

## **SCHEDULE D: AGENCY WORKFORCE PLAN**

### **Functions**

Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) has an array of programs that serve the almost 11,000 students identified blind, low vision and deafblind throughout Texas. Our goal is to transform educational outcomes for students, ages birth to 22. In some cases, we serve as a special public school for students ages 6 through 22 on the TSBVI campus. We also provide support in the form of online courses, consultations, publications, and in-person and virtual trainings throughout Texas, addressing the needs of students that may never set foot in Austin. Family education and engagement is at the heart of what we do.

Our employees are our greatest strength. We are blessed with direct care staff that are dedicated to improving the education and lives of students.

TSBVI has a strong reputation for our educational and outreach programs focused on students who are blind, low vision and deafblind. Schools, educators and parents across the state and even the world access our training, our curriculum and request to visit our campus.

### **Anticipated Changes over the Next Five Years**

While it is expected that the primary functions of TSBVI will largely remain the same over the next five years, the complexity of the needs of students and educators across the state has grown and regulations continue to evolve and expand. COVID-19 pandemic greatly impacted teachers either retiring or leaving the profession. The pandemic also significantly affected our application flow for our other posted vacancies, particularly Resident Specialist, Teacher Aide and Vehicle Driver IV (requires CDL). These vacancies have resulted in delayed student admission as well as reevaluating who is eligible for residential services. Beginning in the 2022-2023 school year we began to limit the area we accept students in our dorms. Those within 45 miles of TSBVI are considered day students and no longer eligible to stay in the dorms.

#### **Vision**

All Texas students who are blind, deafblind, or have low vision will be empowered to lead productive and fulfilling lives.

#### **Mission**

We serve as a leading center of expertise and resources, working in partnership with schools, families, communities, and organizations to transform outcomes for students, ages birth to 22, who are blind, deafblind, or have low vision.

#### **Philosophy**

We believe in the independence of students who are blind, deafblind, or have low vision. All staff at TSBVI collaborate to increase statewide student potential.

We believe that our mission, established by the people of Texas through our legislature, is to serve all students in Texas through partnership with families and local educational teams. By doing so, TSBVI ensures that Texas receives the greatest value for its investment in the promising future of our students.

We believe that the expertise developed at TSBVI since 1856 continues to grow in its leadership. We are committed to using this expertise to eliminate barriers through instruction in all areas of the Core and the Expanded Core Curriculum.

We believe that the State of Texas has established a statewide educational system for students who are blind, deafblind, or have low vision that is widely recognized as among the very best in the nation. TSBVI is honored to play a key role in the achievement of this recognition.

## Additional Considerations

### Lack of competitive salaries

#### Alignment to AISD for contract staff

TSBVI teacher and professional contract salaries are tied to Austin Independent School District (AISD) in state statute. AISD's pay rates have not kept pace with other local districts resulting in a negative impact on TSBVI's competitiveness. The vast majority of students served on site at TSBVI have special education needs, so our teachers and professional contract staff must possess a more complex skill set than a typical school district. In addition to the normal subject and grade level certifications required by TEA, TSBVI teachers must be certified in both special education and visual impairment due to the wonderfully unique population we serve. This pay gap has worsened as a result of AISD's budget challenges. It is particularly heightened with hard-to-fill positions where TSBVI struggles to compete with other school districts. This can result in overburdening our existing staff to ensure that TSBVI provides needed services for our students and meets our obligations under state and federal Special Education regulations. Salaries that are below the market value compromise our ability to attract and retain critical qualified staff. As a result, we struggle to compete with the private sector and other states for qualified staff resulting in shortages in critical positions such as Teachers.

#### Non-contract staff

TSBVI has significant issues competing with other school districts and the private sector when recruiting and retaining staff. The recent pay changes the legislature implemented (5% effective 7/1/2023 and the upcoming 5% effective 9/1/2024) have helped. However, we must be able to continue these increases to be competitive as well as be funded to permit merit increases for high performing employees.

When you take our starting wages and apply the mandatory retirement contribution, this moves further into a non-competitive position. This is particularly true for entry level positions, where the applicant is focused on paying their monthly bills versus having a longer term view of planning for retirement. We are particularly impacted in our hiring of Residential Specialists.

Registered Nurse (RN) is a key position where we are not able to compete with the private sector. Due to the medical complexity of our students, to include the amount of medications given, TSBVI targets experienced pediatric nurses. The COVID-19 pandemic only worsened the competition for nurses as well as drastically increased the wages.

TSBVI must be funded in such a way to be able to respond to the market minimally on an annual basis. The school districts, and in many cases the private sector, that we compete with are making those changes.

#### Cost of Living

Affordable housing is a real issue for our employees. According to the Austin Board of Realtors the median home price has increased to \$443,065 in February 2024 for the Austin-Round Rock-Georgetown MSA. According to rentdata.org, "Compared to the rest of Texas, the Austin-Round Rock Fair Market Rent (FMR) is more expensive than 100% of the state. Fair Market Rent prices in Austin-Round Rock are **very high** compared to the national average. This FMR area is **more expensive** than **97%** of other FMR areas. Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Austin-Round Rock is \$1,924 per month. The previous year, rent for a two-bedroom home was \$1,626 per month. This is a 18.33% increase year-over-year." This kind of exponential growth makes it very difficult for staff to afford to live in the Austin-Round Rock-Georgetown MSA.

## Current Workforce Profile

TSBVI is a 24/7 facility. For FY2024, our staff is comprised of 465 budgeted positions (282 full-time and 183 part-time employees). These numbers do not include substitute employees, who work on an on-call as needed basis. Of those budgeted positions 333 are classified and one, the Superintendent, is line item exempt. The remaining 131 employees are teachers, principals, counselors, and other educational positions that, by statute (Texas Education Code 30.024(b) (1)), are paid in accordance with AISD pay scales for comparable positions. Because the majority of our employees do not work continuously through the summer and other school breaks, our FTE count varies depending on the quarter. Our average estimated FTE count for FY2023 was 321.8.

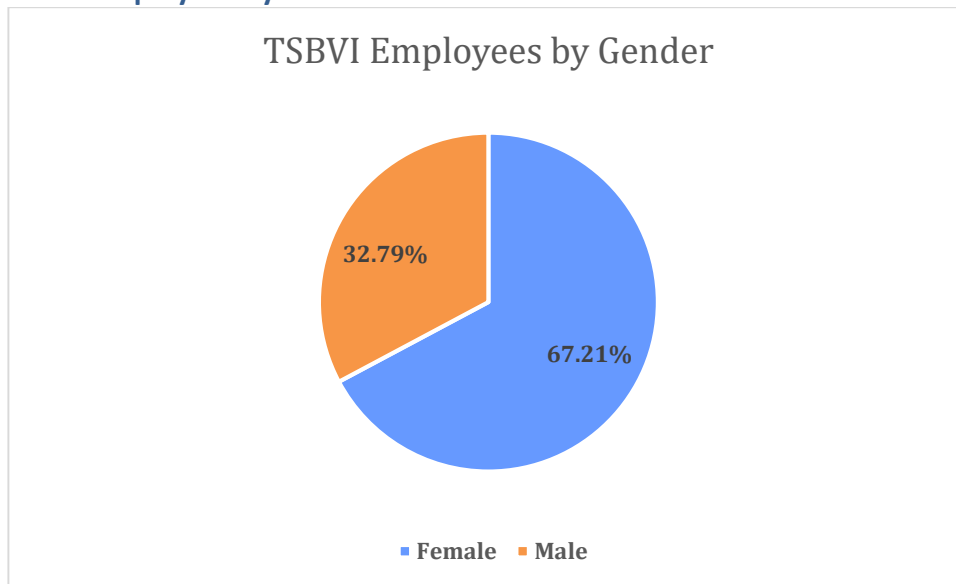
Among the classified positions, the single largest staff group (120 positions) consists of residential instructors (classified as direct support professionals). As a residential school where students stay with us overnight and some on weekends, these staff are key to providing care, instruction, recreation and supervision of students in their non-school hours. Other classified positions range from nurses to maintenance mechanics, from accountants to technology specialists. The campus-based workforce is a small community with nearly every occupational field represented.

TSBVI has focused on increasing the diversity of our staff to include hiring of employees who are blind or low vision. Their personal experiences can connect to our students on a whole other level of understanding.

### Demographics: Gender, Ethnicity, Age, and Tenure

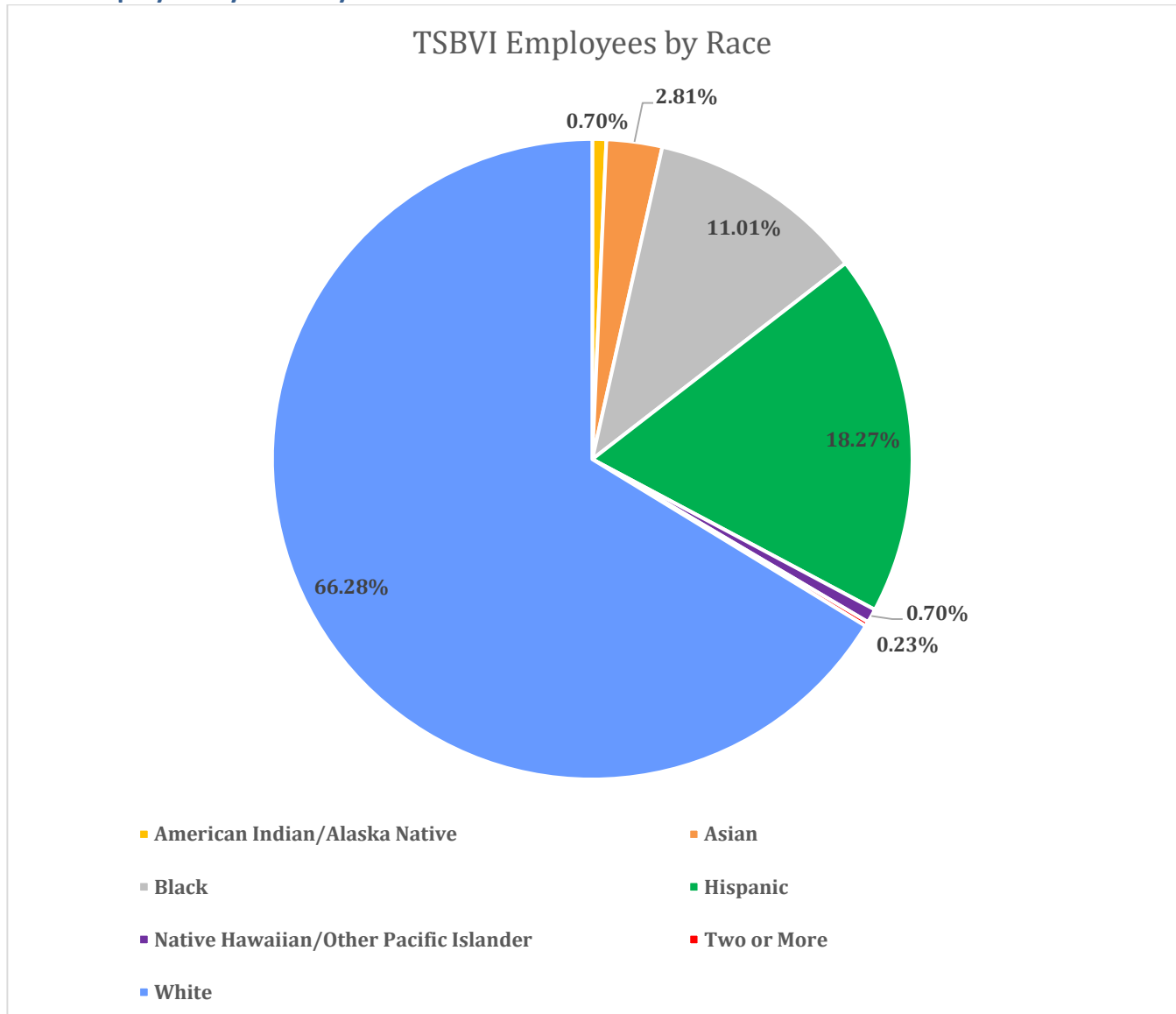
The workforce data presented excludes substitutes.

#### TSBVI Employees by Gender



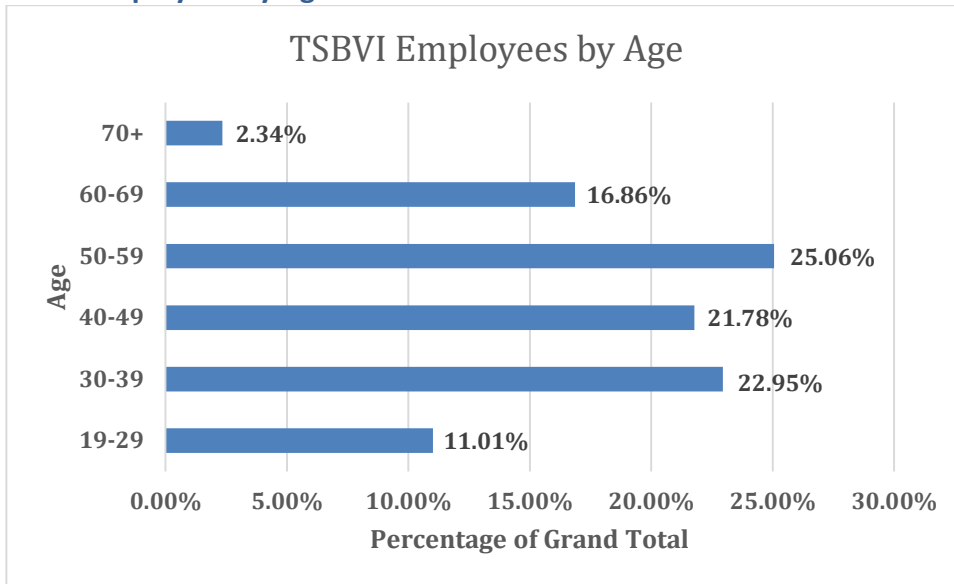
TSBVI has a higher percentage of female employees which aligns to the field of education but is different from other state agencies. The breakdown of employees by gender has stayed fairly constant.

## TSBVI Employees by Ethnicity



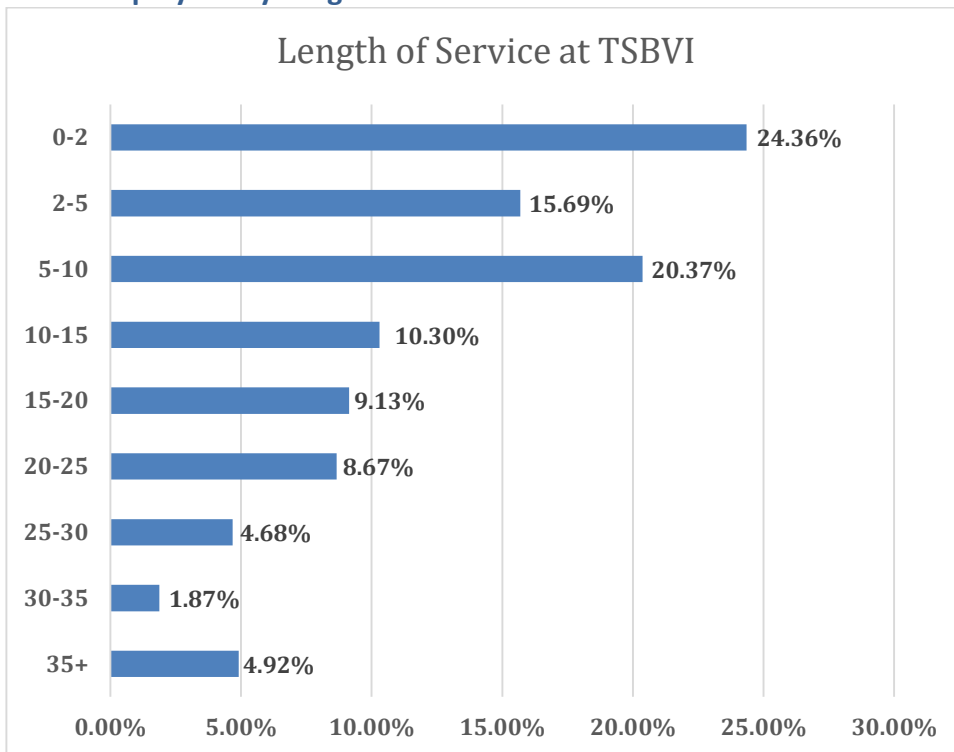
While overall TSBVI has a high percentage of white employees, we have focused on increasing diversity in all positions but specifically in our teaching staff to more align to our student population.

### TSBVI Employees by Age



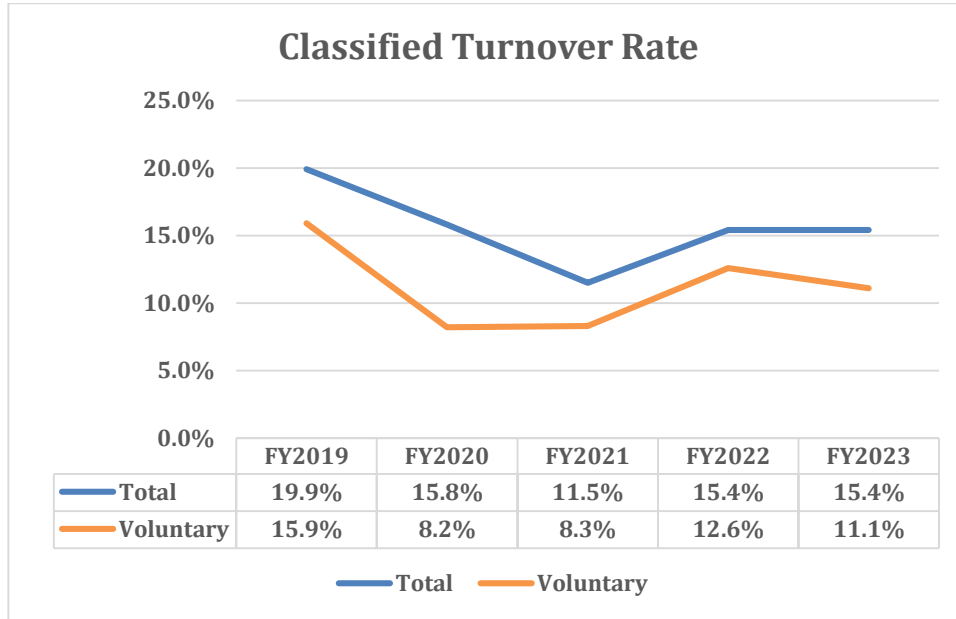
Approximately 65% of our staff are over the age of 40 which makes succession planning key.

### TSBVI Employees by Length of Service



Around 30% of our employees have 15+ years of service at TSBVI, including more than 12% having over 25 years. Many of these employees have additional state service separate from their time at TSBVI.

## Overall Turnover Rate



The numbers above are from the Texas State Auditor’s Office (SAO). SAO reports TSBVI’s turnover rate for FY2023 as 15.4% overall and 11.1% voluntary. However, the SAO data only includes Classified employees (excludes substitute employees as well as contract staff turnover) so does not provide a full picture of our agency’s turnover.

We continue to see turnover in our direct care Classified positions (e.g., Direct Support Specialist). Often these employees change to a substitute status and remain employed to work as needed. We have had continued difficulty recruiting and retaining these employees who are critical to our student care in Comprehensive Residential Programs including Weekends Home. The salary movement TSBVI and the state made in the past couple of years has been helpful as has the recruitment bonus.

## Critical Workforce Skills

TSBVI’s teachers and other educational professionals are at the core of what we do. Additionally, direct care paraprofessionals (e.g., Teacher Aides) extend the capabilities of teachers during the school day and provide care, supervision, recreation, and instruction to students during non-school hours. The remainder of our employees work in support of those that work directly with students. This final group of employees offer a wide variety of administrative, technical, and other skills paramount to our school/agency’s success. Based on our wonderfully unique school/agency, the following skills and credentials are critical to the performance of our mission:

- A human service orientation with a strong desire to work with or in support of children and students with disabilities from birth to age 22.
- Proficiency in working with students who are low vision, blind or deafblind as well as may have multiple disabilities, including autism and orthopedic impairments.
- Proficiency using and instructing students in the use of specialized technologies for the low vision - one of the most critical options (and ever changing) available today for providing access to the world of information for blind learners.
- Proficiency in instructing students in career education and other subjects related to transition to adult life.

- Specialty certifications dependent on position:
  - Certification as a teacher of low vision students and special education.
  - Paraprofessional certification and qualified under No Child Left Behind Act.
  - Certification or licensure in the professional areas that comprise special education related services required for our students: Orientation & Mobility (O&M) Specialist, Licensed Specialist in School Psychology (LSSP), Educational Diagnostician.
  - Other professional licensure to support our students: Speech-Language Pathologist, Physical Therapist, Occupational Therapist, Librarian, Social Worker, and Nurse.
  - Educational administration certification
- Knowledge of statewide services, regional programs and local school districts and how to collaborate with them.
- Proficiency in training and consulting skills.
- Proficiency in leadership and management skills.
- Proficiency in database management, technology, and skilled trade areas that support all School functions.
- Proficiency in business and administrative support areas that support all School/Agency functions.
- Skill in working collaboratively as a team member.

## Future Workforce Profile

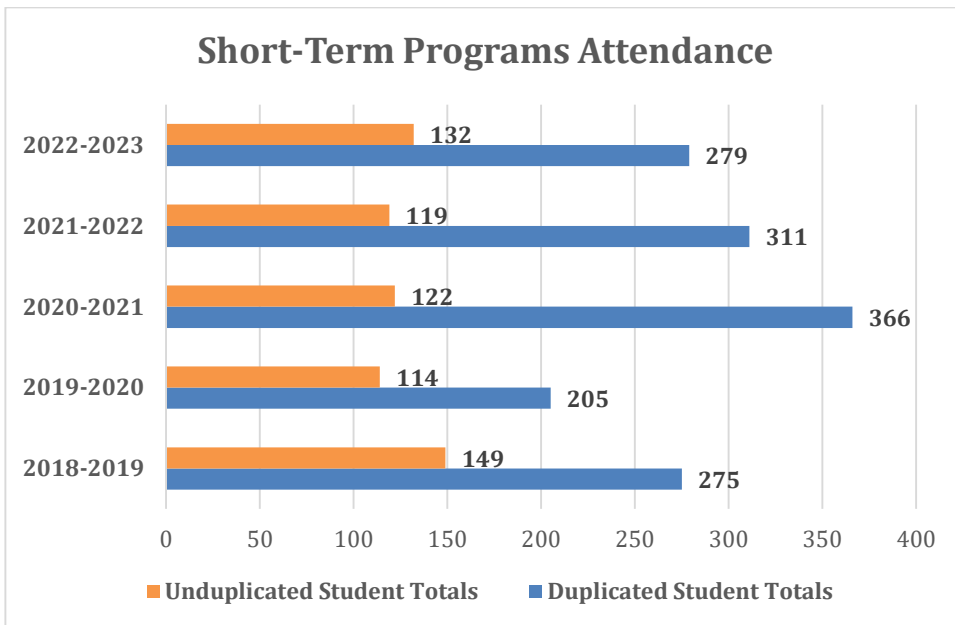
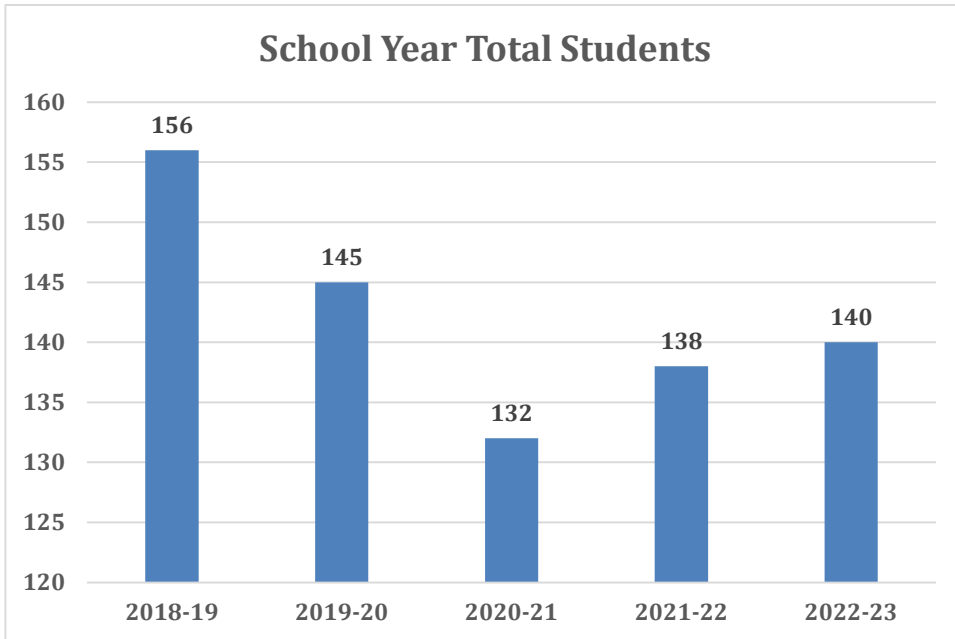
### Expected Workforce Changes

Comprehensive Programs (regular school year) has seen regulatory changes in the services to be provided to students which has resulted in hiring additional targeted positions to meet those recent requirements (e.g., tutor support for HB 4545). We expect these types of regulatory changes to continue. At times the changes are immediate and at other times they are for the next school year.

Short-Term Programs (STP), the area that provides TSBVI Summer School, saw a decrease in summer school students during Summer 2019. This was largely driven due to lack of Residential Specialist staff available to support students. We had plans in Summer 2020 to increase enrollment and were on track to do so and then COVID-19 hit. We instead offered a virtual summer school. We saw an increase in the numbers for Summer 2021 and have returned to our pre-COVID numbers.

We have seen an increase in the amount of training staff are required to participate in due to regulatory changes (e.g., Trauma-informed Care, Seizure Recognition, and Bleeding Control). This has resulted in turnover becoming even more costly. When we hire an individual and they complete the required training only to leave TSBVI for a higher paying job, that training time (and the expense of them completing) is lost.

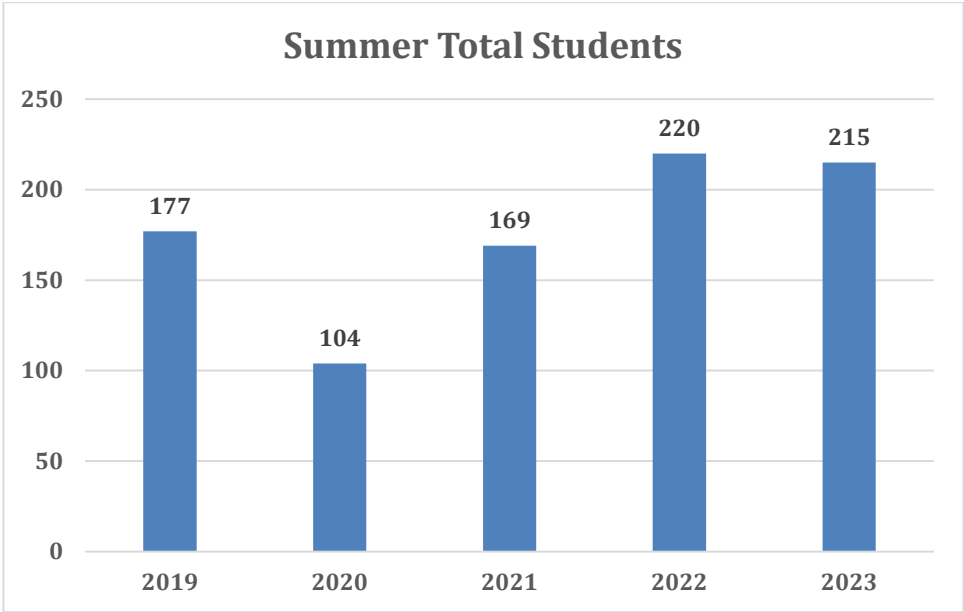
TSBVI has an ever expanding reliance on technology, both to execute the School's core mission and to assist in all support activities, resulting in the School needing to have employees proficient in the use of technology as well as highly skilled technical staff to support it.



Some students attend multiple Short-Term Program sessions so both totals are reflected.

- Duplicated students refer to total students in all sessions.
- Unduplicated students account for the number of unique students attending any session.





In Summer 2019 student enrollment was down due to staffing issues in the Residential Specialist position. In Summer 2020 student enrollment was down due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

**Future Workforce Skills Needed**

Many things about the TSBVI workforce will stay consistent however our staff’s skills must continue to evolve to respond to the complexity of our students, their mental health needs, and recent regulatory requirements such as more of our teaching staff requiring English as a Second Language (ESL).

TSBVI will continue to have a steady demand for certified VI teachers and O&M instructors, but will also need teachers who are certified in VI along with auditory impairment, ESL and subject specific (e.g., math, science, and geography).

We will continue to need certified or licensed professionals in the related services areas, but with particular emphasis on counseling and assessment personnel to respond to the need for more intensive services related to student behavioral disorders and emotional needs. Related to this need, our staff providing direct services to students, whether professional or paraprofessional, must expand their skills managing students' behavior and emotional needs.

**Anticipated Changes in the Number of Employees Needed**

It is difficult to forecast future enrollment, because we cannot ordinarily predict how many or which students will be referred to TSBVI, and we cannot know the extent of their needs until they have been assessed. A referral from a local district to TSBVI can take place at any time, and it is a complex, highly regulated review process. Our goal is to have the student remain in the home district with their family and friends when possible. Students come to TSBVI, when their local school district is not able to fully support their educational needs. We strive to support the education of the almost 11,000 students in Texas whether it is through attendance at our school or through additional support to their school district. Nevertheless, we do not expect a decline in enrollment or demand for other services.

## Workforce Gap Analysis

### Anticipated Surplus or Shortage of Employees

We anticipate shortages of employees in the following areas:

- Teaching and related services
- Teacher Aide
- Residential program (Residential Specialist)
- Weekends Home program (Residential Specialist, Vehicle Driver)
- Substitute employees

### Anticipated Surplus or Shortage of Skills

We anticipate shortages of skills in the following areas:

- We will continue to have an insufficient supply of VI teachers and related service professionals due to retirement and other attrition.
- As technology continues to become more integral to most jobs, increasing technical competence (and comfort with technology advancements) is key. In addition, in some jobs, the required competence level increases with technology related to visual impairment.

## Strategies for Workforce Transition

### Succession Planning

One of our focus areas is ensuring we consider succession planning and that processes are documented by our management team. We have potential for retirement in some key roles and want to ensure the valuable institutional knowledge is not lost and ensure the smoothest possible transition to successors.

For many years, TSBVI has benefited from a staff committed to working with our students. Many of these staff started in our Residential Program and went on to further their education to move into a teaching and management role. This career progression gives the opportunity for a rewarding professional career.

### Direct Instruction and Service

#### *Visual Impairment (VI) Teachers*

Action steps to ensure adequate supply of VI teachers:

- Continue to administer the VI teacher preparation project established by legislative rider. This includes continuing to financially support the Texas universities (Texas Tech and Stephen F. Austin) that offer VI teacher preparation in return for their assurance of a minimum number of graduates per year, providing mentors for teachers in training, and providing workshops for new teachers to minimize attrition.
- Work to assure the continued funding of the VI teacher preparation project by documenting the outcomes of the program and communicating them to the funding sources.
- Grow our own VI teachers from within TSBVI:
  - Identify and encourage degreed paraprofessionals (e.g., teaching assistants) who could complete alternative teacher certification in Special Education through the Region XIII Education Service Center program. After completion of this program, employ them (if vacancies occur) as first year classroom teachers to fulfill their internship.

- Hire promising teacher candidates who already have Special Education or other related certification.
- Require all teachers hired under both circumstances to obtain VI certification over a designated period of time. Provide tuition reimbursement for those who complete coursework toward VI certification.

### ***Related Service Professionals and Teachers with Additional Certification***

Action step to ensure adequate supply of related services professionals (e.g., Educational Diagnosticians, Speech/Language Pathologists) and specially certified teachers (e.g. English as a Second Language, Science):

- Continue to identify “high need” credentials based on actual and expected attrition.
- As funding permits, utilize the existing procedure that provides for teachers to receive tuition reimbursement for completing coursework toward credentials designated by the School's management as "high need."
- Actively solicit interest among current VI teaching staff in these opportunities.
- Actively recruit and train interns.

### ***Outreach Specialists***

The majority of outreach specialists are highly experienced VI teachers or professionals in the field of deafblindness. Most of our current employees have progressed to this position following a successful career as a provider of direct instruction. Based on that they are nearer retirement age than the average employee. It is estimated that a significant number of staff in this group will be eligible to retire within the next five years, whether they choose to do so or not. The classroom teacher staff at TSBVI provides a natural “training ground” for future outreach specialists; however, many teachers would not be interested in this role due to the extensive travel and longer work year. Generally, vacancies in this area require a national or at least statewide search.

Fortunately, the very nature of the outreach specialist job involves extensive networking in the fields of visual impairment and deafblindness, both on a state and national basis. Our Outreach program is well known and respected so there is an increased change to recruit candidates from a wide pool and many are usually well known to us.

## **Management**

### ***Educational administration***

Several employees in this area have already retired and returned to work. It is expected that succession will be accomplished through filling from within or conducting a national search for outside candidates. Our practice of developing lead teachers helps ensure our future supply of educational leaders. After a slate of interviews, we are promoting an assistant principal to a principal role for the new school year which will be available following the incumbent’s retirement.

### ***Management of Support Functions***

The non-programmatic management positions are currently staffed with competent, experienced professionals. Although these are critical and highly skilled positions, they – unlike the educational administrator positions – do not require educational certification, and they have counterparts in other state agencies or the private sector. Should one of these position come vacant, we will follow our normal recruitment approach.

## **Recruitment and Retention**

### ***Residential Instructors***

On-going review of the program continues with goals to identify opportunities to improve our recruitment and retention of Residential Instructors (classification Direct Support Specialists) for both Comprehensive Residential and Weekend Home Programs.

## **General Recruitment**

TSBVI has had great difficulty getting a sufficient number of applications. Some of this is due to the time it takes to initially register for a WorkInTexas account as opposed to the private sector. Following TSBVI going live with the new WorkInTexas product in August 2019, we have seen a marked decrease in submitted applications. The decrease was so dramatic that went back to accepting the fillable State of Texas Application (SOTA). Over 50% of our applications are the fillable SOTA. We saw an even further decrease in application due to the pandemic.

TSBVI developed a recruitment plan which includes a focus on increasing our presence in various forms of media which had been used on a very limited basis previously related to recruitment.

TSBVI has implemented on-site career fairs as another step to enhance our recruitment efforts. Our first career fair in July 2023 was a success. We plan to host two in 2024 in preparation for the 2024-2025 school year.

## **General Retention**

In October 2023, TSBVI asked UT's Institute for Organizational Excellence to again administer an engagement survey. We had a 75.4 (up from 73% response in November 2021). Questions could be scored between 100 and 500 points with 350 being the tipping point that determined a positive response. Of the 12 overall areas rated, "Pay" was rated as the most negative with 277 points (up from 249 points in November 2021). This continues to align to what we have experienced with recruitment and retention.