardware and software)) without an equal investment in training all staff in the effective and efficient use of the new technology.

It was stated by some that a standard orientation program to GBSD was not completed for all staff.

Recommendation

A process should be developed for determining how staff development days will be utilized. A staff development plan needs to be created, articulated and practiced. Within this plan, goals need to be set and articulated for professional development impacting both the school and individuals. Also within this plan, a clear process for requesting and handling requests for off-site workshops needs to be developed.

Sufficient funds must be allocated for a campus wide professional development process. Professional growth is essential for faculty and staff to remain current with techniques, philosophies and practices that promote learning.

The faculty needs to meet regularly as a team to discuss educational issues, philosophies and innovative or "best practices".

ASL courses should be offered for the staff at no cost with expanded dates and offerings.

In order to utilize the new technology, training should be available for all staff as soon as possible. Initial and on-going training must be available for new and existing staff members.

Within the first three months of employment, all staff must participate in a Board approved orientation program.

PROGRAMMING

1. Finding

Some of the students interviewed who had transferred from Maine public schools expressed concerns about having to take courses at GBSD that they had already taken at their previous schools. These were obviously intelligent students who were not being sufficiently challenged at GBSD. They yearned for the best of both worlds: the challenge at their previous school and the ease of communication and peer relations at GBSD. At least one teacher interviewed reported that GBSD students could not keep up with the pace of mainstream classrooms. There was also concern that some GBSD students might not have the requisite skills to succeed in public school classrooms.

Recommendation

Although the local public schools in Falmouth are unable to accommodate additional students, every effort should be made to enable local public schools to allocate a number of openings for GBSD students. The Board should explore and develop mainstreamed opportunities for its students with neighboring schools. Interpreters will be required for these students. Increasingly more GBSD students should become capable of keeping up with the rate and level of sophistication of the mainstream classes.

2. Finding

The Outreach Program works diligently to provide quality services to 340 students and their families around the state. Each educator has approximately sixty-five families spread over a large geographical area. They have time to schedule only one visit to the public school site per year. The educators have extreme difficulty providing follow-up and continued support. In addition, this program is merely tolerated on the GBSD campus. It was reported that staff and educators are reprimanded by those on the island, being told that they are aiding in the demise of the Deaf Community, that they are helping keep students off the island, and if these students did not attend public school, then more than 300 students would come to GBSD.

Recommendation

Staffing should be increased in order to provide adequate services to students who are deaf and hard of hearing whose families choose local public schooling. The funding for this program should not be in competition with the Mackworth Island program funding. The "islanders" should coordinate their efforts with the Outreach Program to truly reach out to those 340 families who need so much support. GBSD should work in concert with the University of Southern Maine to help improve interpreter services throughout the state.

3. Finding

GBSD does not have a certified guidance counselor and there is no comprehensive guidance program.

Recommendation

GBSD needs to employ a certified guidance counselor or the services of a certified counselor as soon as possible. This person should be responsible for providing student personnel services, including guidance and counseling services to all students K-12. The GBSD must develop a comprehensive guidance program and the delivery of the services it describes shall be a coordinated effort of the members of the school's professional staff.

The comprehensive guidance program shall identify the appropriate services to be provided to students at each developmental stage. It shall also indicate how the following services will be provided to all GBSD students:

- 1) A program of structured experiences presented systematically through classroom and group activities to enhance the ability of students to reach their potential;
- 2) A program of activities and planned strategies to help individual students manage their career development; and
- 3) Counseling and consultation services designed to respond to immediate needs and concerns of students, parents, and staff.

The comprehensive guidance program should also give attention to the following goals:

- 1) Encourage parental involvement;
- 2) Provide information to students, parents, staff and appropriate referral sources; and
- 3) Provide management activities, which establish, maintain, and enhance the total guidance program including research, evaluation, programming, supervision, staff development, public relations and professional development.

4. Finding

It was reported that arranging field trips to local points of interest is nearly impossible. Several factors seem to hamper these efforts including scheduling around the sports schedule, receiving signed parental permission slips and the fact that some local parents apparently do not feel comfortable participating in GBSD activities. It should be noted that the sports schedule includes long distance trips to locations such as New Jersey and Rochester, New York.

Recommendation

Since educational field trips can increase a student's awareness of possibilities for their futures, field trip procedures and policies should be reviewed and revised. Scheduling conflicts should be negotiated and perhaps blanket permission slips could be acquired at the outset of each school year. Area businesses should also be contacted with the purpose of developing a resource for student activity. Since GBSD conducts long distance sports trips, it should pay equal attention to facilitating local academic and extra-curricular field trips as well.

5. Finding

Educational programming at GBSD does not appear to be based on an integrated curriculum, supported by assessment data, which is used to develop and improve instruction. Programming tends to be more a function of individual teacher preferences and agreements within departments of the school as opposed to arising from overall leadership and planning.

Recommendation

There is a need at GBSD for improved leadership and overall participation in program planning and development. A first step should include a thorough review of existing curricula and student assessment information. The resulting data could form the basis of an overall needs assessment and set the stage for an appropriate action plan.

PERSONNEL-CERTIFICATION

1. Finding

Prior to the review, the Director of Special Education submitted the following information:

- Of the 17 teaching staff at GBSD, only eight have the required K-12 endorsement Teacher of Students Who Are Deaf or Who Have Hearing Impairments. Four teachers hold an Elementary Education K-8 (020) endorsement. One teacher holds an Industrial Arts/Technology K-12 (700) endorsement and only two teachers hold the Teacher of Exceptional Students (282). No teachers have a subject area content endorsement for grades 7-12.
- Four teachers have been granted waivers by the Commissioner of Education, to teach at GBSD for the 1998-99 school year. [Note: a waiver is granted upon request by a superintendent and is based upon evidence that a person is working towards completion of academic or professional requirements.]

The present supervision and evaluation process is a standard state employee form and process. The Performance Evaluation and the Professional Development Plan sections of the standard state employee evaluation form should be maximized.

Recommendation

GBSD must attract and retain quality staff members who are properly certified. The Board must insist that teachers at all levels have strong content knowledge and effective teaching skills. This is especially important in grades 7-12, so that a challenging curriculum is offered. The Department of Education, in conjunction with the GBSD Board and Superintendent, needs to clarify the certification requirements for GBSD faculty and administrators. This review must include information pertaining to the national certification process and procedures administered by the Council on Education of the Deaf (CED) which has direct affiliation with a network of approximately 50 college and university training programs. It cannot be stressed enough that teaching staff and administration must be properly certified and competent in order to serve this unique population adequately.

2. Finding

It was reported that some of the faculty had not been monitored and /or evaluated for years. Some faculty members believe that this has led to an inconsistent application of the curriculum, confusion concerning instructional strategies and a lack of sound assessment practices.

Recommendation

The evaluation policy and practice should assure that all faculty members receive an annual written instructional evaluation (more often if indicated). The evaluation system and a developmental supervision system should be a high priority of the new Principal. The new Principal should convene a committee of stakeholders to develop a relevant, performance-based teacher and administrator evaluation process. Once reviewed by all, an implementation and training process must occur.

SPECIAL EDUCATION AND 504 STUDENTS

1. Finding

Individual Education Programs (IEPs) do not appropriately address the unique learning needs of the GBSD student. Identical goal statements and related objectives appeared in multiple IEPs. Frequently, there was not a direct relationship between annual goals and present levels of educational performance. This raises the question of the level of individualization of the IEP process.

Recommendation

The U.S. Department of Education issued a policy guidance entitled "Deaf Students Education Services", dated October 30, 1992. Specifically, this guidance states that full consideration of the unique needs of a child who is deaf will help to ensure the provision of appropriate education. Additionally, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 1997 states, in developing each child's IEP, the IEP Team shall consider the deaf or hard of hearing child's needs in a number of areas.

IEPs for GBSD students must be developed and implemented in a manner consistent with the aforementioned policy guidance and statute. In developing and implementing IEPs, Pupil Evaluation Teams (P.E.T.s) must address the unique and individual needs of all students. While the sending schools share ownership in the development of IEPs, the GBSD staff is instrumental in providing expertise at P.E.T. meetings. Their role is to assure the development of appropriate IEPs for its students. The GBSD staff must be prepared to provide information to the P.E.T. concerning how the child's disability affects the child's involvement and progress in the general education curriculum. This information must include relevant evaluation data, which will assist the P.E.T. to not only develop appropriate goals and objectives, but also to determine progress toward these goals and objectives.

2. Finding

There appears to be confusion among school units as to the process used for ensuring that the procedural guarantees set forth in law are carried out (e.g., what are the shared responsibilities regarding P.E.T. minutes, IEP development and distribution, evaluations). In general, it appears that the sending school unit is responsible for sending out parental notices of P.E.T. meetings, conducting evaluations, taking P.E.T. minutes, and drafting portions of the IEP. The GBSD provides draft goals and objectives and distributes the final version drafted at the P.E.T.

Examples of the level of confusion regarding responsibilities include GBSD Special Education staff stating that the sending school is responsible for minutes. In a survey of sending school Directors of Special Education, conducted prior to the review, comments included GBSD has always taken the minutes. Regarding evaluations, GBSD Special Education staff stated that the sending schools are responsible for evaluation services. However, the local Directors comments included that GBSD has said that it would have the occupational therapy evaluations done for the triennial. There are indications that confusion exists about evaluations in general.

Information gathered during the review process also indicated that when it was determined that a particular responsibility rested with GBSD, there was difficulty meeting various timelines set forth in the special education regulations. For example, it was found that sending schools do not always receive the goals and objectives (developed at the P.E.T.) from GBSD within the 21 school day time frame.

Eleven due process actions were filed against GBSD in the calendar year 1998. GBSD had more due process activity than any other school system within the state during the 1998 year.

Of these 11 due process actions, five were complaints. Four of the five complaint decisions directed GBSD to take actions to correct non-compliance with State and Federal regulations. There were three hearings, which resulted in one decision and two withdrawn requests. The hearing decision was found against GBSD and resulted in actions taken to correct non-compliance with the regulations. There were three mediations, which were all unsuccessful.

Recommendation

Acknowledging that it is difficult to coordinate P.E.T. responsibilities for procedural compliance with multiple school units, the GBSD should collaboratively develop a written policy with all sending school units delineating the procedures to be used that ensure the procedural guarantees set forth in the regulations are met. This policy should specify responsibilities including, but not limited to: setting the time and place of the P.E.T. meeting; parental notification; minutes of the meeting; conducting evaluations; and IEP development and distribution.

A comprehensive review of the GBSD special education program should be conducted to specifically review policies, practices, procedures, student records, appropriate responsibilities, services, teacher certification, and in-class instructional compliance with the IEP in order to determine whether or not GBSD is in compliance with all special education laws and regulations. The review should also include a technical assistance component designed to assist GBSD in its school improvement initiatives with regard to special education services.

3. Finding

Interview results indicated that there is a question about whether students attending GBSD should be identified with disabilities under special education or identified under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Maine State Special Education Regulations, Chapter 101, Section 3.1 defines a student with a disability as an individual who has a disability which adversely affects the student's educational performance and requires the provision of special education services in order that the student may benefit from an elementary or secondary educational program. Every student enrolled at GBSD has gone through the P.E.T. process and has been identified as a student with a disability requiring the provision of special education services. Section 2.19 defines special education services as educational services specially designed to meet the unique need of a student with a disability.

Recommendation

The discussion on this issue needs to be resolved for all involved. GBSD should clarify with administrators, staff and parents that all students at GBSD have been identified as having a disability under Maine Special Education Regulations. Since every student has an IEP, GBSD is responsible for the implementation of each IEP and it is responsible for compliance with all Federal and state special education laws and regulations.

4. Finding

Conflicting information was received regarding the provision of supportive services. The question raised was whether GBSD or the sending school unit is responsible for the provision of supportive services. The GBSD Director of Special Education stated that GBSD provides the supportive services. If there is a delay or interruption in services being provided, the sending school is contacted to provide the supportive services through its own provider. Comments from local Directors of Special Education included that they have received phone calls stating that the speech and language services that were provided by GBSD will become the responsibility of the local school unit, or, that services decided upon in the previous year will not be financially covered by GBSD. Directors are unclear why the financial responsibility is shifted back upon the local school unit. Apparently, local Directors were also informed by GBSD that since contracts for services were no longer permitted at GBSD, the local school unit should provide the service or risk non-compliance with IDEA and Chapter 101.

Recommendation

Maine Education Statutes, Title 20A, M.R.S.A., Chapter 304, Section 7407, states that the Board at GBSD shall ensure that services required to meet the individual education programs for each student are provided by the school. Therefore, GBSD must clarify with all sending schools that it is responsible for providing the services identified in a student's IEP. Title 20-A, M.R.S.A., Chapter 304, Section 7401, states that GBSD must comply with all Federal and State laws and Department rules for the provision of educational services to children with disabilities. Accordingly, GBSD needs to implement procedures to ensure that students with disabilities beyond being deaf or hard of hearing attending GBSD, including those under the program auspices, are provided with all the services identified in the student's IEP.

CONCLUSION

SCHOOL APPROVAL

Given the significant deficits present in the current educational program at GBSD, the Commissioner should change GBSD's status from "Approval" to "Provisional Approval" as provided for in Chapter 125 Regulations Governing Basic School Approval, Section 125.28. The deficits include:

1. No school Principal;
2. The lack of a cohesive curriculum, instruction and assessment program including non-administration of the Maine Education Assessment;
3. The lack of a certified school guidance counselor and no comprehensive guidance program;
4. Certification issues that require review and clarification;
5. Concerns about the safety of the facility in terms of the fire alarm system and security practices;
6. Inadequate science laboratory facilities;
7. Classroom spaces that do not comply with maintaining a temperature and air exchange which provides a comfortable environment for employees and students;
8. Improper safety procedures concerning the use of protective eye wear in the science lab and industrial arts areas; and
9. Improper storage of student records.

Accordingly, as indicated in Section 125.28 Governor Baxter School for the Deaf shall be required to file with the Commissioner an acceptable written plan of corrective action. The date for submitting the plan shall be mutually agreed upon by the GBSD Board, the Superintendent and the Commissioner of Education.

The Commissioner should appoint a School Approval/School Improvement Technical Assistance Team to work jointly with the Board, administration, and all staff at GBSD to assist with the development of the corrective plan of action and subsequent measures required for GBSD to meet all school approval regulations in an expeditious manner.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

COMMUNICATIONS

1. Finding

The level of communication between and among individuals and departments within the school appears to suffer from a lack of trust and shared mission and goals. While there is expressed support for the Superintendent, the level of communication and interaction between the Superintendent's management team and the remainder of the staff appears to be minimal. In the absence of a full time Principal, there is a void relative to communication with and among instructional staff. Departments within the school are functioning in isolation from each other. The lack of program cohesiveness and effectiveness has been the focus of repeated investigations, task forces, advisory committees and reviews that have been conducted over the past five years. Ineffective communication, whether it be signed, written or spoken at GBSD, has reduced morale to a seriously low level.

Recommendation

The Superintendent needs to first appoint, then convene supervisors from each component of GBSD. The purpose should be to examine the serious need to establish a campus wide communication system. This group of administrators and/or directors should be assigned the responsibility of soliciting input from all stakeholders, including students and parents, and then submitting a plan to create a campus wide system of communication. The system should include performance indicators and frequent opportunities for assessment and evaluation. Once a system has been designed and approved by the Superintendent, a comprehensive process for dissemination of information about the new system should be conducted. Modalities must be instituted which ensure that communication at GBSD is effective and responsive to all vested parties.

2. Finding

Many GBSD employees are not able to communicate using American Sign Language (ASL) including both lead administrators- Superintendent and Director of Special Education, 6 Business Office Personnel, School Nurse, Cafeteria Workers, 2 Secretaries, 3 Garage Workers, 4 Security Staff and the Supervisor of Maintenance. The level of skill/fluency held by those who do sign is undetermined.

Recommendation

All individuals employed on Mackworth Island must be able to communicate using sign language at a basic level within one year of employment. Additionally, all individuals who have daily interaction with the students including but not limited to teachers and residential assistants must be able to use sign language before they are employed. The Communication Garden

program should be the only exception to the signing requirement. If a standardized sign language assessment does not exist, GBSD must contact Gallaudet or (NTID) National Technical Institute for the Deaf and learn about the assessment tools they use to determine competency in sign language. Minimally, a team of "evaluators" at GBSD could score employees using an agreed upon rubric that would provide guidance for employees to improve their signing skills.

There must be a plan to coordinate interpreters as well as support to employ additional interpreters so the campus will be staffed 7:30 AM to 9:00 PM. Coordination would assure the effective scheduling of interpreting services for the entire complex

3. Finding

There is serious concern from all vested parties regarding communication. Parents, students, and staff all expressed issues involving communication. There is a great need for accurate and reliable information. The issue of a school vision and the lack of communication about that vision was expressed time and time again by students, parents, and staff. Issues around essential communication, (e.g., parental contact to and from the school, daily schedules, expectations by administration, staff to staff, staff to students, students to staff) all suffer to some degree from the poor communication that is prevalent at GBSD.

Recommendation

All areas of school communication need to be reviewed and assessed on a regular basis. The use of newsletters, parents groups, staff meetings, departmental meetings, student council, and a centralized board/clearinghouse for display of pertinent information should be considered. These provide essential connections to facilitate effective communication to all stakeholders. A visual intercom should be purchased and installed in each classroom or at least one per school hallway to keep students and faculty informed.

4. Finding

The GBSD Board has approved the adoption of the Bilingual-Bicultural approach as its language philosophy with the focus being on the development of language and realization of their languages. It is laudable that the Board has considered input from the school faculty and staff and has given its support to the implementation of this approach. There are, however, some practices that should be reviewed. Students and teachers using this approach must "turn off their voices". Several GBSD students wearing hearing aids are required not to use their voices. This must be confusing to students. An ASL environment is a "voice off" environment. It appears that the Board and other stakeholders agreed to an approach that they did not fully understand.

As stated above, the GBSD Board has mandated that American Sign Language (ASL) be the communication/language modality for instruction. GBSD joins a small minority of schools in this regard and places a significant task on all staff and students (especially those who did not grow up using ASL) in becoming fluent in this beautiful, but difficult to learn language. Some of the GBSD staff do not agree with this philosophy and instead use Signed English. To put this into perspective nationally: In 1996-97 the Gallaudet University Center for Assessment and

Demographic Studies surveyed schools relative to communication methods used in instruction. Of the 46,749 students age six and older, 44% used auditory/oral, 52% used sign and speech, 4% used ASL only (Bilingual-Bicultural) and 1% cued speech.

It was reported that some teachers are using a "total communication" approach in their classrooms. "Total communication" is an umbrella term for using a variety of communication strategies to promote understanding. Although this is not in accordance with the Bilingual-Bicultural philosophy, most parents interviewed reported that their children have demonstrated significant improvements in reading and written English levels when they have received instruction in a classroom where the teacher employs a "total communication" approach.

Another aspect of this variance of pure ASL is that the required and inherent "voice off" is in opposition with the use of spoken and signed English. This has created significant dissension between those who support ASL only and those who support spoken English. This has contributed significantly to the poor climate and low morale at GBSD. Individuals who are deaf expressed feelings that there is no open and honest communication between the two groups. People on both side of this issue feel oppressed.

Recommendation

The GBSD Board should consider modification of this policy and permit flexibility in the application of their language philosophy. There must be equal emphasis on the development of both ASL *and* English. Students, who use hearing aids and/or have intelligible speech, should be allowed to develop these abilities further in all classes, extracurricular activities, and in the dormitories. For those students who are developing their residual hearing and spoken language, the "voice-off" rule is a grave detriment to their progress. If hearing and spoken language development is written in their IEPs, then it should be carried out. Certainly the Board must continue to demonstrate support on the concept of Bilingual-Bicultural approach all the while promoting some flexibility. A "voice off" requirement must not exist.

Classes should be taught in the "total communication" approach that stresses both spoken and written English development. This action will not only help raise student academic performance, it would also demonstrate to parents that their concerns have been acknowledged and addressed. A strong Deaf Studies component should be developed across the GBSD curriculum. This could be a "voice off" environment.

The cause of the dissention and friction must be resolved as soon as possible. It is not likely that local mediators can resolve this problem, so consideration should be given to engaging the assistance of a team of deaf and hearing mediators to work on site with all stakeholders. The National Technical Institute of the Deaf and Gallaudet University are likely sources for such teams. There are also deaf and hearing psychologists in private practice who could assist with finding compromise and resolution of the issue. The results of such efforts should be to clarify the philosophy of GBSD and to assure that all practices are aligned. Consideration should be given to assure that the practices and philosophy enable each student to reach his or her fullest potential. If the result is a "voice off" ASL only decision, GBSD must notify all school systems in the State to assist them in deciding whether or not to send their students to GBSD.

SCHOOL CLIMATE

1. Finding

There are indicators from statements of the interviewees, and a certain affect about GBSD, which suggests that the school climate is neither healthy nor positive, at least at the surface level. A part of such an atmosphere may be assumed as natural, based on the recent history of changes in administration and the current studies by the State Legislature and Department of Education. These uncertainties, combined with the existence of philosophical ambiguities, lack of continuity of instructional leadership at the administrative level, and poor internal communication, set the stage for general unrest and low morale.

Almost without exception, the individuals interviewed by the Review Committee stated that morale at GBSD is extremely low. The causes for this are many, and include:

- 1) poor communication within the staff;
- 2) actual inability of the staff to communicate with each other using a common language;
- 3) clash of cultures;
- 4) perceived (or real) lack of respect for the deaf community;
- 5) non-competitive salaries in all positions at GBSD;
- 6) numerous changes in leadership;
- 7) history of controversy;
- 8) lack of pride in one's work;
- 9) hiring of under-qualified or unqualified teachers and other staff;
- 10) poor student performance; and
- 11) anxieties concerning governance.

Although staff members, as individuals, are caring and dedicated, it is not clear that they all care about the same things or are dedicated to the same ends. It seems, from the interviews, that there are those who feel and express that if one is not deaf, one is less.

Recommendation

There is little question that the GBSD staff genuinely cares about the school and its students, parents and other stakeholders. However, there needs to be a removal of real or perceived roadblocks, which inhibit its work and interaction. Stable leadership at all levels is necessary before other problems can be easily assessed and addressed. Some external consultative services and support could help this process move at an acceptable pace. An improved climate would surely manifest itself in the achievement of goals and success for students. There needs to be a clear statement or policy direction from the Board and the Superintendent that everyone at GBSD is equal and will be respected. This not only needs to be practiced, but prejudice must not be tolerated among staff or students and appropriate actions must be taken when such situations arise. An Affirmative Action Coordinator should be appointed and trained to assist leadership in identifying the issues and solutions to address and resolve such school climate issues.

In order to ensure employment of qualified staff, the Department of Administrative and Financial Services should develop a salary schedule sufficient to attract and retain appropriately trained administrators, faculty, and other staff and then encourage the appropriate branches of government to see that the salary schedule is implemented as soon as possible.

STRUCTURE/GOVERNANCE

1. Finding

It is perceived by many that the present relationship/connection with the State is not working well. This system appears to impede the present administration and the Board. Although the Board has been charged by the State to provide the Superintendent with authority and direction to lead and govern, GBSD still must deal with a number of State agencies such as the Department of Education, Attorney General, Department of Administrative and Financial Services including the Bureau of Accounts and Control, Bureau of Purchases, Bureau of General Services, Bureau of Employee Relations, Bureau of Risk Management, Department of Labor including the Bureau of Labor Standards, Department of Conservation, Department of Transportation, and others, plus the State Legislature, in order to carry out its responsibilities to provide a secure environment for the students and staff in which to live and learn. The policies and practices of these agencies and bodies do not provide enough flexibility and the local autonomy required to allow for efficient and effective operation of a residential school and outreach program.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1 and #2 of the Executive Summary (See Attachment #3) of the Final Report of the Committee to Review the Governance Structure of the GBSD, provide the immediate short term strategies for beginning to resolve these issues. The charge to present a more permanent resolution to Structure/Grievance and Leadership issues rests with a new study committee to focus specifically on long range strategies and recommendations. The Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs is currently considering a Joint Standing Order to establish that committee. The recommended charge to that committee is also included in Attachment #3.

Oversight by the Department of Education seems logical, as is the case with other local public school boards. Funding responsibility could be shared through a special legislative allocation recommended through the Appropriations Committee. Legislators, parents, and the deaf community could lobby this budget, as is the similar case with local school budgets.

A structural flowchart should be developed and displayed for all to see. Having the GBSD stakeholders informed as to how decisions are made and that the same mechanisms and procedures are used for all would be a unifying endeavor.

The Board needs to have training in boardmanship concerning appropriate roles, responsibilities, and expectations. Maine School Management and the Maine School Boards Association would be excellent resources for this training, consultation, and on-going guidance.

GBSD has enjoyed strong support from the Department of Education and currently has an agreement with the State to receive technical support and assistance. This agreement is open to review and is due to be renewed by July 1, 1999. The Board and Superintendent should work to ensure that the Department of Education continues to provide needed technical assistance to the school.

LEADERSHIP

1. Finding

The current leadership at GBSD is primarily in the hands of the Superintendent who is a seasoned school administrator as a Superintendent and Special Education Director in public education, but with little background in special school administration. He gets high marks from those who work with him, but he has no deaf educator available to work with him in the position of Education Director/Principal. Thus, he is spread so thin as to dilute his potential effectiveness. The Superintendent also has the title of Principal. The Director of Special Services stated that she has been relegated the responsibilities of the Principal. However, members of the faculty seem not to be privy to that information or perhaps they do not accept it.

During interviews, adults and older students were asked which they would select if given a choice between a leader with educational leadership expertise or one with Deaf Culture membership. Everyone chose educational leadership expertise. They added that appreciation, sensitivity, and affirmation could be acquired on the job.

The GBSD Board members are serious and dedicated to their task but can only give limited time as volunteers. Given the present governance structure, the Board lacks sufficient authority to develop policy and address many of the serious deficits requiring attention.

It was clear from the interviews that staff members had taken upon themselves the task of solving the high incidence of administrator turnover. As the staff came forward to fill a void in leadership there were both positive and negative results. Staff initiative and concern were positive. The negative result was a lack of cohesive leadership.

Recommendation

Clearly, among the highest priorities of the Board and Superintendent is that of completing the roster of administrative team members, in particular a well-trained and experienced Principal. Additionally, staff development for administrators must be included in long range planning. Quality leadership at departmental levels can only emerge with support and direction from top management.

The recommendation of the Governance Review Committee appointed by the State Legislature and Governor, if implemented, will give the Board and GBSD administration increased levels of flexibility and autonomy. This will mean greater responsibility and greater opportunity to develop and exercise good leadership. The new leadership team must make a concerted effort to increase public relations and increase the visibility of GBSD.

2. Finding

The Director of Special Education has more responsibilities than most Directors. From the interviews, it appears that she has become the Principal of the campus. Since all GBSD students have an IEP, the responsibilities inherent in the Director's position alone are significant. Adding Principal duties to the Director's position has placed the current Director in a taxing position and it has reduced the base of leadership at the school.

In addition, the Director, a non-signing adult, has such duties as dealing with student discipline situations and reportedly conducting P.E.T. meetings for deaf students without an interpreter present. This is inappropriate and unacceptable. These incidents of accumulating responsibilities may account for the expression of parents and staff (deaf and hearing) that they have been made to feel alienated by the Director.

Recommendation

The responsibilities of the Director of Special Education should be reviewed and more aligned with those of public school Directors. The duties usually performed by a Principal should be removed as soon as possible once the new Principal is employed.

An effort must be made to attract and hire administrators who are proficient in ASL. Failing that, it must be required that all administrators take ASL classes until they become proficient. Interpreter services must be available until proficiency is attained.

3. Finding

The existing organizational infrastructure is fragmented, resulting in an unclear focus of responsibility, such as in performance reviews and evaluations. Minimal communication was in evidence between and among departments. Statements from interviewees regarding a lack of meetings and information exchange support this finding.

In addition, some ideas and recommendations brought to the Board must also go to State level governing bodies for approval and support. This process can be prolonged and can result in decisions being made by groups or individuals without firsthand knowledge of the decision context.

Recommendation

It must be ensured that a new organizational infrastructure is designed to meet the health, safety and educational needs of the GBSD students. It must also ensure that the essential instructional and supportive services are delivered so that all GBSD students can meet the guiding principles of Maine's *Learning Results* upon completion of their program at GBSD.

Development of a strong and complete infrastructure begins with a strong and active Board leadership and management team. Until further development in this regard is underway, positive and lasting changes throughout GBSD are unlikely to begin.

PLANNING (MISSION, VISION, MONITORING)

1. Finding

The Board has developed and adopted a mission statement that is student centered in content, expressing six objectives for each student. This is commendable. It can serve as a basis for the development of a strategic plan which would chart the path to ensuring the achievement of the objectives contained in the mission statement. The Board has also made significant progress by developing a policy manual to serve as a guide for operations. It is also a good precursor to implementing program review and planning.

However, there is a lack of coherence between the vision, mission, and the decisions and practices that take place. Staff and parents don't understand or see how the decisions that are made are related to the mission and vision. Staff members are not in agreement with the mission and vision. Some have their own personal beliefs and openly express their disagreement with the vision, mission and philosophy. Many stated that they plan to continue to "do their own thing."

Recommendation

The Board and the GBSD stakeholders should engage in a comprehensive process of developing a strategic plan. Such a process will require support from a professional planner/facilitator. Once developed, the plan should be reviewed annually for accomplishments and needed revisions. Prior to beginning this process, it may be necessary for the Board and the administrative team to receive training in planning procedures and strategies.

2. Finding

Parents of GBSD students and employees are unaware of plans for a regular review of programs, curriculum, instruction, assessment, residential life, land, building and grounds.

Recommendation

A long-range plan for the facility must be created and regularly revised. An individual with maintenance background needs to be involved in the long range planning for capital improvement as well as for monitoring daily/weekly/monthly facility needs. Standard operating procedures for issues such as facilities inspection, fire drills, etc., should be part of the planning process. All stakeholders need to be kept informed of the planning process and actions taken as a result.

PERSONNEL (RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION)

1. Finding

The loss of contracted services at GBSD and all state agencies has had a detrimental effect on the entire school program at GBSD. As of 11/30/98, GBSD was advised that it could neither keep current contracts nor enter into any new ones until further notice. Occupational Therapy, Speech-Language Therapy, and Interpreter Services are just a few of the contracted services that were affected. Efficient operations have suffered as well as have compliance with IDEA '97 and Section 504. Many auxiliary employees either had to leave the school or reduce their work time. Some service providers have been offered positions performing the same tasks for less money and more time. While this created a crisis in service delivery, the state Bureau of Human Resources and Bureau of the Budget worked with the Superintendent and Business Manager at GBSD to establish the number and variety of positions required to resolve this issue and provide for the necessary services.

Recommendation

The array of employee positions and contracted positions should continue to be examined. A decision should be made regarding which services are provided by full time state employees and which might best be provided under contracts for service. Public schools in Maine often contract for services such as O.T., P.T., Speech-Language, psychological services, etc. GBSD may need to exercise the same option for contracting services.

2. Finding

GBSD has had minimal success in recruiting from the national pool of professionals trained in administration and instruction in school settings for the deaf and hard of hearing. GBSD is not well known among deaf education professionals. For a variety of reasons, including salaries, which are considerably below that of many other regions of the country, it is difficult to attract personnel with the necessary training and experiential background.

It is difficult to acquire needed position descriptions approved through the State personnel system, especially when such positions do not already exist within the system, e.g., sign language specialist.

Administrator retention has been a problem plaguing GBSD. Modest salary, heavy workload and other conditions of employment surely have contributed to the unduly large turnover of top management.

The employment and retention of qualified teachers and line staff, such as those in food service, is an on-going problem at GBSD. The key issues include salaries, workload, supervision, time and support.

Hepatitis B immunizations were not provided to GBSD staff, although they may be at risk.

The need exists to utilize substitute teachers when members of the faculty are ill or attending professional development programs.

Recommendation

In the short term, the State is working with GBSD to help with some of the technical problems of utilizing contracted employees and in getting job descriptions approved in a timely manner. Over the long term, a revised governance system should provide the Board and Superintendent with more flexibility with such matters. The problem for GBSD in recruiting from a national pool of professional needs to be addressed in several ways. Exceptions to current salary schedules would be helpful in this regard, including incentive pay for credentials in excess of that currently required by the State. Salary ranges for the Superintendent, Principal, and faculty holding nationally recognized credentials need to be increased. Other strategies are needed to improve the standing of GBSD to the national professional community. Showcasing the beauty of its location, the potential afforded by its cutting edge accessible technology, and Children's Garden program and the potential of its interactive television capability are a few of the highlights to be presented.

It is imperative that GBSD pursue a revision of the pay scale to bring salaries of certified personnel more in line with those in surrounding communities. An appropriate and effective staff development program and process should be established for existing staff so that they have the opportunity to become better qualified and better compensated.

The GBSD should contact Ms. Jude Walsh at the Maine Bureau of Health (287-3746), to discuss developing a contract for purchasing Hepatitis B vaccine, and to secure educational materials, consent forms, etc.

Every effort must be made to increase the substitute cadre in order to maintain the continuity of instruction. The Board should explore incentives for substitutes.

Finally, Recommendation #1 of the Executive Summary of the Committee to Review the Governance Structure of the GBSD, provides the immediate short term strategy for beginning to resolve these issues and a new Study Committee to review and recommend long term, permanent strategies for governance structure and personnel matters.

RESIDENTIAL LIFE

1. Finding

The dormitory is generally in good condition, adequately furnished and well maintained. The majority of its 20 plus residents reside there during the week and return to their homes for the weekend and vacations. The current age span in the dormitory is eleven (11) to eighteen (18).

Students of all ages reside in close proximity to one another in the dormitory. While there are separate floors within the dormitory for boys and girls, there appears to be significant

intermingling of students in common rooms and other locations, and little effort to separate students by age appropriate groups or by gender.

The dormitory staff on duty after the close of school until 11 p.m. is comprised of non-hearing residential advisors. This presents a serious safety concern due to their inability to hear hazing, abuse, or distress.

The Review Committee heard testimony from parents that indicate sexual activity sometimes occurs in the dormitory, and that parents are concerned that supervisory staff may not be sufficiently qualified or numerous enough to ensure a safe environment.

Parents, staff, and students expressed frustration that a dormitory employee has been on administrative leave for 9 months, that the attendant investigation has taken too long, and that there has been insufficient information provided on the status of the investigation.

Students who were interviewed regarding residential life spoke favorably about the opportunity to participate in sports, and some wanted a wider variety of team sports. The nature and quality of residential life activities such as discussion groups, clubs, support with homework, and other activities drew few comments.

Recommendation

The two-day review of the entire GBSD facility did not permit more than a cursory review of residential life, but it is clear that a number of issues should be addressed immediately.

First, all residential staffing shifts must include at least one person who can hear. Further, staff and administration should immediately ensure that students in the dorms are supervised at all times, and that all students are engaged in age appropriate activities. In particular, the school must commit itself to providing a safe and healthy environment for all students, and to ensuring that no sexual activity occurs in the dormitory. Knowledge of such activity or circumstances needs to be reported and corrected immediately.

Careful and serious consideration should be given to separating students of different age and gender in the dormitory. Additionally, the school must commit itself to providing continuous, high quality professional development for residential staff, and to hiring enough qualified staff to maintain a sound residential program.

Confidentiality and due process considerations prevent the Review Committee having any direct knowledge of the investigation of personnel matters at GBSD. While the Committee recognizes the frustration experienced by some parents, staff and students, the legal requirements and protections provided to all parties in a personnel matter must be adhered to strictly.

The GBSD Board, the Superintendent, and the Commissioner of Education should collaborate to form a broad-based committee charged with undertaking a thorough review of the GBSD residential life program. The committee should include individuals outside the GBSD community with experience operating residential programs for youth.

The Executive Summary of the Final Report of the Committee to Review the Governance Structure of the GBSD recommends that the new study committee on the governance/structure review both the DOE Program Review Report and any report completed on the residential life program in its deliberation on the governance and structure of GBSD.

FAMILIES

1. Finding

Parents were invited to an open forum via interactive television from three sites on Thursday afternoon, December 3, 1998. None took advantage of this opportunity. However, 12 parents attended the forum that took place in the evening of December 3, 1998. A lively three-hour discussion was held. Parents generally demonstrated a desire to see GBSD thrive and improve. They were highly complimentary of some programs, especially the parent/infant and pre-school programs. They expressed dismay with a few aspects of GBSD, especially their perception that the faculty was not following a curriculum. Some expressed views that the school required a complete overhaul, a "shakedown", with some low performing staff to be replaced. Other comments included "the high school program is more social than academic" and "the school lacks leadership." Parents are looking for help yet they feel that they are not listened to and the school needs personnel with a 'deaf heart'. There is the perception that the school lacks openness and that ASL in classrooms doesn't translate into English proficiency. Parents also believe that some teachers are not qualified and not appropriately certified. A significant parental perception is that the need exists to continue the close ties between GBSD and the Department of Education due to the need for this resource and support system.

The energy in the room during the evening forum attests to the power and enthusiasm which parents can bring to any enterprise which involves their children. A great deal of this energy emanated from the frustration of not seeing their children achieve up to their expectations or that their children were not being served or supported in optimum ways, either now or for the foreseeable future.

It is clear that for many families the decision to send their child to GBSD was a difficult one and one that had serious pros and cons attached to it. Parents expressed the need not to be in that position. They wanted very much to feel more positive and trusting of GBSD.

Parents stated that they are deeply concerned about the safety of their children and the quality of education at GBSD.

The Outreach Program staff reported that the families they deal with need information and affirmation for their decisions regarding their child's education. The Outreach Program families are generally pleased with the academic expectations set by the local schools yet they are deeply concerned about the social and emotional development of their child if she or he is the only student who is deaf or hard of hearing and is feeling isolated. Many of these families have chosen the method of "total communication" rather than ASL, so the Bilingual-Bicultural philosophy of GBSD would not fit their needs or their child's needs.

Recommendation

It is incumbent on GBSD to include families more fully in the education of their children. It is essential to include parents in all-important planning and deliberation activities, which impact their children, and to make families a full partner in improving the programs at GBSD. Workshops and training for parents is a necessary component of this process. Since many of the GBSD parents live from one hour to several hours away, the process of fully including parents in school-related programs and activities presents some logistical problems. However, the accessible technology at GBSD provides an avenue to include more of the distant parents in an increasing array of programs and opportunities. The parents must be made to feel welcome as an integral part in fulfilling the GBSD mission and vision.

There is a need for a parent organization much like a public school PTA where parents can have direct input to the administration, staff, and Board.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

1. Finding

During the first morning of the review, the Committee was able to get a sense of the formalized aspects of GBSD's community relations program. These included making the facilities available for community groups to conduct meetings, the ASL classes being open to any interested community member, and the ITV presentation of ASL courses currently being offered to public high school students as a means to meet the foreign language requirement. Time did not permit the exploration of other aspects of the relationship between GBSD and the nearby and statewide communities through the community relations program.

For example:

- One Board member spoke of a local bank coming onto the campus to set up a banking system for the students. (Note- The present status of this program is not clear to the Committee);
- An Outreach Program worker mentioned that GBSD had participated in an inclusion program with the Falmouth public schools;
- A high school student reported that she is enrolled in a math class at the University of Southern Maine.

Recommendation

Further study should be conducted of the community relations activities and programs at GBSD. Before having a positive and effective community relation's plan, there needs to be agreement on the GBSD philosophy, mission, vision and the overall strategic plan.

ALUMNI

1. Finding

Although the Committee did not have the opportunity to meet with individuals or groups of alumni to discuss alumni activities, it is clear that alumni are welcome at GBSD. It was pointed out that soon, some space on the campus would be established for alumni activities. Also, the museum, which is under development, will provide a great source of pride for the alumni. There is at least one alumnus serving on the Board. The Committee was not informed of any specific program that might be available or planned for the future that includes alumni.

Success or failure of the alumni is not known. It appears that it has not been a priority of GBSD to follow alumni and maintain data that could be applied to essential programming.

Not much was heard from GBSD students regarding their career aspirations. Most students did express a desire to remain in a deaf culture.

The concern was raised by parents that graduates from GBSD have difficulty in succeeding in post-secondary education and the working world.

Recommendation

Alumni are a valuable resource for any school. GBSD is no exception and although its alumni may be small in number, they remain an important voice and support group. To the extent possible, GBSD should support an alumni group in its activities and utilize them on committees and advocacy groups, and to promote student aspirations.

GBSD should track students who enroll and re-enroll in public or private schools. These students should be surveyed about the quality of their educational experience at GBSD, and how well GBSD prepared them for their next school or chosen occupation.

Additionally, GBSD should maintain a database of graduates and keep in touch with them for a variety of reasons. The quality of their occupational, social, and civic lives is one of the true measures of the quality of GBSD programs. They should be invited back to GBSD often and provided an opportunity to give back to their school, in kind, a measure of that which they took as GBSD students.

An annual report of alumni tracking should be completed and submitted to the Board, Superintendent, staff, parents and students.

In addition to establishing strong academic and vocational programs on campus, the GBSD Board should investigate off campus opportunities for school, work, and/or living. A safe transitional housing unit could ease the re-entry process for some students.

CONCLUSION

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Despite the climate of frustration, extremely low morale, and feelings of helplessness, the Review Committee believes that many of the problems that exist at Governor Baxter School for the Deaf can be resolved. There is no doubt that GBSD and its programs are offered in a unique setting to a very unique clientele. The issues surrounding communication, philosophy, history, and state requirements do not lend themselves to a rapid solution to the challenges and controversies facing GBSD. However, careful consideration of the recommendations of the Review Committee and a genuine effort to respond to each could do much to reduce frustration and increase morale within the program. All stakeholders, including those who might feel vindicated by some of the Committee findings and recommendations, must seek lasting ways to work together for the benefit of the GBSD students and their families. Failure to do so may result in further deterioration of the situation, in further erosion of the quality of education, and potentially the demise of the entire program. No one person or stakeholder can afford to believe that his or her personal philosophy or needs warrant special attention or consideration over and above the needs of the GBSD students and their right to a free and appropriate education. It is important to note that the students interviewed stated their strong support for their need to associate with other children who are deaf and hard of hearing. It is vital for them to have the opportunity to share their innermost feelings and thoughts with others that truly understand.

Everyone associated with GBSD must endeavor to create a learning environment that expects all GBSD students to function at high levels; that all students and staff show respect for one another; that all positions at GBSD be filled with people who are qualified and who expect high performance from the students and each other; that all employees in leadership roles demonstrate that they will not accept anything but the best from themselves and others and that they be appropriately compensated for their efforts with salary levels that are commensurate within the field. No more studies of the school should take place until the standing recommendations of all prior reports are disposed of in some way. The students, staff, parents, and all others associated with GBSD should not be forced to suffer the continued and pervasive paralysis of continued review and analysis.

The work of all schools in Maine is work on behalf of children. It is imperative that all GBSD parents, faculty, staff, administration, Board, and perhaps most importantly the State of Maine, move forward with respect, cooperation and flexibility, championing the needs and general well being of the young students who are deaf and hard of hearing attending the Governor Baxter School for the Deaf.

The Review Committee did hear a resounding theme from its interviews with students, faculty, parents, staff and Board members. Namely, they prioritized their need to repair not only the physical plant, but the political and emotional core of the GBSD Community and to move forward.

ATTACHMENT 1

Governor Baxter School for the Deaf School Approval Review Committee

Edwin N. Kastuck, Ph.D., Review Committee Co-Chair, Learning Systems Team, Department of Education

Ethel Macklin, Review Committee Co-Chair, Division of Special Services, Department of Education

Monique Culbertson, Curriculum Coordinator, Scarborough School Department

Karen Rumery, Regional Education Services Team Member, Department of Education

Donna Ford, Director of Special Education, Old Orchard Beach School Department

Richard Abramson, Superintendent, Arundel School Department

Robert Kennedy, Senior Consultant, Spurwink School

Jody Rich, Teacher of the Deaf, George Mitchell School, Waterville

Elaine Tomaszewski, Director of Special Education, Falmouth School Department

Rob Welch, Principal, Oxford-Cumberland Canal School, Westbrook

Dr. Victor Galloway, Chief, Deafness and Communicative Disorders, Rehabilitation Services Administration, U.S. Department of Education, Beltsville, Maryland

Doin Hicks, Deaf Education Private Consultant, Deale, Maryland

ATTACHMENT 2

Governor Baxter School for the Deaf

Enrollment Figures

Statewide Educational & Consulting Services:

Public School Outreach	282
Public School Outreach/Aroostook	74
Early Intervention	55
Parent-Infant/Toddler Program	8
Communication Garden	5
Preschool	<u>13</u>
Total:	437

Academic Program:

Elementary	22
Mid-School	20
High School	<u>20</u>
Total:	62

Grand Total: (students served by GBSD) **499**

Residential Program: **26**

February 3, 1999/ph

ATTACHMENT 3

Executive Summary

In 1996, the Maine Legislature enacted a law that shifted authority to govern operations of the Governor Baxter School for the Deaf from the Maine Department of Education (DOE) to a newly-created School Board at the Baxter School. As part of that law, the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs (Education Committee) was directed to establish a study committee to review the transition to the new governance structure and to report back to the Education Committee by December 15, 1998. The Education Committee established the Committee to Review the Governance Structure of the Governor Baxter School for the Deaf (Governance Review Committee), a 20-member committee chaired by Representative Elizabeth Watson.

To begin its review, the committee familiarized itself with the current systems for governing and operating the school, including the roles of the school board, the Department of Education, the Department of Administrative and Financial Services, the Office of the Attorney General and the Department of Conservation. The committee also discussed current governance issues relating to budget and finance, personnel, legal representation, facilities and property management, and the provision of statewide outreach programs and services to deaf and hard-of-hearing children. The discussions revealed several aspects of the current governance system that make it difficult for the school to efficiently and effectively provide the best programs possible: the complexity and inflexibility of the state personnel systems, the division of authority over property management, the lack of authority for the school board to use funds to provide needed services, and the need to request state funds two school years before actual budget needs are known.

After discussing these issues among themselves and with representatives of the state departments that share governance and operational powers, the committee came to two major conclusions about governance of the school. First, that some steps can be taken within the current governance system to solve some of the school's most immediate problems. Second, that even with some tailoring, the current governance system cannot be made to fit the school board's need to effectively and efficiently govern the school. A new governance system must be created to give the school greater autonomy in managing its affairs.

Recommendations

The GBSD Governance Review Committee unanimously recommends* :

* Committee members Pam Brown and Aaron Rugh were absent from the meeting at which recommendations were approved. The Office of the Attorney General limited its participation on the committee to non-voting status and therefore did not participate in voting on recommendations.

1. That the school board and the state immediately take steps available within the current personnel and budget system to address personnel needs until a redesigned governance system is in place.

Among the most pressing personnel needs at the school are: (1) the need to offer salaries sufficient to attract and retain a qualified superintendent and principal and qualified teachers and other professional staff; (2) the ability to hire substitute teachers and other staff and to hire temporary staff to provide specialized therapeutic and clinical services; (3) the need for better training, development, recruitment and placement of teachers of the deaf and other educational personnel at the GBSD; and (4) the need for incentives for staff to develop bi-lingual competency (American Sign Language (ASL) and English). With the assistance of the Department of Administrative and Financial Services, the committee concluded that, although the school board is not able to solve these problems on its own, there are steps that can be taken within the current state system to address these needs. The committee recommends:

A. That the school board develop and submit a supplemental budget request to the governor to increase the salary for the superintendent position to a nationally-competitive level;

B. That the school board work with DAFS to determine whether the recruitment and retention problems experienced by the school are sufficient to justify an adjustment to salaries for the principal, teachers and other professional educational personnel to more appropriate levels;

C. That the school board work with DAFS to designate currently-authorized positions as positions that can be used to hire temporary service providers;

D. That the school board work with DAFS to prepare and submit a supplemental budget request to the Governor to better provide staff and funding for temporary service needs;

E. That the Department of Education and the State Board of Education review existing certification standards for teachers of the deaf and other professional educational staff to determine whether there are more appropriate ways to measure competency in providing deaf education;

F. That the school board work with the Department of Education to develop plans for improving preparation and development of teachers of the deaf and other professional educational personnel; and

G. That the school board work with the Department of Administrative and Financial Services to create an incentive program to provide stipends to staff to develop the bi-lingual competency.

2. That the budget system be revised to give the GBSD school board flexibility to move money around within its budget without legislative approval and that the board be authorized to submit a supplemental budget request to the Legislature at the beginning of the second year of each biennium.

Under current law and practice, the budget bill enacted by the Legislature specifies the number and type of staff positions that an agency may fill, the dollars that may be spent to pay for personal services, capital expenses and all other expenses. The GBSD school board is not authorized to increase or change the authorized staff positions, even if it has sufficient funds to support the change. Nor is it authorized to use unexpended funds in the "all other" account to pay for needed personal services.

This system is particularly difficult for the Baxter School. The need for specialized personnel to provide services to its students may not be known at the time the school submits its budget to the Governor, which is almost a year before the beginning of the school year to be funded by that budget. Although there are mechanisms within the current system for receiving approval for some changes within the system, the school board feels it is appropriate and necessary for them to be able to make such changes without delay. An amendment to the law allowing for flexibility with some or all of the budget would enable the school to govern the operations of the school more effectively.

The school board also seeks specific authority to submit legislation at the beginning of the second year of the biennium to reflect changes needed for the next school year to meet the Individual Educational Program needs of Baxter School students. It is too difficult to plan 2 years ahead in a school budget without knowing how many students will attend the school, and the specific needs of those students who are designated as exceptional students under federal and state laws.

3. That a study group be established immediately to design a more autonomous governance system for the school, that resources be dedicated to helping the school develop capacity to be more autonomous, and that legislation creating the new governance system be developed for introduction to the Second Regular Session of the 119th Legislature.

The Governor Baxter School for the Deaf is a unique institution in Maine -- a state-funded school for the deaf and hard-of-hearing, with a statewide obligation and role to help local schools educate deaf and hard-of-hearing children and a critical role as the centerpiece of Deaf Culture in the State. To take best advantage of its unique features, the school needs a governance system and management powers that reflect the school's unique status.

Although the committee did not have time to propose a design for this unique system, it did endorse several principles to be met by the new system:

- A school board with legitimate authority to develop policy for the school that is consistent with State and federal laws and regulations;
- Lump sum budget with flexibility to transfer money as needed;
- Personnel not subject to the state personnel classification system;
- School board duty to negotiate directly with employee unions; and
- Employee benefits to be defined (e.g., health and retirement benefits)..

The committee recommends that a group be formed immediately to define a new governance system and to help the Baxter School develop the capacity to implement a system that is more autonomous from the State than the current governance system. The group should be appointed by the Legislature, must represent all interested parties, must begin its work immediately and must report back to the Legislature by December 1, 1999.

The charge to the new committee would be to:

1. Define the basic structure of the new governance system and answer the questions: What does it mean for the school to have autonomy from state government? What are the roles and responsibilities of the school board, school administrators and state agencies? The answers to these questions will determine the extent to which the provisions in the existing Agreement for Administrative Assistance will need to be renewed or renegotiated by the Department of Education and the GBSD School Board;
2. Identify the resources needed for the school board to develop the capacity to perform functions that the school would take over from state agencies, such as personnel and budget management functions. This may involve securing additional staff for the school to strengthen its personnel management capacity. If the GBSD School Board is to bargain directly with employee unions and is to address employee relations issues (e.g., grievance proceedings), the Baxter School must build the capacity to undertake these functions as well;
3. Develop a plan to address the recommendations from the Basic School Approval review and any other necessary reviews, such as a review of the residential program. The Department of Education is performing a Basic School Approval review process this year and will have results ready in January, 1999. Governance Review Committee members and members of the public stressed the need for a comprehensive review of the residential program at the school. A plan to address the results of these reviews should be developed and factored into the planning for transition to a new governance system;

4. Consult with GBSD employees and their representatives so that their interests can be taken into account in designing a new governance system. Employees have an interest in the potential for changes in salary, benefits and working conditions. Planners must take into account existing employee rights under union contracts or state law that may impact the timing or scope of change that may occur at the school;
5. Develop strategies for properly managing state-owned facilities and the natural resources of the island. What role, if any, should state agencies play in managing school property and Mackworth Island? What improvements are needed in the school's physical plant, and who should make the improvements? The deed from Governor Baxter granting Mackworth Island to the State requires the island to be used and managed in a certain way. Should a state agency continue to be involved in managing the island or only in overseeing the school's compliance?;
6. Hire an impartial consultant to help the school, the Department of Education and other state agencies to redefine their roles and shift responsibilities;
7. Establish benchmarks to measure the school's progress toward a more autonomous governance system and require that the consultant, the school and the Department of Education make progress reports to interested parties, including the Legislative committee with jurisdiction over education matters. This gives interested parties an opportunity to give input on the change; and
8. Draft legislation to create the new governance system in Maine law. The legislation should be ready for submission to the Second Regular Session of the 119th Legislature, with an implementation date of July 1, 2000.