

Senate Education Oversight Subcommittee

Summary Report on the SC School for the Deaf and Blind

March 2017



The mission of the agency is to educate students with hearing and/or visual impairments and prepare these students either to enter the workforce, to enter an advanced education program after high school completion and provide them the skills to live independently. The school needs to address the accrual of a growing other funds balance through a specific spending program. The school may also need to develop a more vigorous admissions policy to address greater demand for residential programs. Also, it is recommended that the school be more specific regarding the terms of the affiliation and support agreement with the Foundation to stipulate agreed upon fund raising targets and planned uses for the funds raised as well as considering the cost of providing office space to the foundation.

Agency at a Glance

With a General Fund budget of \$14.7 million and total budget of \$25.1 million, the SC School for the Deaf and Blind operates a school for students ages 5-21 with deafness and/or blindness. Both the School for the Deaf and the School for the Blind are degree granting entities while the Cedar Springs Academy issues certificates of attendance for enrolled students, aged 3-12, with vision and/or hearing disability and one other physical or mental disability. The school also operates an outreach program to provide services for deaf and blind students in their homes and local school districts.

Issues

Student Activity Fees Proviso

The activity fee allowed under Proviso 6.1 is not uniformly collected and raises minimal revenue.

Legislative Recommendation: Since the activity fee is not uniformly collected and generates very little income it is recommended that proviso 6.1 be deleted from the appropriations act.

Adult Vocational Program Fees Proviso

The Adult Vocational Program has been discontinued. Therefore, the fee allowed under proviso 6.4 is no longer collected.

Legislative Recommendation: Since the program for which the fee is authorized no longer exists, it is recommended that proviso 6.4 be deleted from the appropriations act.

Student Maintenance Fee

The fee allowed under S.C. Code §59-47-90, is no longer collected.

Legislative Recommendation: Since the fee cited in the law is no longer charged, it is recommended that S.C. Code §59-47-90 be deleted.

Other Funds Accrual

The cash balance in the agency's special revenue accounts has more than doubled from \$6.5 million at the end of FY 13 to \$17.7 million at the end of FY 16. Since SC Code Section 11-9-125 specifically directs state agencies to "draw down and expend federal and other funds before spending state general fund appropriations whenever possible" this cash accrual over time may be in violation of the state statute.

Agency Recommendation The School should develop a plan to begin expending the other fund balances that have accumulated and request the additional allocation authority in the budget request submission to allow them to expend these funds in accordance with this plan.

Legislative Recommendation: The appropriate subcommittee of the Senate Finance Committee may wish to obtain and approve the agency plan for expending the other funds balance and monitor the expenditures to ensure that they conform to the agency's plan.

Admissions Policy

The admissions policy at the school utilizes very few criteria for determining enrollment. Once a student has met the basic requirement of having an educationally significant vision or hearing disability, the primary consideration for acceptance into the residential program is parental/student choice. If the school begin accepting students into the residential program from within the thirty mile exclusion zone, maximum capacity could be become an issue.

Agency Recommendation: The school should consider revising the admissions policy in a manner that would provide the administration some discretion in admitting additional student to ensure that those most in need of residential services are admitted to the school should capacity restrictions prevent additional enrollment. This would require utilizing the existing criteria to prioritize students for enrollment in each of the three on campus programs.

Transportation

Operating a fleet of 25 school buses and other vehicles, the SC School for the Deaf and Blind has a transportation department that performs the maintenance and repair for all of the school's vehicles. With the school located only about 7 miles from the Spartanburg School District Six offices, portions of this operation might be redundant.

Agency Recommendation: The school may want to undertake a cost study to determine if some of the transportation functions could be performed by the local school district or a private contractor more efficiently.

Foundation

The school provides office space to the Foundation for the consideration of one dollar. This nominal amount does not provide adequate compensation for the cost of the office space provided. Based upon Attorney Generals' opinions are unclear regarding the legality of this arrangement. Also, the Agreement between the two entities does not describe the fundraising goals or specific uses of the funds raised.

Agency Recommendation: It is recommended that the SCSDB either seek to have a proviso passed granting authority for the arrangement it has with the Foundation for office space or charge the Foundation an agreed upon rate determined through a demonstrable process. Additionally, including language in the agreement stating the fundraising target for the Foundation and how these funds will be used for the school and students would allow for an objective determination of the relative success of the Foundation's efforts on behalf of the school.

Campus Master Plan/Facility Study

The agency plans to contract with an outside entity to develop a comprehensive campus plan that will meet the infrastructure needs of the campus well into the future without hindering the operations of the school. The agency's budget request includes \$150,000 in non-recurring funds to accomplish this goal. The age and condition of some of the buildings and infrastructure on the campus make this essential to ensuring that the school is able to provide a safe environment for the students and avoid wasteful or redundant projects.

Agency Recommendation: Until an updated campus master plan can be completed the agency may wish to delay beginning any additional infrastructure projects to ensure consistency with the outline of the campus plan. Should the requested funding for the Campus Master Plan not be included in the state budget, the agency should consider requesting authorization to utilize available cash balances to proceed with this project.