



Indiana School for the
Blind and Visually Impaired

Shaping the Future of Blind and Low Vision Education

Strategic Plan | 2023 - 2027

Context

Vision loss is one of the top 10 disabilities in the U.S. among adults 18 years and older and one of the most prevalent disabling conditions among children. Approximately 13% of adults and 6.8% of children under 18 have an uncorrectable vision disability, ranging from blindness to significantly low vision.

Previously, children with blindness or low vision were educated through specialized schools, like the Indiana School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ISBVI). These schools were specifically designed to support the unique needs of students with blindness or low vision, providing tailored educational offerings and onsite residential services. The push for education to be more accessible in the U.S. changed that model. Today, youth are increasingly educated in special education programs in K-12 districts, allowing children to remain closer to their families and to be better integrated into their communities. Blind and low vision schools operate in parallel with districts, continuing to provide direct services to students with blindness or low vision and increasingly supporting the work of local schools. The context has brought about several challenges and opportunities relating to the future of blind and low vision schools, including:

- *Enrollment in blind and low vision schools has experienced significant shifts.*
Schools have seen a decline in the number of academic students enrolling in their programs, as these students often stay in their home districts. In their place has been a rise in students with blindness or low vision alongside additional disabilities, many of whom come from underprivileged backgrounds. This dynamic has fundamentally changed these schools and introduced new operational and educational complexities as educators work to meet more diverse needs.
- *Schools are challenged in fully supporting the needs of students with blindness or low vision.*
Educators in local school districts often don't have the specialized training or supports to fully engage students with blindness or low vision, limiting students' academic success and long-term opportunities. Blind and low vision schools are helping to bridge the gaps by providing expertise and reducing burdens and expenses for districts through training and materials.
- *Achievement gaps are growing for students with blindness or low vision.*
According to the National Federation of the Blind, of all non-institutionalized U.S. citizens reported as having blindness or low vision, 53% have achieved a high school diploma or less, 70% are unemployed or under-employed and most are living at or below the federal poverty level. These realities, alongside a growing equity movement, are prompting an increased focus on academic outcomes for students.
- *Blind and low vision schools' current positioning significantly limits their ability to act.*
Many schools, like ISBVI, operate as state-funded special education public schools. This designation, while helpful in some ways, often hinders their freedom to innovate as a school and employer due to the constraints of being a state agency. It also affects public perceptions and limits schools' ability to obtain outside philanthropic support. Additionally, many operate on historical budgets that do not reflect the current costs of providing specialized educational services.

Perspective

For 175 years, the Indiana School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ISBVI) has been the leading provider of education services to youth with blindness or low vision in our state, providing specialized programming on our historic Indianapolis campus as well as outreach services to school districts across the state. Our instructional approach emphasizes academic skills alongside critical independence and real-world training to prepare students for fulfilling and rewarding lives.

Over time, the school has adapted to shifts in the landscape by finding alternative ways to support the educational needs of students. These adjustments have helped the school remain relevant and provide expert support throughout the state. Today, as we examine the current context, we recognize that the circumstances of our environment haven't just shifted - they've fundamentally changed. The scale of today's challenges and opportunities requires more than adaptation. They require transformation. This reality challenges us to take our work deeper and broaden the ways we support the success of students with blindness or low vision in our state.

The following strategies provide a roadmap for positioning ISBVI as the Center of Excellence for the state in educating students with blindness or low vision. Informed by a comprehensive landscape review and stakeholder engagement effort, the plan leverages our school's strengths while challenging us to deepen and expand our work in focused ways. This roadmap will be implemented in phases over the coming years as the school concurrently navigates its transition to a new state-of-the-art campus.



Indiana School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Established in 1847

Vision

Every student in our state with blindness or low vision has access to high-quality and engaging learning experiences that prepare them to lead full and productive lives.

Mission

To serve as the Center of Excellence for the state in educating students with blindness or low vision, ensuring they can access specialized vision-specific instruction and supports needed to thrive in school and life. We do this by disseminating knowledge and best practices, partnering with schools to enhance the educational services offered in home districts and providing direct educational services on our historic Indianapolis campus.

Core Values

The following are root beliefs from which ISBVI operates and works to support the individual needs and success of students who are blind or have low vision:

- We foster a culture of high expectations.
- We promote confidence and self-determination.
- We respect ourselves and each other.
- We value diversity and nurture a sense of belonging for all.
- We challenge ourselves to experience and master new skills.
- We continually adapt the learning environment to reflect our changing world.

Strategic Goals

2023 - 2027



Build our next generation organizational model.



Set the standard in blind and low vision education on campus.



Establish a system for supporting student success in local school districts.



Deliver specialized offerings to address educational gaps and empower students for success in school and life.



Goal 1: Build our next generation organizational model.

Supporting strategies:

1

Re-establish our brand identity to reflect the future direction of our organization and services.

- A. Identify and/or fund a full-time role to oversee our marketing and communications efforts for the school and all related service areas.
- B. Refresh our organizational identity and create more focused messaging for stakeholders. Develop supporting communication for service areas and recruitment efforts.
- C. Build our digital presence by enhancing the website and supporting social channels. Ensure the site structure and content accounts align to best practice accessibility standards.

2

Develop the best talent base.

- A. Establish our employer brand to communicate our identity and mission to current and potential employees.
- B. Modernize our hiring practices by establishing a dedicated careers webpage and expanding recruitment tactics (e.g., broader channel promotion, targeting ideal candidates through social media, implementing an employee referral program and forging strategic partnerships).
- C. Partner with appropriate agencies, organizations and individuals to address high-priority vacancies and/or high-turnover roles.
- D. Develop new entry points and advancement pathways within our organization, including Career and Technical Education programs, pre-service opportunities and job-embedded training models.
- E. Develop a comprehensive onboarding program specific to the organization and the employee's department and position within it.
- F. Create opportunities for seasoned staff to mentor and train new hires through clearly defined benchmarks.
- G. Expand professional development (PD) opportunities for our faculty and staff, including quarterly PD days, job-embedded coaching and specialized external trainings.
- H. Increase the use of recruitment incentives and recognition efforts to secure and retain top talent.

3 Expand our expert voice.

- A. Formalize our expertise through the creation of an online resource and information center.
- B. Develop a coalition of Indiana blind and low vision service providers to collaborate and collectively address opportunities for advancing the quality and coordination of services.
- C. Spearhead the creation of a statewide resource and referral network to better connect individuals who are blind or low vision and their families with critical services and information.

4 Build operational and financial efficiencies.

- A. Conduct a review of our current internal capacity and operations and address opportunities through technology and modernized processes.
- B. Strengthen and maximize the organization's relationship with the Indiana Blind Children's Foundation. Align requests to shared priorities and funding gaps.
- C. Build organizational technology capabilities, ensuring operational and educational technologies are up-to-date and aligned to best practices.

5 Create the conditions for success.

- A. Deepen and maximize School Board involvement through education, training and engagement opportunities.
- B. Align our staffing structures and financial resources to explicitly support strategic objectives.
- C. Foster a vibrant, engaged and inclusive culture that prioritizes diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging across all facets of our school. Establish a committee to drive action.
- D. Leverage the new campus and its co-location planning effort to actively participate in and inform the future environment.



Goal 2: Set the standard in blind and low vision education on campus.

Supporting strategies:

1 Strengthen student learning outcomes.

- A. Evaluate curriculum to identify and address academic gaps, misalignments and opportunities to improve student outcomes.
- B. Differentiate instruction to address individual learning styles and abilities to maximize student outcomes.
- C. Integrate technology into all aspects of the curriculum during the school day and afterschool programs.
- D. Grow professional development opportunities for faculty and staff in priority areas, such as differentiated instruction, diversity, equity and inclusion practices, supporting children with multiple disabilities, managing challenging behaviors and assistive technology.
- E. Expand methods for capturing student progress during their ISBVI tenure, utilizing Individual Education Plans, the School Improvement Plan and other means to be determined.
- F. Build our capacity to use data to inform and improve teaching and learning practices.
- G. Support student leadership programs to develop a self-determined student body.

2 Enhance our family experience.

- A. Institute a communication app to manage family communication and encourage further engagement. Leverage the app for both teacher-family and school-family communication.
- B. Create regular opportunities to share information about a child's learning and development outside of IEP meetings.
- C. Expand and formalize education/training supports for families at key touch points to increase engagement (e.g., new family onboarding, start of new school year, transition to middle school/high school, college and career planning, etc.).
- D. Establish a family teacher organization (or model) to provide opportunities for families to work with administrators and teachers to supplement and enrich the educational experience.

3

Create a continuous and immersive learning environment.

- A. Realign organizational culture and staffing structures to support a continuous and integrated learning experience that spans the school day and after-school hours.
- B. Extend formal educational opportunities beyond the school day to support increased learning outcomes. Support by allocating or reallocating professional positions to offer core curriculum as after-school programming.
- C. Deepen the Expanded Core Curriculum offered during afterschool programming through activities, routines and enrichment programs.

4

Expand academic and enrichment opportunities for students.

- A. Develop an engaging set of community-based enrichment programs to be offered on and off campus. Secure partnerships and philanthropic funding to support, ensuring the implementation model minimizes staffing and operational burdens for our school.
- B. Expand the elective offerings available to our students through partnerships with local school districts. Provide supports for student success.
- C. Increase opportunities for students to become prepared for college and career through strategic partnerships and work-based learning programs.

5

Establish year-round school offerings for both our students and students from other school districts.

- A. Offer expanded core curriculum intensives during summer.
- B. Provide core curriculum intensives for academic students who need or want more intensive work in a subject.
- C. Provide specific core offerings (e.g., physical education, STEM courses, etc.) that allow non-ISBVI students to fulfill course requirements while receiving expanded support and transfer credits.



Goal 3: Establish a system for supporting student success in local school districts.

Supporting strategies:

1 Build our role as a statewide intermediary.

- A. Deploy a hub strategy to build and enhance our ability to address blind and low vision education service gaps across the state. ISBVI hubs will serve as regional bases for delivering shared resources and services to local school districts, making ISBVI's expertise more accessible for all. Target district partners within each service area, providing service benefits in exchange for operating space.
- B. Formalize ISBVI's service offerings for school districts and develop supporting marketing and outreach strategies to build awareness and interest among leaders for partnership opportunities. Emphasize the benefits of accessing ISBVI's model (for students, educators and administrators) versus managing within the district.
- C. Offer incentives or benefits for districts and/or staff to transition to ISBVI services or employment.
- D. Align staffing and financial resources to support model growth, including moving toward a centralized, statewide educator pool through strategic hiring and related incentives. Leverage marketing strategies and incentives to facilitate transition.
- E. Proactively build relationships with district administrators through marketing and communication efforts, ensuring their awareness of ISBVI service offerings and benefits.

2 Provide expert, value-adding services to support student and district success.

- A. Deliver specialized blind and low vision services at local school districts, including evaluations and assessments, direct services for students and consultative services for educators.
- B. Provide professional development opportunities for local educators on expanded core curriculum, best practice instructional strategies and adaptations of materials, training and assistance with vision/functional literacy assessments, etc.
- C. Offer specialized, short-term opportunities to come alongside school districts and address knowledge and skills gaps for students. These include short course offerings, summer and distance learning opportunities and short-term placements (semester or year-long).
- D. Continue to provide accessible educational materials (AEM) to school age students, who are blind or low vision, in school districts through the Indiana Educational Resource Center (IERC).

3 Make the case for a shared network of blind and low vision services.

- A. Fund a study of the cost and quality benefits of providing blind and low vision education services through a shared service model.
- B. Develop a proposed model for Indiana to share with state leaders, the Indiana Department of Education, district administrators and other stakeholders for future consideration.



Goal 4: Deliver specialized offerings to address educational gaps and empower students for success in school and life.

Supporting strategies:

1 Develop a network for connecting students with blindness or low vision and families with ISBVI-hosted opportunities and other partner offerings.

2 Leverage our campus to provide specialized offerings for students with blindness or low vision statewide.

- A. Provide enrichment programs to students statewide through digital formats.
- B. Offer programs during summer and school breaks to help close knowledge and skills gaps and further support students' academic success in their home district. This includes providing specific core offerings that allow students to fulfill course requirements and receive transfer credit.
- C. Expand Short Course, including to younger age groups, as a means of providing more opportunities for students with blindness or low vision to experience success in core and expanded core curriculum.
- D. Offer short-term placements (semester or year) for students to come to ISBVI at the high school level to receive expanded core curriculum while maintaining progress in the core curriculum required by Indiana standards, thus promoting transfer of credit.
- E. Establish distance learning offerings to connect students to our classrooms and specialized course offerings. Ensure necessary operational and technology infrastructure is in place to support.

3 Expand college and career prep services.

- A. Refresh and expand the Student Employment and Training Program (STEP) to provide students with meaningful exposure and experience to career opportunities.
- B. Pilot work-based learning (WBL) training programs that allow students to develop important employment skills while earning a small wage.