

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY****Title:** Legislative Update on Evaluation of Services to Students with Hearing and/or Visual Impairments**Type of Executive Summary:**

- Action       Action on First Reading       Discussion       Information

**Policy Implications:**

- Constitution \_\_\_\_\_  
 General Statute # \_\_\_\_\_  
 SBE Policy # \_\_\_\_\_  
 SBE Policy Amendment  
 SBE Policy (New)  
 APA # \_\_\_\_\_  
 APA Amendment  
 APA (New)  
 Other Session Law 2007-323 (Section 10.20)

**Presenter(s):** Ms. Angela Quick (Deputy Chief Academic Officer, Curriculum, Instruction, Technology and Accountability Services) and Mrs. Mary N. Watson (Director, Exceptional Children Division)

**Description:**

The General Assembly, through Session Law 2007-323 (Section 10.20) and in response to a study conducted by its Fiscal Research Division, directed the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to 1) conduct an evaluation of the State's service delivery model for deaf and blind students, 2) determine whether the schools for the deaf and blind should remain under DHHS management or be transferred to DPI, and 3) develop a plan to reduce institutional capacity to an appropriate level. The Departments conducted an evaluation and reported in April 2008 that more time was required to fully examine these matters. Recommendations included forming two committees - one to examine the issue of residential schools governance/administration, and the other to examine how a free appropriate public education (FAPE) can be ensured for students with vision loss and/or hearing loss. The attached report is a follow-up to these recommendations.

The Departments formed these committees and examined the issues presented. The Governance Committee deliberated on the issues of direct management of the residential schools (i.e., North Carolina School for the Deaf, Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf, and the Governor Morehead School for the Blind) and that of non-residential and non-day school programs (i.e., Governor Morehead Preschool, Early Intervention Program for Children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, Governor Morehead School Outreach Program, and the Resource Support Program). It arrived at a recommendation that the overall administration of the residential schools should remain with DHHS, noting that there are no identified cost savings with a transfer to DPI and such may, in fact, increase costs due to the need to establish an administrative office within DPI. DHHS already has this office (Office of Education Services, or OES) which serves many other State-operated educational programs (see Attachment C). It also concluded that the early childhood programs should also remain under DHHS, as this mirrors other same-age programs administered by DHHS divisions. Finally, it concluded that the school-age outreach programs should collaborate routinely with DPI, as the functions of these programs closely align with and complement the monitoring, support and technical assistance currently provided by the Exceptional Children Division.

The FAPE Committee examined many issues, most notably the ability of local educational agencies (LEAs) throughout the state to provide the wide array of special education, related services and placement options required by federal and state special education laws and regulations. Many LEAs reported capacity for fully providing all necessary services to these low-incidence populations, while others expressed some difficulty. The committee developed a proposed model for LEA-hosted/LEA-administered programs to serve multi-LEA areas, with additional support and resources from DPI and DHHS. The proposed model was shared with LEA Exceptional Children Directors in meetings throughout the state. More than sixty-five percent (65%) indicated interest in participating in such a model. The FAPE Committee proposes moving forward with establishing pilot regional programs. It states that this could build local and regional capacity that would, in turn, reduce institutional capacity to an appropriate level, as required by the legislative directive.

