



# **OKLAHOMA Rehabilitation Services**

## **MISSION**

**Empower Oklahomans with disabilities**

## **DUTIES/RESPONSIBILITIES**

**The Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) provides assistance to Oklahomans with disabilities through vocational rehabilitation, employment, independent living, and residential and outreach education programs. The agency also determines medical eligibility for disability benefits.**

**For more Information**

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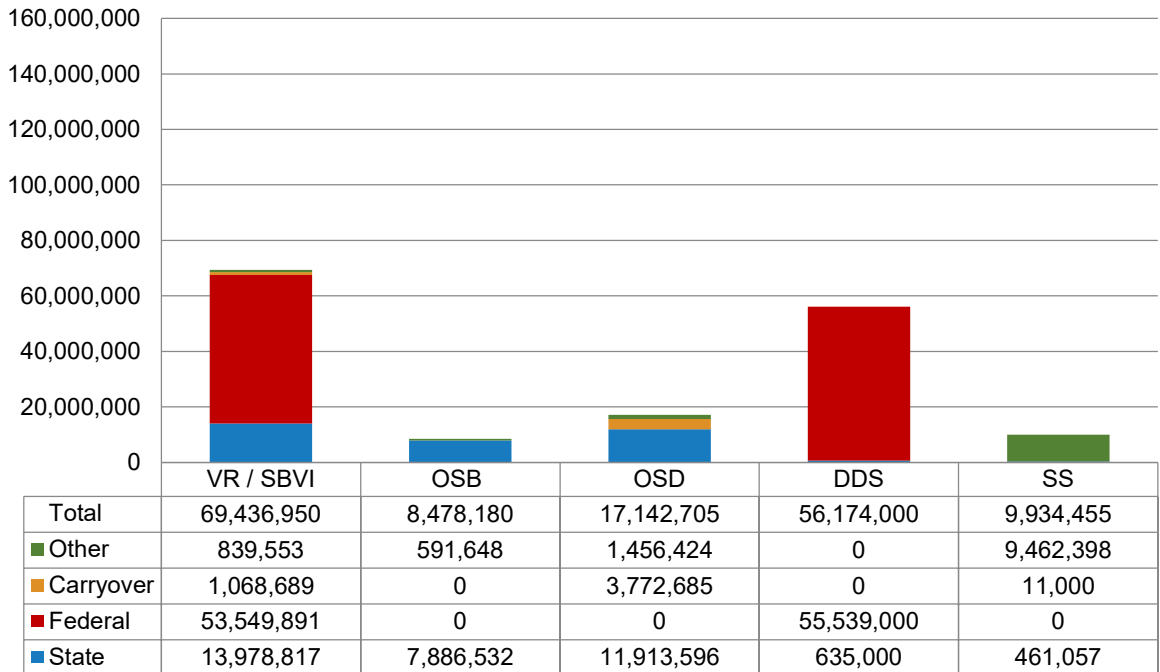
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**DRS Website  
<http://www.okdrs.gov/>**

## Program Expenditures, Budget

Program	FY 2018 Actual Expenditures	FY 2019 Actual Expenditures	FY 2020 Actual Expenditures	FY 2021 Actual Expenditures	FY 2022 Projected
Vocational Rehabilitation and Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired	51,452,635	53,127,720	53,432,884	47,805,209	69,436,950
Oklahoma School for the Blind	6,629,181	7,344,574	8,252,197	7,776,469	8,478,180
Oklahoma School for the Deaf	8,052,572	8,920,666	9,707,959	10,071,468	17,142,705
Disability Determination	40,057,771	41,242,972	41,034,266	42,170,354	56,174,000
Support Services	7,619,148	8,742,302	9,510,814	8,992,154	9,934,455
<b>Total</b>	<b>113,811,307</b>	<b>119,378,234</b>	<b>121,938,120</b>	<b>116,815,654</b>	<b>161,166,290</b>

**DRS FY 2022 Budget by Revenue Source**



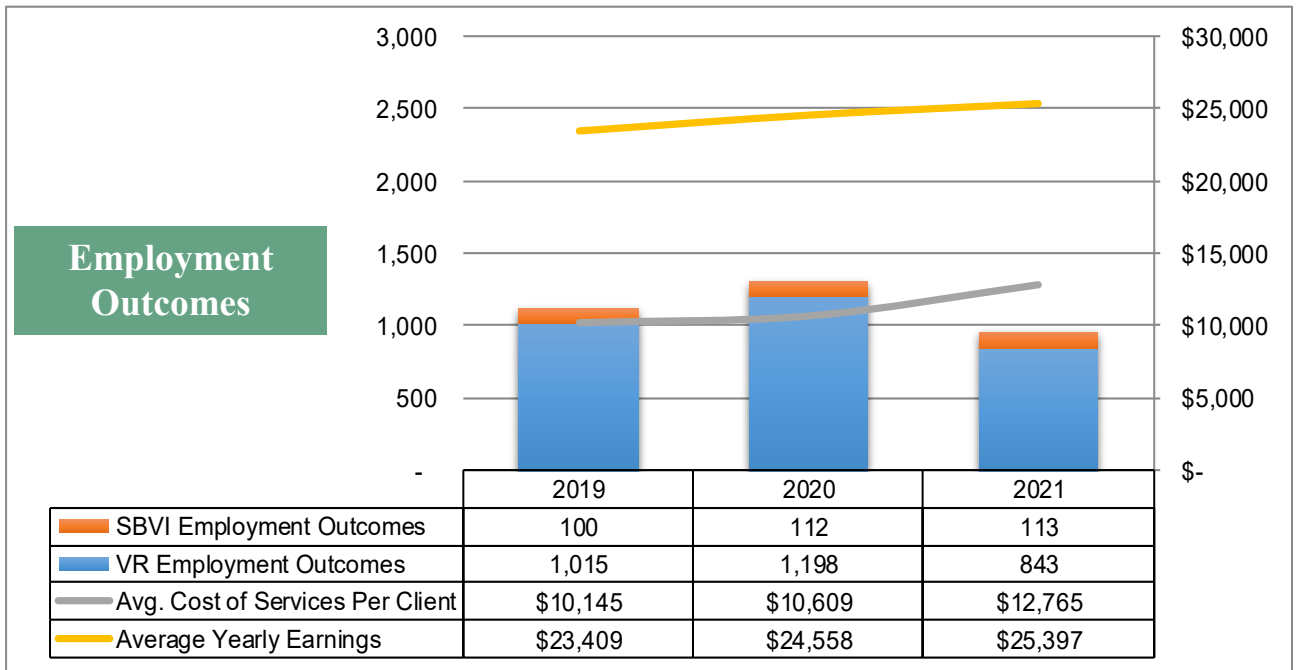
**DRS Total Budget \$161.2 million**

## 82,533 INDIVIDUALS WERE SERVED BY DRS DURING STATE FISCAL YEAR 2021

Division	Constituents Served in SFY2021	# of Counties Constituents Reside In
Vocational Rehabilitation 43 Offices in 28 Counties	9,229	77
Services for the Blind & Visually Impaired 15 Offices in 11 Counties	1,300	73
Oklahoma Library for the Blind Oklahoma City	5,638	77
Oklahoma School for the Blind Muskogee, Oklahoma	494	57
Oklahoma School for the Deaf Sulphur, Oklahoma	12,728	76
Disability Determination Services Oklahoma City, Tulsa	53,144	77

# 82,533

**Divisions of Vocational Rehabilitation and Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired** are funded through both federal and state funds. The Federal agency responsible for monitoring and funding these divisions is the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). The federal agency awards \$4 for every \$1 the state invests in DVR/DSBVI (Federal share 78.7% and state share 21.3%).

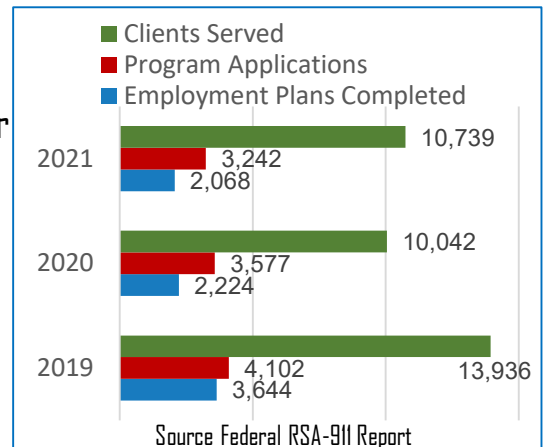


### Achievements

- ◆ The primary goal of the Vocational and Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired Divisions is to assist individuals to find gainful employment. Successful employment closures were achieved for 956 individuals.
- ◆ Increased services under WIDA (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act) in the area of Pre - Employment Transition Services
- ◆ Wages increased on successful outcomes from \$24,558 in SFY20 to \$25,397 in SFY-21
- ◆ Developed customized employment contracts through Employment Support Services (ESS); and developed policy to improve internships with On the Job Experience (OJE)
- ◆ During SFY-2021, 3,571 participants were removed from the waiting list to receive services.
- ◆ Improved partnerships through MOU agreements with Tribal VR Programs.

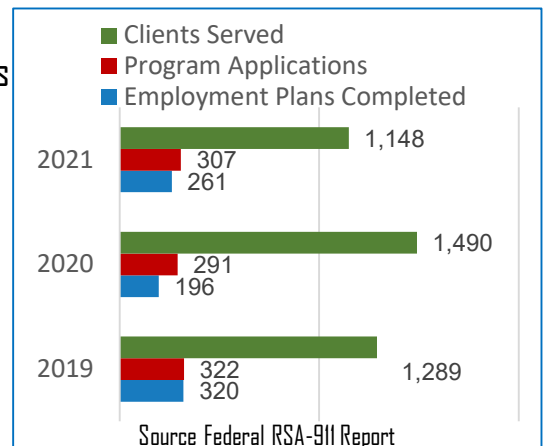
## Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

provides vocational rehabilitation services for individuals needing support to enter careers of their choice. As a result, thousands whose disabilities were barriers to employment become taxpayers each year, eliminating or reducing their need for disability benefits and social assistance. DVR includes three career planning centers, a transition school to work program, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program, Benefit Planner Program, coordination with the American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation program, and outreach to minority and under served populations.



## Division of Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired

offers vocational rehabilitation services to thousands of blind and visually impaired Oklahomans each year to help them enter the workforce. In addition to quality employment services, DSBVI programs include the Business Enterprise Program (vending facilities), the Oklahoma Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, a Rehabilitation Technology Lab, an Older Blind Independent Living program, Rehabilitation Teaching Services for the visually impaired and a transition school to work program. Consumers enjoy an enhanced quality of life as a result of the multiple services provided by this division.



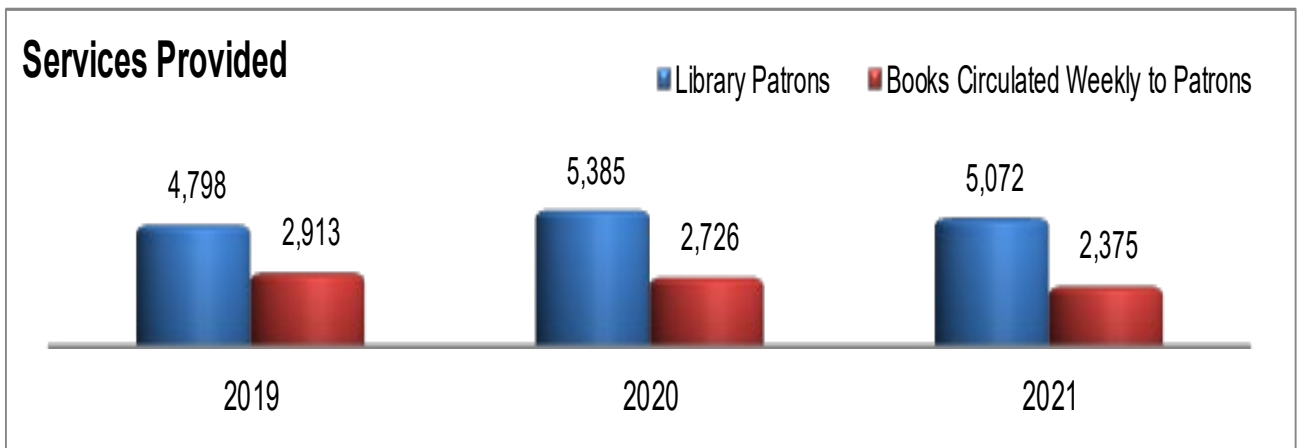
### Current Issues

DRS has Statewide programs providing services to all 77 counties. As such, recruiting new staff into rural areas has proven to be difficult. It is easier to recruit from within the communities, but small labor pools and competition among other social service and education careers makes this difficult.

WIDA changed the federal metrics that analyze all employment programs using a common set of standards. Individualized services are a proven model to best serve disabled consumers. A challenge is to adapt and comply to the new metrics without losing the consumer, in the name of efficiency.

**Oklahoma Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped** is a unit within the Division of Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired serving children and adults throughout Oklahoma. OLBPH provides thousands of books, periodicals, textbooks, and other instructional materials in recorded, large print and Braille formats for library patrons and students with visual impairments in K through 12.

Library operations are funded through state appropriations. The Library may qualify for certain federal grants as they are available. The state is eligible for money for Braille textbooks through Federal Quota funds, which are set aside through the American Printing House for the Blind. Hundreds of children are eligible for textbooks purchased through Federal Quota funds each school year.



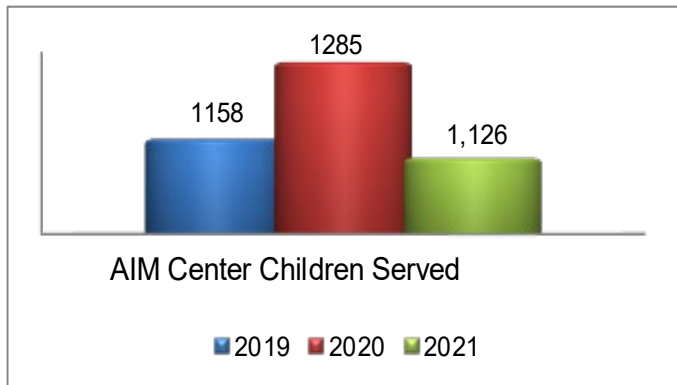
### Achievements

OLBPH started Duplication on Demand (DoD) whereby patrons can receive multiple title cartridges verses a single title on each cartridge, with the goal of moving 75% of patrons to the Duplication on Demand (DoD) delivery system by 12/31/21 and 100% by 6/30/22.

OLBPH has continued to provide audio book library service/circulation and AIM Center student services through the COVID-19 pandemic by employing a mixture of staggered on-site scheduling and work from home options. To accommodate virtual learning requirements, the AIM Center is shipping textbooks and equipment directly to students' homes.

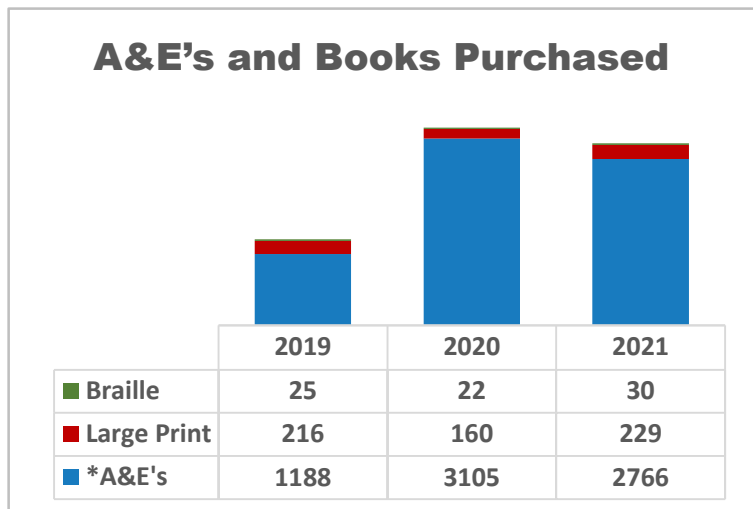
## Accessible Instructional

**Materials (AIM) Center** serves children in pre-K through 12th grade who attend public and private schools in Oklahoma. Braille and large print textbooks, instructional materials and specialized educational aids are provided to children who are blind or visually impaired, have a physical disability or a medically diagnosed learning disability that makes it difficult to use regular print. The AIM Center maintains a central depository of Braille and large print textbooks and other specialized instructional materials for loan to Oklahoma students who cannot use regular print. The Center also maintains the Federal Quota Registry of blind and visually impaired children utilizing the funding to provide accessible instructional materials.



### Savings or Efficiencies

We now have a Library Technician in the AIM Center that is certified to repair Perkins Braille Typewriters. Minimal cost for sending Brailers off to Perkins for repair is \$225. In SFY-2021 we repaired 78 brailers saving DRS \$17,550. This service is also available to DRS staff and VR/SBVI clients who use Brailers as well as AIM Center students.



\*A&E's: Instructional aids/equipment i.e., talking globe, tactile map, etc  
2019 Braille includes 9 titles and 16 electronic files

## Achievements

The AIM Center's SFY-2022 budget includes \$50,000 reimbursement from the State Department of Education as well as \$150,000 in appropriations, which will be used to purchase instructional materials and specialized educational aids for school children with disabilities, in order to maximize their opportunity of being successful in the classroom and beyond. Purchases include MagniLink Zip and hand-held video magnifiers, portable reading scanners, Tactilo braille learning system, and large print calculators, scientific calculators and talking graphing calculators.

**Oklahoma School for the Blind** is a residential school in Muskogee that offers educational options for children who are blind or visually impaired, ages two through twenty-one. 90 residential and day students were served during the 2020-2021 school year. OSB has a residential capacity of 114. Funding for the school's operations is provided through state appropriations.

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**61 Residential Students**

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**29 Day Students**

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**9 Students with Multiple Disabilities**

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**77 Counties Served**

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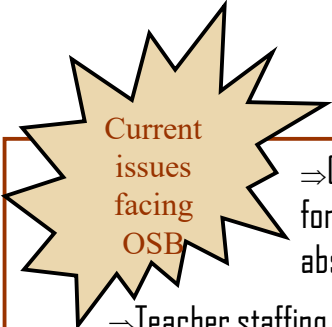
**100% Graduation**

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**In addition to meeting state curriculum requirements, the following expanded curriculum is provided to each student:**

Daily Living Skills Training; Braille and Abacus Instruction, Use of Adaptive Equipment, Tactile Graphic Skills, Transition to Work Program; Transition Services; Mobility and Orientation Training; Assistive Technology Training and Low Vision training according to requirements of the National Agenda for the Education of Children and Youth with Visual Impairments Organization. OSB provides services to school systems, students and families in many Oklahoma counties

**OSB provides an educational program to equip students for life-long learning, responsible citizenship and productive employment in an ever-changing society.**



Current  
issues  
facing  
OSB

⇒ OSB does not receive funding from local ad valorem taxes or the SDE funding formula. Without annual CPI maintenance funding, increased costs must be absorbed administratively and in infrastructure and maintenance costs.

⇒ Teacher staffing is a challenge for all districts, and it is compounded when special education skills are required to teach blind and deaf students.

⇒ A significant challenge for the students is overcoming the lack of appropriate reasonable accommodation on any standardized test that measures performance



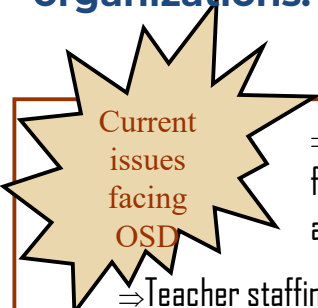
**Oklahoma School for the Deaf** is a residential school that offers educational options for deaf or hearing impaired children ages two through twenty-one. The campus occupies a 37 ½ acre site in Sulphur, Oklahoma and includes a residential capacity of 154. OSD had 97 residential and day students served during the 2020-2021 school year, as well as 14 preschool students served through three satellite programs. Funding for the school's operations is provided through state appropriations.

<b>67</b>	<b>Residential Students</b>
<b>30</b>	<b>Day Students</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>Satellite Preschool Students</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Students with Multiple Disabilities</b>
<b>77</b>	<b>Counties Served</b>
<b>100%</b>	<b>Graduation</b>

**Programs and Services:**

DHHES (Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education Services), Audiology Testing, SLPI (Sign Language Proficiency Interview), American Sign Language Classes and Labs, Auditory Skills Development, Occupational Training Opportunities for the Deaf, Transition Services, Telecommunication Equipment Distribution Program, Hearing Aid Program for Senior Citizens and Youth, Family Engagement and Early Learning Support (FEELS)

**OSD outreach services provide evaluations to children from age two to twenty one, in-service training programs and makes recommendations for adaptations and modifications to the child's educational environment. OSD provides direct services to deaf or hearing-impaired students, evaluation services, contacts families, and contacts hearing-impaired organizations.**

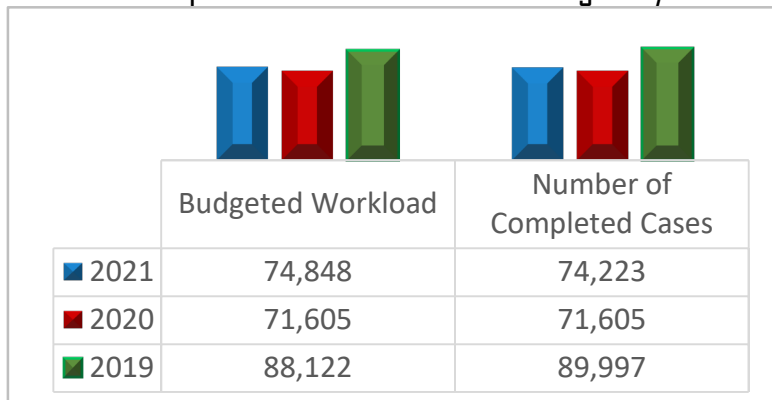


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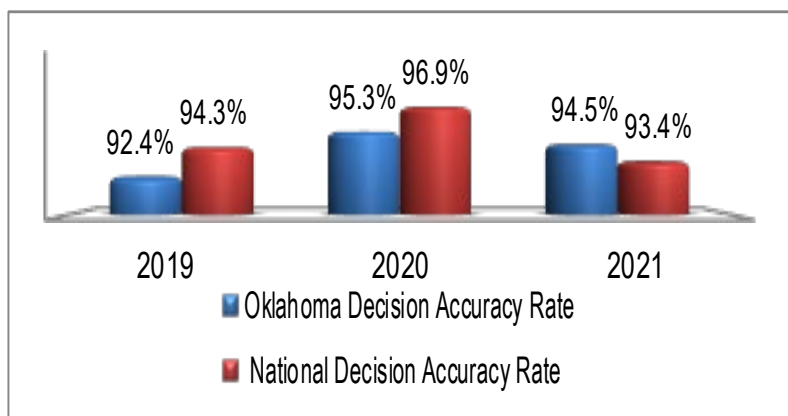
**Disability Determination Services** provides determination of eligibility for Social Security Disability and Supplemental Security Income Programs. Disability examiner staff obtain medical and vocational information on the person applying for disability benefits and decide if the person meets the medical eligibility criteria.



Current year estimated as of 9/9/21; prior years are actual

### Efficiencies

As of December 2020, we have significantly increased the number of physical exams performed by Nurse Practitioners (ARNP) and Physician Assistants (PA). While the COVID emergency reduced the overall number of our providers by 28%, our focus on obtaining quality exams performed at a lower overall cost still resulted in significant savings over prior fiscal years. We continue our recruiting efforts in the areas of ARNP and PA examinations.



Current year estimated as of 9/9/21; prior years are actual



Succession planning continues to be a challenge. Within the next 1-3 years, approximately 25% of our employees are eligible for retirement. We have found that the pool of qualified applicants for replacement hires has diminished as we face this loss of institutional knowledge. One of the challenges to hiring replacements from this pool is that we must balance between sometimes contrasting requirements of both federal and state hiring processes and timelines. While facing institutional knowledge drain, DDS Examiners and Medical Consultants are under continuous pressure to learn and perform complex job processes at an ever increasing pace. The complexities of positions within the DDS take 2-3 years to obtain proficiency. During this time employees are required to maintain both high production and quality. Attrition of experienced staff occurs when Federal partners and other State DDSs announce like job opportunities with more attractive benefits.

## Major Agency Projects

- ❖ DRS continues to work with the Oklahoma Office of Workforce Development to implement the American Job Center requirements of WIOA. This section of WIOA enables the six core programs to be collocated in a manner that provides easier access to consumers. The programs are Adult, Dislocated Workers and Youth Programs and the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service Program administered by the U.S. Department of Labor, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Program and the Vocational Rehabilitation Program administered by the U.S. Department of Education.
- ❖ DRS Vocational Rehabilitation program that encompasses Vocational Rehabilitation Division and Services to the Blind and Visually Impaired Divisions are working to implement new program common performance measures as put forth by the WIOA legislation. The measures are designed to better reflect the Vocational Rehabilitation program's performance across a spectrum of programs in a common and equal manner.
- ❖ DRS continues to partner with State Agencies, Advocate Organizations, Local Workforce Boards and a broad array of Business and Corporations that serve and employ DRS consumers. DRS works with partners to find best practices and gaps in services to improve the lives of individuals with disabilities by changing the way staff, partners and employers think about accessibility for consumers who have disabilities. Barriers, whether physical, technological or cultural must be removed. Access for All is an initiative, in partnership with ABLE TECH that is designed to address 508 compliance in software. These barriers continue to emerge and prevent individuals with disabilities from participating in their communities, employment and independence.
- ❖ The legislature appropriated Capital Improvement funds to improve the facilities at the Oklahoma School for the Deaf. These projects have kicked off in FY-2020 and continued into FY-2021, focusing on items associated with improving safety and security for students and staff.

## Accomplishments over Past Year

- DRS assisted 82,533 Oklahomans with disabilities and their families during FY-2021.
- The VR and SBVI divisions assisted 11,887 consumers with their rehabilitation plan during FY-2021 and 956 consumers attain employment. This included releasing 3,571 cases off of the Waiting List. The average length of an employment training plan is 36 months. The average taxes on earnings of the consumers employed is \$3,810 and employment reduces the need for disability benefits and other social supports.
- DRS strives to maintain 100% graduation rates at Oklahoma School for the Blind and Oklahoma School for the Deaf. Graduation rates for 2021 were 100% for OSB and 100% for OSD.
- The Disability Determination Services Division continues to excel nationally in all standards.
- OSD has introduced a bilingual culture for the campus. This will enhance students ability to move between the hearing and non-hearing world.
- DRS successfully moved the majority of staff to telework in light of the Covid-19 pandemic without any major disruptions of service. Developed and are maintaining a DRS Guide to assist staff in understanding roles and expectations as they re-enter work sites.

## Goals for Upcoming Year

- Monthly Performance Review meetings to review available resources that will allow for the VR Waiting List to be reduced, increase outreach to transition students and develop strategies to ensure performance goals will be met.
- As part of the IEP and intake process, students that transfer to the schools are assessed as to their academic status and individual needs to graduate are identified and addressed.
- The OK DDS determines annual workloads with input from SSA. Monthly and quarterly financial reports and budget plans are submitted to SSA. Ongoing communication regarding the placement of resources to ensure performance accountabilities are met. DDS is working this year to implement a new case management system.
- Continue to manage DRS protocols to adapt the schools and work locations to address the ongoing threat of COVID-19 to best protect students, staff and consumers.
- Assuring that Program Information is in an accessible format for the public and consumers regardless of their disability. Over the last year, students and staff have been successful working remotely. In person contact has distinct advantages for students and consumers. The goal will be to manage how best to move back and maintain as much in person education and consumer services as possible.

## Savings and Efficiencies Achieved

- DRS staff continue to build upon and utilize new and existing services to maximize the economic impact of programs. Much of what the agency provides is not easily translated into short-term savings as students and consumers will use the skills learned for a lifetime. DRS partners with other entities to identify ways to better serve consumers.
- DRS takes advantage of the p-card program to maximize rebate incentives. Realized savings generated by the programs are then available to provide additional services.
- DRS is active in generating available program income from the Social Security Administration. When the Vocational Rehabilitation program is successful in retraining and developing employment for an SSDI recipient, the SSA reimburses VR a portion of the cost of the rehabilitation.

## DRS Oklahoma Partnerships

- Oklahoma Governor's Council on Workforce and Economic Development
- Oklahoma Office of Workforce Development
- Local Area Workforce Boards
- Oklahoma Employment Security Commission
- Oklahoma Department of Corrections-Technology/Education grant
- Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse-Placement staff at Clubhouses
- Oklahoma Department of Education and Public Schools
- Oklahoma Commission for Children and Youth
- Oklahoma Transition Council
- Oklahoma ABLE Tech- Access for All, Agrability, assistive technology, short term equipment loans
- Oklahoma Rehabilitation Council
- Oklahoma Statewide Independent Living Council
- Oklahomans for Special Library Services
- Visual Services Advisory Committee
- Oklahoma Juvenile Affairs - DRS Transition Counselor at Central Oklahoma Juvenile Center (COJC) and Southwest Oklahoma Juvenile Center (SWOJC) to help transition juveniles into the job market
- Attorney General's Office-Disability Determination Services' Investigation Unit

## Partnerships with Oklahoma Tribes

American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Programs:

Apache, Cherokee, Cheyenne & Arapaho, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Delaware, Iowa, Muscogee (Creek) and Comanche

Co-shared client cases, Job Placement contracts, Multi-cultural training

## FY 2022 Budget Request

### Oklahoma School for the Blind

**Requesting appropriations for annual maintenance request to allow for economic adjustments not otherwise available**

**State Appropriated  
Funding  
\$406,000**

The Oklahoma School for the Blind in Muskogee provides effective education options for children with all levels of blindness or visual impairments. The goals of the school are to provide an environment that maximizes the learning opportunities for children with disabilities, certify their learning in accordance with State standards, and provide a solid foundation of knowledge that the students can lean on well into adulthood. OSB also serves as a resource center to complement to the spectrum of services provided within common education for the State of Oklahoma. Communication and literacy are the two most crucial components for learning. OSB is able to tailor the education to the needs of the student. Students learn to be literate through braille and experience different levels of communication technology that establish a strong foundation for a lifetime of learning. OSB is 100% state appropriated. They do not receive funding from local ad valorem taxes or the State Department of Education funding formula.

The School received the teacher pay raise that was offered during SFY-2019 and SFY-2020. The school also received the employee raise and the requested CPI adjustment for SFY-2021 but no increase was provided for SFY-2022. Without the CPI maintenance funding, operating budgets must be shifted as necessary to provide a safe and healthy learning environment. The CPI request allows for incremental economic adjustments to the school's funding that would not otherwise be available. The Covid-19 pandemic has put additional stressors on the staff and students to adapt and continue a productive learning environment. CARES Act funds were utilized when possible but are no longer available.

As a residential facility, OSB has the same budgetary challenges as all the other local school districts in regards to the rising cost of food, fuel and utilities, but with the additional challenge of operating a residential facility. The Oklahoma Constitution mandates that the State provide for and support the School for the Blind. A maintenance appropriation adjustment based on this most recent increase of 5.15% would result in an increase of \$406,000 dollar budget request for the School for the Blind. This would allow for economic adjustments to the school's funding that are not otherwise available.

## FY 2022 Budget Request

### Oklahoma School for the Deaf

**Requesting appropriations for annual maintenance request to allow for economic adjustments not otherwise available**

**State Appropriated  
Funding  
\$613,000**

The Oklahoma School for the Deaf in Sulphur provides effective education options for children with all levels of deaf or hard of hearing impairments. The goals of the school are to provide an environment that maximizes the learning opportunities for children with disabilities, certify their learning in accordance with State standards, and provide a solid foundation of knowledge that the students can lean on well into adulthood. OSD also serves as a resource center to complement to the spectrum of services provided within common education for the State of Oklahoma. Communication and literacy are the two most crucial components for learning. OSD is able to tailor the education to the needs of the student. Students learn and communicate using sign language and experience different levels of communication technology that establish a strong foundation for a lifetime of learning. OSD is 100% state appropriated. They do not receive funding from local ad valorem taxes or the State Department of Education funding formula.

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## FY 2022 Budget Request

### **Vocational Rehabilitation and Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired**

**State Appropriated  
Funding**

**Requesting appropriations to maintain necessary state match and maintenance of effort funding**

**\$2,500,000**

Increased funding maximizes services to Oklahomans with disabilities, enhancing their opportunity to become self-sufficient through employment and becoming independent in their homes and communities. This means more Oklahomans can terminate their dependence on state and federal programs and move towards becoming taxpayers. This funding increase will positively impact the stability of the Oklahoma economy. The ratio of funding available is \$4 federal dollars to every \$1 dollar of state matching funds. Funding this request will allow DRS to fully match all of the federal funds available to the State of Oklahoma and keeps DRS in a position to put Oklahomans with disabilities to work each year. The SFY-2023 appropriation increase requested is \$2,500,000. This increase will allow DRS to fund all obligations associated with the federal funds awarded to the State of Oklahoma, including match and maintenance of effort. Oklahoma forfeited \$5.7 million in unmatched funds from the FFY-2020 grant and another \$6.6 million from the FFY-2021 grant. Not providing this funding will cause the State of Oklahoma to forfeit additional federal funds from the 2022 and 2023 grants and severely reduce the services available to disabled Oklahomans that want to return to work.

DRS continues to work with other state agencies to coordinate services to common participants and to improve efficiencies. The Agency is an active participant in the Oklahoma Workforce System as well as the Governor's Council on Workforce. The workforce and Opportunity Improvement Act, the guiding federal regulation for the VR program, requires DRS to participate with 19 different programs across the State to better prepare individuals for successful employment outcomes. Providing this necessary funding would allow for the full access to available funds to continue to serve the existing clients and expand services to better reach underserved populations.



## FY 2022 Budget Request

### **Vocational Rehabilitation and Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired** **Requesting appropriations to offset the federal unallowable portion of Pathfinder**

**State Appropriated  
Funding  
\$555,000**

VR/SBVI assists Oklahomans with disabilities in finding gainful employment. Funding received for Basic Support is part of an entitlement grant that supports the activities of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act reauthorized as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. The level of support provided to the State of Oklahoma is 78.7% Federal dollars with a 21.3% State match. Employees hired after November 1, 2015 are enrolled in the Defined Contribution plan administered through OPERS as pathfinder participants.

The pathfinder program has an overage billed by OPERS that has been ruled unallowable by the federal partners. For State programs, this is not a problem. For Federal programs, the overage must be paid with State funds. For VR this requires the state dollars be utilized in place of federal funds. The overage is a static 6% annually and these funds are not eligible for match or MOE. As staff hired before November 1, 2015 age out through attrition and are replaced, the required pathfinder contribution has been incrementally increasing each year.

DRS has two major federal programs. One for DDS and the other is the VR grant. This results in 70% of personnel costs that are federally supported with either 100% federal funds or 80% federal funds. The FY-2023 pathfinder costs for the VR program is anticipated to be \$555,000 dollars. Without additional funding, the VR program would be limited in the number of positions that could be filled and funds available for match would be reduced, further impacting the program's ability to fully match the federal allotment granted to Oklahoma.

## FY 2022 Budget Request

### Disability Determination Services

Requesting appropriations to offset the federal unallowable portion of Pathfinder

State Appropriated  
Funding  
**\$775,000**

The Disability Determination Services Division of DRS is responsible for adjudicating the applications for Social Security Disability claims. This program was 100% federally funded by the Social Security Administration prior to November 1, 2015. Employees hired after that date are enrolled in the Defined Contribution plan administered through OPERS as Pathfinder participants.

The pathfinder program has an overage billed by OPERS that has been ruled unallowable by the federal partners. For State programs, this is not a problem. For Federal programs, the overage must be paid with State funds. For DDS this requires the state dollars be utilized in place of federal funds. The overage is a static 6% annually. As staff hired before November 1, 2015 age out through attrition and are replaced, the required pathfinder contribution has been incrementally increasing each year. SSA has offered Oklahoma the opportunity to hire an additional 222 full time professional positions. The Pathfinder costs were not funded in SFY-2022 and Oklahoma released 66 FTE back to SSA to be distributed to other states within the region.

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# OKLAHOMA Rehabilitation Services

