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MEMORANDUM

TO: Members, Utah State Board of Education

FROM: Martell Menlove, Ph.D.
Chief Executive Officer

DATE: April 4, 2014

INFORMATION: Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind (USDB) Quarterly Report

Background:

USDB provides special education and related services to Utah students with sensory impairments under the direction of the State Board of Education, and is advised by the USDB Advisory Council. The USDB Superintendent and Advisory Council Chair will report on activities and concerns quarterly.

Key Points:

The USDB Superintendent will provide the Standards and Assessment Committee with an update on the Advisory Council membership and activities, the USDB budget, and a review of 2014 Utah legislation that impacts USDB.

Anticipated Action:

The Standards and Assessment Committee will receive the information provided and request additional information as needed.

Contact: Glenna Gallo, Special Education Director, 801-538-7757

USDB Superintendent Report

1. **Laser focus on Education** – This item listed first to demonstrate our commitment to keeping our students foremost in our minds as we evaluate and improve our work at USDB. Beginning last summer I have systematically visited our programs, including some of our most distant locations, to witness our education activities and to meet our teachers and students personally. We also recently finished an internal audit of some of our divisions to strengthen and refine our IEP processes and to insure they are consistent with our policies regarding placement and educational goals. We have also implemented a policy to govern our enrichment programs, including setting measurable standards for each program.
2. **Finances** – This year we have implemented budgeting and spend plans to shift accountability and forecasting duties to administrators in each unit throughout USDB. We have also implemented internal controls, timelines, and policies throughout the agency. In conjunction with the state auditor, USDB has released an RFP for an annual audit to provide ongoing transparency. Finally, we have implemented initiatives to reduce paper printing and mileage wherever possible. For example, we recently collaborated with state purchasing to allow dedicated fleet vehicles to certain employees where it is justified in assignments with extremely high mileage.
3. **Facilities** – We have worked with DFCM to secure and design temporary portable facilities to alleviate severe over crowding problems in the Salt Lake County area. They will be functional before the end of the school year and will serve as a temporary facility while a significant roofing project is completed on the main JMS building throughout the summer months. We have recently completed remodeling projects to provide a new activity center and also an area to teach life skills in the school for the blind. In April we will have a ribbon cutting ceremony to publicize the acquisition of a new mobile audiology vehicle. Finally, we have implemented an initiative called “Tidy Tuesday” to encourage clean and orderly work areas throughout the agency.
4. **Legislature** – Steps and Lane increases were included in the supplemental funding bill for USDB, we received \$400k for new teaching positions and \$1.5M for planning and design of our new Salt Lake Center facility. We did not receive \$150k for acquisition and development of our agency database. The bill to transfer our payroll services in house died on the senate calendar on the last day of the session, but it should have no problems next year. We are very grateful for the supportive reception by many legislators this year.
5. **Employees** – We are placing a high emphasis on employee performance plans and annual evaluations for all employees this year – not just educators as required in statute. Our administrative staff has generally responded very well to the additional responsibilities and competencies we have required from them. We funded a Microsoft Office certification program for the professional development of our secretary corps and we also funded a tuition reimbursement policy for those who were previously told they would be required to attain new credentials. Beginning next year we will be offering scholarship programs for a few hard to fill positions, funded from vacancy savings. Our Executive staff has become a tight working group that has improved communications and internal processes by refining business through utilization of the chain of command.
6. **IT and Data Retention** – we have implemented “Wipe out Wednesday” (W.O.W.) to encourage employees to keep their computers, email, and electronic storage updated. We are a couple weeks away from acquiring a new phone system to replace the severely outdated system, which will in turn allow us to transfer our email and many other electronic tools to Google services. This transition will be complete by July 1. Our agency database RFP was released the week of March 17 and we are also implementing an electronic forms and workflow system to alleviate many inefficiencies and frustrations with the previous methods of activity approval and oversight. We have appointed a records officer as required by Utah statute and we are revising our archive process and our records policy.
7. **Communications** – USDB has begun implementation of a master communications plan, including a “Monday Morning boost” (an agency wide message directly from the superintendent), internal and external newsletters, a social media outreach plan involving parents on a rapid response team. On March 31 we launch a new website we have worked very carefully to design for better access and information about our programs.