



COLLEGE OF  
**OSTEOPATHIC MEDICINE**  
at the Cherokee Nation



**OKLAHOMA**  
Rehabilitation  
Services

**2021**  
Annual Report





# Agency fast facts

## TOTAL SERVED

# 82,533

Total number of people served by DRS in State Fiscal Year 2021.

## VR & SBVI

# 10,529

Individuals who received assistance from DRS' Vocational Rehabilitation and Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired in SFY 2021.

## DDS SERVED

# 53,144

Individuals served by Disability Determination Services in SFY 2021.

## CLIENT SALARIES

# \$25,397

Annual average yearly earnings in SFY 2021 of clients who received VR and SBVI services.

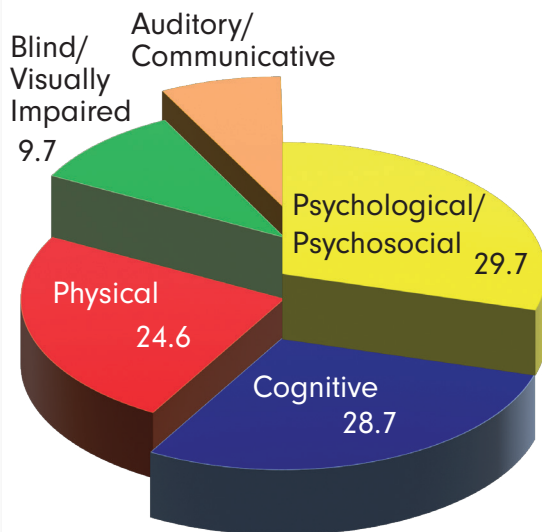
## TAXES PAID

# \$3,810

Annual average taxes paid in SFY 2021 by clients who received VR and SBVI services. (Based on 15% tax rate.)

## WHO IS SERVED

DRS clients by disability:



## SERVICES' COSTS

# \$12,765

Average cost of services for DRS' VR and SBVI clients in SFY 2021.

## FEDERAL MATCH

# \$4 to \$1

Federal financial support to state match for VR and SBVI employment programs in SFY 2021.

## LIBRARY IMPACT

# 5,638

Individuals served by the state's Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped in SFY 2021.

## TRANSITION/ PRE-ETS

# 3,211

Total participants in Transition and Pre-employment Transition Services.



## OKLAHOMA Rehabilitation Services

The Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services is comprised of eight divisions highlighted below that work to serve Oklahomans with disabilities.



# DRS helps Oklahomans build skills to live independently

The Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services expands opportunities for work, independent living and economic self-sufficiency by helping Oklahomans with disabilities overcome barriers to success in the workplace, school and at home.

One in six Oklahomans has a disability, and DRS' Vocational Rehabilitation and Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired programs

introduce or reinstate people with disabilities back into the workforce, creating taxpayers and reducing dependence on disability benefits and social assistance.

DRS clients exercise informed choice to achieve goals that promote equality of opportunity, full inclusion and integration into society, employment, independent living, and economic and social self-sufficiency.





# Commission for Rehabilitation Services



## Chairman Wes Hilliard

Wes Hilliard is a Sulphur banker and former Oklahoma state representative.

Oklahoma House of Representatives Speaker Charles McCall, R-Atoka, appointed Hilliard to the Commission for

Rehabilitation Services.

Hilliard is president of Simmons Bank in Davis. He served in the Oklahoma House of Representatives from 2004 to 2012.

He has a bachelor's degree in

political science from Oklahoma State University and a master's in education from East Central University in Ada.

Hilliard and his wife Melissa have three children, Weston, Jaxson, and Blake.



## Vice Chairwoman Theresa Flannery

Theresa Flannery, of Mustang, was appointed by Gov. Kevin Stitt to serve as a member of the Commission for Rehabilitation Services.

Flannery is a senior director for social services at Catholic

Charities of the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City. Prior to that, she worked closely with DRS for 20 years when she was community resources and compliance director at Dale Rogers Training Center.

Flannery has received numerous awards for her work to help employ people with disabilities.

She earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from Southwestern Oklahoma State University in Weatherford.



## Jace Wolfe

Jace Wolfe, of Edmond, is the director of audiology and research at the Hearts for Hearing Foundation in Oklahoma City.

He is also an adjunct professor in the audiology department at the OU Health Sciences Center

in Oklahoma City and Salus University.

He provides clinical services for children and adults with hearing loss and is actively engaged in research pertaining to hearing aids, cochlear implants, hybrid cochlear implants and personal

remote microphone systems.

Wolfe has authored and co-authored numerous textbooks, publications and articles in professional journals.

He has also presented at state, national and international conferences.





Melinda Fruendt

## Message from the executive director



# People with disabilities key to strengthening state workforce

In 2021, the staff at the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services focused on strengthening the state's workforce. Labor shortages and supply chains challenges have tested our country and its economy. By assisting individuals with disabilities to pursue work, our agency is reinforcing the state's talent pipeline, making it possible to ease these and future labor challenges.

The number of people with disabilities entering the workforce is rising, and that's good news for the economy, for people with disabilities and for employers.

Unfortunately, too many companies hold themselves back when it comes to hiring people with disabilities. They see hiring (some) persons with disabilities as being "the right thing to do" but do not see it as part of a talent strategy that will benefit the company and outweigh what they see

“

***By making a commitment to hiring people with disabilities, the business will begin to see the market advantage, not a social obligation.***

as the potential expenses and risk. That mindset puts companies at a disadvantage when it comes to acquiring and leveraging the talent they need in today's tight job market.

Hiring people with disabilities need not cost any more than hiring someone without a disability. Accommodations for the majority of people with disabilities cost nothing. And when there is a cost involved with providing technology or other tools, it's usually less than \$500, and there may be tax incentives available to help.

A business can change its thinking and strategies related to hiring skilled and talented individuals with disabilities by creating a mutually supportive community in the workplace. By making a commitment to hiring people with disabilities, the business will begin to see the market advantage, not a social obligation.

Our focus at DRS is helping businesses, employers and the state of Oklahoma workforce system build a stronger and more diversified workforce. We are assisting Oklahomans with disabilities to achieve their life goals through education and training to successfully obtain employment.

Melinda Fruendt





# DRS maximizes resources to help Oklahomans succeed

Staff of the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services leverages state and federal resources to ensure Oklahomans with disabilities reach employment goals and pursue lives of independence.

The motto for the agency is “Empowering Oklahomans with Disabilities,” and agency staff work each day to achieve that goal and strengthen Oklahoma’s workforce.

The majority of funding for the Vocational Rehabilitation and Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired is eligible for a federal/state match of 78.7 percent/21.3 percent. The Oklahoma Library for the Blind and Physically

Handicapped is state-funded.

The majority of funding for Oklahoma School for the Blind and the Oklahoma School for the Deaf is state appropriations. Other key OSD funding comes from the Equipment Distribution Program, which provides telecommunications and other equipment to deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind and severely speech-impaired individuals.

In support services, DRS utilizes an indirect cost rate as the standardized method for individual programs to pay a fair share of support service (general administration) costs. Statistical information is based on State Fiscal Year 2021.



## State Fiscal Year 2021 Expenditures

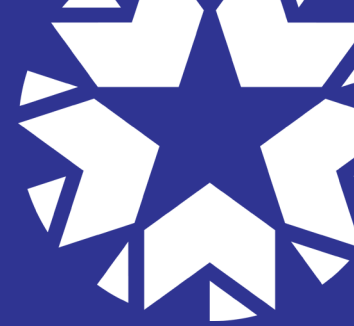
	VR/SVBI	Oklahoma School for the Blind	Oklahoma School for the Deaf	Disability Determination	Support Services	Total
State	\$14,157,000	\$7,108,000	\$9,328,000	\$402,000	\$2,530,000	\$33,525,000
Federal	\$33,168,000	\$0	\$0	\$41,768,000	\$6,113,000	\$81,049,000
Inter-agency	\$180,000	\$625,000	\$275,000	\$0	\$342,000	\$1,422,000
Other	\$300,000	\$44,000	\$469,000	\$0	\$7,000	\$820,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$47,805,000</b>	<b>\$7,777,000</b>	<b>\$10,072,000</b>	<b>\$42,170,000</b>	<b>\$8,992,000</b>	<b>\$116,816,000</b>



# Vocational Rehabilitation



VR Administrator  
Mark Kinnison



## VR staff help Oklahomans pursue longterm employment

DRS staff assisted more than 10,000 Oklahomans with disabilities with Vocational Rehabilitation services in State Fiscal Year 2021. The goal is for each client to be successful in their pursuit of independent lives and obtaining economic freedom through work.

DRS staff utilized in-person counseling, testing and online tools when necessary to see that each client was on a path to start or return to work, and become Oklahoma taxpayers. By doing so, the state's workforce continued to grow and diversify.

VR staff members work with clients in removing barriers that prevent a person from working. They guide and counsel clients on employment goals and network with employers on behalf of people with disabilities. They can also assist employers in training the employees and advise on workplace

accommodations, if needed.

In State Fiscal Year 2021, VR served 9,229 clients. DRS saw 843 Oklahomans with physical or mental disabilities become employed with the average yearly earnings reaching \$25,007.

These achievements were possible because of DRS services that include career counseling, vocational education and training, and medical services if it is determined it will help a client find employment. They may also receive assistive technology, job placement and coaching.

When DRS clients who are former Social Security benefit recipients reach the nine-month work anniversary, the Social Security Administration reimburses DRS a portion of the cost of the services to get that person into the work force. These services build both people's self-respect and strengthen the state's available workforce.



### VR fast facts

9,229

Total number of individuals who received VR Services in State Fiscal Year 2021.

3,242

Program applications made for VR services in SFY 2021.

2,068

Employment plans completed.

843

Employment outcomes achieved.

\$25,007

VR clients annual average yearly earnings.

\$12,613

Average cost of services per VR client.

\$3,751

Average yearly taxes paid by employed client (15% tax rate).





VOCATIONAL  
REHABILITATION  
**IMPACT**

# Embracing possibilities

## VR client overcomes challenges with help from DRS programs

Aaron Place learned the limits of rural medicine in Oklahoma four years ago when a rattlesnake sank its fangs into his arm during an experiment at Northwestern Oklahoma State University.

Place was flown to Oklahoma City in a fight to save his arm, which would require five surgeries and numerous three-hour drives between his rural town and Oklahoma City.

It would be an ordeal that would put his life on a new path with the help of the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services.

"It was at that time, I discovered the severe shortage of medical professionals in rural Oklahoma," Place said. "During that time, I determined my calling was trying to fill that need."

Place was born with ectodermal dysplasia, a group of disorders in which two or more of



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the ectodermally derived structures — the skin, sweat glands, hair, nails, teeth and mucous membranes — develop abnormally. Each person with an ectodermal dysplasia may have a different combination of defects.

"I don't sweat," he said. "I have a hard time regulating my temperature when it is hot out, and have some missing teeth."

Growing up with a disability in Wisconsin, Place sought vocational rehabilitation services from the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development. Their services made it possible for him to earn an undergraduate degree in wildlife management from the University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point. His love of educating people about reptiles led him to pursue a doctorate at Oklahoma State University where one of the leading voices on





rattlesnake behavior teaches.

After completing his doctorate, Place taught for 14 years at the university level in Alva until the accident. That ordeal led him to the doors of DRS.

The agency was able to provide services, enabling Place to start attending Oklahoma State University College of Osteopathic Medicine in Tahlequah. He is in his second year.

"I am an osteopathic medical student, and when I graduate, I hope to go into family medicine," he said. "Doctors of osteopathic medicine have all of the same rights and responsibilities as an person with an MD (doctorate of medicine.) We take a couple of extra courses in osteopathic manipulative treatment. Osteopathic doctors do everything an MD does — surgery, family medicine, orthopedics and emergency medicine."

Place said DRS has been instrumental in helping him pursue a career change that will allow him to give back to rural Oklahoma.

"I can't say enough nice things about my counselor Brandi (Fulgham — Vocational Rehabilitation office No. 63 in Alva)," he said. "She is always

willing to help, answer questions and provide whatever support I need."

Place said not all people have the same opportunities, and people with disabilities may feel like they are at a disadvantage.

"I always advise people to use DRS," he said. "I am obviously a big advocate for education. Education is a great way to level the playing field. Not everyone has the same opportunities, and DRS is a great way to make those opportunities available for people who don't think they have those opportunities."

Both of Place's children use DRS services as well. His son has a severe peanut allergy, and just graduated from OU with a double major in anthropology and music. His daughter is a freshman at OSU majoring in family and consumer science education and has debilitating anxiety.

Seeing the benefits of DRS services, and the opportunities it provides, Place's wife now tries to pay it back by helping others.

"My wife is a schoolteacher in rural Oklahoma," he said. "She recognizes students who may benefit from DRS services and has recommended several students."



"I always advise people to use DRS. I am obviously a big advocate for education. Education is a great way to level the playing field. Not everyone has the same opportunities, and DRS is a great way to make those opportunities available for people who don't think they have those opportunities."

— Aaron Place



# Transition and Pre-employment Transition Services **Taking control**

## Program offers youth tools to pursue dreams for career and independence

Oklahoma youth with disabilities can pursue an independent life and a fulfilling career by taking advantage of services through DRS' Transition program.

Transition services offer these youth opportunities including education, training and work experience. The services are available through counselors in Vocational Rehabilitation and Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired. They are assigned to high schools across the state, and counseling services they offer may include:

**Vocational counseling and guidance:** DRS counselors assist teachers, parents and students in developing appropriate career goals.

**Vocational assessment and evaluation:** DRS' staff help to determine students' employment-related strengths and interests, and provide recommended career fields to investigate.

**School Work-Study:** Through contracts with the schools, DRS Transition provides job readiness skills training through work experience at the school district or in the community, while earning a minimum wage and school credits.

**Work Adjustment Training:** This training is provided through contracts with the schools or from community-based facilities, and offers students foundational employment skills to help them prepare for competitive, integrated employment after high school.

**On-the-Job Training:** This program provides students the opportunity (during the second semester of their senior year) to obtain community employment in their career of choice with permanent employment as a goal.

**Supported Employment:** This program helps students in their senior year transition into permanent employment with supports from a job coach to search for employment, apply, prepare for the interview, learn the job and work toward independence on the job.

VR and SBVI serve youth and students with disabilities across the state to provide career focused preparation activities and services that are intended to help achieve community integration, independence, post-secondary education and/or competitive integrated employment. These services assist youth and students with disabilities in a seamless transition from high school to a meaningful career path.

These students may participate in Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) without having to apply to VR, or be determined eligible for services. Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA), every student with a disability has the opportunity to participate in Pre-ETS through VR, including job exploration counseling, work readiness training, work-based learning experiences, postsecondary educational counseling and self-advocacy training."



### Transition and Pre-ETS fast facts

**2,040**

Potentially eligible cases for Pre-Employment Transition Services in SFY 2021.

**1,171**

Total number of Vocational Rehabilitation cases In Transition Services.

**\$2,959,853**

Total expenditures for Pre-Employment Transition Services.

# Business Services Program

## BSP opens door to rich resource

DRS' Business Services Program works with Oklahoma businesses, meeting their employment needs by providing qualified candidates for employment.

BSP staff partners with businesses, offering candidates for employment who are loyal and committed to long-term employment. DRS may share job training costs, and the businesses may qualify for tax credits.

The program's staff works with Workforce Centers, chambers of commerce, other state and federal agencies and non-profit organizations to provide hiring events and disability consultations.

Benefits to employers through BSP can include:

- A variety of free training for businesses' staff;
- Support for job seekers with follow up and evaluation of any accommodation needs;
- Paid internships and paid work experiences;
- Increased profits by having a workforce that better reflects the customers served and lowers cost through their commitment to the employer.



*Julie Repschlager, owner of Anew Dawn Counseling Service.*

## 'She is such a great gift'

### Business owner finds win in hiring people with disabilities

Staff at Anew Dawn Counseling Service in Tulsa work each day to improve the lives of others, but when owner Julie Repschlager recently hired staff members with disabilities, her life improved as well.

Repschlager said people who choose not to hire Oklahomans with disabilities are making a mistake.

"They are just missing out," Repschlager said. "The things that I have learned. Sarah (Sullivan) has taught me so much."

DRS contacted Repschlager earlier this year about a client who had completed her education and was looking for a job.

Repschlager interviewed and hired Sarah Sullivan who is blind and uses a software computer screen reader program. This software allows blind and visually impaired users to read the screen either with a text-to-speech output or by a refreshable Braille display.

"She is such a great gift to our agency," Repschlager said. "She is our only licensed marriage and family counselor. I think she is the only one in the state that is blind."

Sullivan is one of two workers with

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See **Gift**, Page 16



# Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired



*SBVI Administrator  
Tracy Brigham*



## SBVI programs enable clients to pursue careers

Being blind or visually impaired does not have to be an impediment to an Oklahoman who wants to lead an independent life.

Through programs provided by DRS' Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired, clients can reach employment through career counseling; vocational education and training; medical services required to become employable; and assistive technology geared to their specific needs and job placement.

Clients are eligible for the vocational rehabilitation program if their disability makes it difficult to work. They must be able to benefit from vocational rehabilitation services, which prepare clients for employment.

Legal blindness occurs when visual acuity with best correction is 20/200 or less or when side vision results in a

field restriction of 20 degrees or less.

Many clients receive living skills training that allows them to navigate their environments, operate computers, manage money and much more. With these skills, people who are blind or visually impaired often feel ready to compete in the workplace.

SBVI services can include, but are not limited to:

- Physical or mental restoration;
- Mobility training;
- Vocational, college or other training;
- Assistive technology evaluations, equipment and training;
- Information on disability resources;
- Personal assistance services while receiving vocational rehabilitation services;

See **SBVI**, Page 16



### SBVI fast facts

1,300

Total number of individuals who received SBVI Services in State Fiscal Year 2021.

307

Program applications made for SBVI services in SFY 2021.

261

Employment plans completed.

113

Employment outcomes achieved

\$28,304

SBVI clients annual average yearly earnings.

\$13,901

Average cost of services per SBVI client.

\$4,246

Average yearly taxes paid by employed client (15% tax rate).





SERVICES FOR THE BLIND  
AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED  
**IMPACT**



# Ready to explore

## Norman woman gains tools to live fuller life

Barbara Hall left Florida to build a new life in Norman, but limited vision was creating headaches both trying to explore her new home and everyday tasks.

She turned to Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired of the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services for help.

"Hall had difficulty with many personal and home management tasks, such as reading labels and mail, managing finances, shopping and cleaning," SBVI Programs Manager Cheryl Snow said. "She was getting very frustrated."

An Older Blind case was opened, and she began receiving services from Rehabilitation Teacher Ani Severtsen and Orientation and Mobility Instructor Elizabeth Scheffe.





# Library keeps Oklahomans with disabilities connected to the world

Oklahoma Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped staff process hundreds of orders for audiobook cartridges daily for Oklahomans with disabilities.

The library makes it possible for Oklahomans to connect to thousands of books, textbooks and periodicals available in audio recorded and Braille formats — all for free. The library provides services at no cost to those with visual or physical disabilities.

Through its Accessible Instructional Materials Center, the library provides Braille and large-print textbooks and assistive devices for students with visual impairments in kindergarten through 12th grade and earlier developmental years as long as funds are available to meet the requests.

For more information on all library



services, go to the library's web site at [www.olbph.org](http://www.olbph.org). The library, which is operated by DRS' Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired Division, is part of the Library of Congress' National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled.

Oklahomans for Special Library Services is the library's friends group supporting the work of the library.



## OLBPH fast facts

**5,638** Individuals served by the library in SFY 2021.

**488** Books circulated daily to patrons.

**2,375** Books received weekly by patrons.

**120** Daily inquiries to the library for titles.

**1,126** Children served through the Accessible Instructional Materials Center in SFY 2021.

**2** Average number of days for child to receive in-house books.

**8,080** Number of books/items in AIM Center collection.



# Business Enterprise Program

## People with disabilities can become entrepreneurs with program



Oklahomans who are blind or visually impaired can move toward a new independent life with the assistance of a DRS program, offering them the chance to own their own businesses.

Through the federally enacted Randolph-Sheppard Act of 1936 and Oklahoma State Statute Title 7, SBVI operates the Business Enterprise Program.

BEP's mission is to provide employment opportunities for people who at least are legally blind with best correction by establishing food service operations across the state.

These operations may consist of vending machine routes, cafeterias or a variety of different types of snack bars. To accomplish this, the BEP aids entrepreneurs by providing extensive business training, licensing business owners, locating and equipping locations, securing initial inventory and offering on-going business consultation services.

BEP entrepreneurs are educated in food safety, hospitality, marketing and business management. A portion of each business' proceeds is paid to DRS for the licensed vendors' retirement and insurance costs.

# Older Blind

## Program offers older Oklahomans training to stay independent

Sharpening their culinary skills and learning how to use a phone are just some of the skills Oklahomans who are blind or visually impaired need to master to live independently.

DRS' Older Blind Independent Living Program offers free independent living services to people who are 55-years-old or older and legally blind.

Rehabilitation teachers located in Services for the Blind and Visually

Impaired offices throughout the state provide one-on-one assistance to individuals adjusting to blindness and regaining or maintaining maximum independence and self-sufficiency.

Staff present training for businesses, organizations and others to develop greater awareness of the abilities and needs of older Oklahomans who are blind. Legal blindness occurs when visual acuity with best correction is

20/200 or less or when side vision results in a field restriction of 20 degrees or less.

Oklahomans having problems dialing the phone, signing their names, cooking, identifying money, time telling, or matching clothing can get help from a rehabilitation teacher. The teacher will work with clients in learning how to perform these tasks safely, efficiently and independently.



"I recommend anyone who has low vision to get ahold of Services for the Blind. The experience and the bond that you develop with your instructors Is Informative and helps you live on your own."

— Barbara Hall

### Help, from Page 13

Hall received orientation and mobility assistance to help with travel using her walker. She now listens to audio traffic signals to cross streets and relies on her cane skills to travel to the Walmart close to home.

SBVI's rehabilitation training helped Hall learn, for example, how to shop with customer service assistance, label items with large print for identification and use apps on her phone designed for people with visual disabilities.

SBVI loaned Hall a closed-circuit television, which uses a camera to enlarge text so she can read mail and pay bills.

She also used information provided by SBVI to sign up for Script Talk to read medication labels.

"I learned a lot from all my teachers. They are great," Hall said. "I recommend anyone who has low vision to get ahold of Services for the Blind. The experience and the bond that you develop with your instructors Is Informative and helps you live on your own."

Snow said Hall Is now successfully using all the skills SBVI staff taught her to live more independently.

### SBVI, from Page 12

- Transportation in connection with VR services being provided;
- Supported employment;
- Self-employment assistance;
- Transition School-to-Work services for youth with disabilities; and
- Other services based on individual needs.

When a client comes to DRS, an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) will be created to determine what services a client receives. It outlines a person's employment goal and the assistance needed to enable the person to achieve that goal.

An IPE is developed in one of two ways — a client and their counselor can



work together to develop it, or it can be written by the client according to guidelines the counselor will explain.

### Gift, from Page 11

disabilities at Anew Dawn. Glenn Baisley is also a counselor.

Repschlager said Sullivan is working 12 hours a week currently but is building up to a full-time schedule.

The only challenge has been to get the medical software the counseling service uses to be fully accessible with the screen reader. To understand the challenges, Sullivan had Repschlager and another worker wear a blindfold and work with the medical software.

"We learned the challenges she was having," Repschlager said. "Then, she

(Sullivan) said this is how I am going to correct that. It has been such a gift to get that perspective."

The agency is making accommodations to ensure Sullivan can do her job without barriers.

Repschlager said her two favorite phrases are — how are things going in your world, and how can I help you? She has learned through DRS disability etiquette training and talking with Sullivan what is needed. Instead, she said it is just letting the worker know you are there to help if asked and that you have confidence that they will get the job done.

# Oklahoma School for the Blind



*OSB Superintendent  
Rita Echelle*

## OSB can open the door to a bright future for students

Oklahoma School for the Blind's staff works to ensure every child who is blind or visually impaired has the ability to pursue an independent life.

OSB serves students preschool-age through 12th-grade, offering superior educational opportunities that empower students to pursue independence, education and a career. Tuition is free.

OSB staff provides students with specialized educational programs in coordination with their state-mandated educational requirements. Independent living skills and specialized accessible technology equipment assist each student in developing their maximum potential.

Staff play a key role in each student's success by setting high standards for achievement. The school offers a



comprehensive curriculum of reading, language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, physical education, music and computer science for all students.

Students wishing to pursue music can join the OSB Jazz Band, which is recognized for setting a high bar for excellence.

Specialized instruction includes Braille, orientation and mobility, optimum use of low vision adaptive equipment, technology and tactile graphic skills. These intensive specializations are not readily available at other public schools in the state.

The school serves all 77 state counties. Regardless of the hometown, OSB provides transportation at no cost to the parents or guardians to stops throughout the state.

See **OSB**, Page 20



### OSB fast facts

**100%** Graduation rate for students attending the OSB.

**1 to 4** OSB teacher to student ratio.

**1 to 4** Direct-care specialists to students ratio.

**90** Total number of students enrolled (day and residential).

**9** Number of OSB students who have multiple disabilities.

**5,212** Direct services offered through school's Outreach Services.

**335** Outreach Services offered to other school districts.



# High expectations



## OSB student thriving in school offering opportunities to achieve

Elbin Carrillo is not treated as special at the Oklahoma School for the Blind. He is just like his fellow students — challenged to meet expectations of personal independence and exceeding academic standards.

Carrillo, a junior, is blind and came to the school in fifth grade. His parents had been told the school had the needed equipment and tools, that would provide him more opportunity to be successful in living independently once he graduated.

An Oklahoma City native, Carrillo said he was “babied” in public school, meaning people would lead him around, taking the pressure off him to learn to navigate school on his own. That changed at OSB.

“My first week when I got here, I asked for a



sighted guide,” Carrillo said. “They said ‘we don’t do that here. That’s why you have a cane.’ They take good care of us.”

Carrillo has flourished at the school. He counts U.S. history, jazz band and wrestling among his favorite activities.

Playing an instrument in band may have not been an option for Carrillo in public schools where students are often expected to learn songs from sheet music.

“Here, I get to learn new music auditorily,” he said. “Our band director is really good with us. I play the tenor saxophone.”

Carrillo maintains a 3.5 grade point average. His plans for the future include owning his own business and advocating for others with visual impairments.





# OSB celebrates opening of gym, bench dedicated

Students, staff, parents, community leaders and friends gathered Nov. 16 in the Oklahoma School for the Blind's new gymnasium on the campus in Muskogee to dedicate the gym and a memorial bench in honor of former Superintendent Larry Hawkins.

The facility has an area of refuge, which doubles as a wrestling room and is large enough to protect students and staff in case

of severe weather.

Lynn Cragg, OSB high school principal, shared OSB history that includes a devastating 1945 tornado, which took the lives of three OSB students, Delores Hicks, 14; Alda Stephens, 15; and Juanita Moss, 15.

Tommy Robertson, OSB alumni and 1945 tornado survivor, shared his experiences from that day.

Rita Echelle, OSB superintendent and

master of ceremonies, spoke to the crowd and displayed a plaque honoring the OSB students who died in the tornado.

"I want to give credit to the superintendents who came before me, DRS leadership and OSB's executive team, especially Construction and Maintenance Administrator Brian Culver who oversaw the project and

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See **Gym**, Page 20





A bench was dedicated in memory of former Superintendent Larry Hawkins. Pictured from left, OSB Superintendent Rita Echelle, Jill Hawkins, Pat Hawkins and former DRS Director Noel Tyler.



### Gym, from Page 19

Business Manager Dennis Read who took on extra financial responsibilities," Echelle said. "Their financial stewardship enabled us to plan and complete a successful project that meets our needs in a cost effective way."

DRS Executive Director Melinda Fruendt welcomed guests and introduced a performance by the award-winning OSB jazz band.

Noel Tyler, retired DRS executive director, and Jill Hawkins, daughter of former OSB Superintendent Larry Hawkins, spoke about his contributions to OSB and his positive impact that continues today.

Hawkins served as OSB superintendent for nearly three years from 2010 through 2011 and again in 2016. He died after a short illness in February 2019.



### OSB, from Page 17

OSB is a four-day-a-week program. Students who live near the school commute daily. Those who live farther away stay on campus during the school week. Residential students are taken to and from OSB for weekends, summers and holidays at home.

Staff offers thousands of free outreach services for students attending public schools. Staff offers free student evaluations,



Top, the OSB mascot. Left, the main entrance to the Oklahoma School for the Blind.

in-service training for teachers and recommendations for classroom modifications and special equipment that help students reach their full potential.

# Oklahoma School for the Deaf



*OSD Superintendent  
Chris Dvorak*



## OSD offers students chance to launch their bright futures

The Oklahoma School for the Deaf gives high school students who are deaf and hard-of-hearing the opportunity to pursue their career dreams.

Staff and students communicate with each other using both American Sign Language and English. Maximized bilingual development is the goal for each student. Many students utilize cochlear implants or hearing aids. For these students, spoken English is also a developmental focus.

OSD is a deaf education immersion school, while other schools, public or private, are often only able to make basic accommodations. Sign language classes are provided for all students and staff.

Classes for parents and the community are also offered. Staff members must obtain sign language proficiency, which is measured by the Sign Language Proficiency Interview.

Students who attend OSD must meet all state graduation requirements. All classes are taught in consideration of each student's

unique communication and education needs. Students receive full educational and social experiences. They perform in school programs and dramas. They have prom and homecoming events for all sports. They compete with other schools on sports teams, leadership programs and academic teams.

OSD has a strong vocational program that offers business technology, family and consumer sciences and welding classes on site. OSD also offers a school-to-work program, Occupational Training Opportunities for the Deaf. Students gain valuable work experience and a paycheck from various businesses in the community, which builds them a competitive resume.

OSD is a four-day-a-week program. Those who live close to campus commute back and forth to school. Students from greater distances live at the school free of charge and go home for three-day weekends, summers and holidays. OSD serves any Oklahoma student from preschool to 12th grade.



### OSD fast facts

11,720

Individuals served by American Sign Language family and community classes.

1 to 4

OSD teacher to student ratio.

1 to 4

Direct-care specialists to students ratio.

97

Total number of students enrolled (day and residential).

10

Number of OSD students who have multiple disabilities.

385

All students served (multi-campus, external services, FEELS Family Engagement and Early Learning Support, and summer camp).

564

564 Served through Telecommunications Equipment Distribution Program (hearing aids and equipment).



# Making his cut

## OSD student setting example to classmates for competing, succeeding



RyJan Reininger is just a sophomore at the Oklahoma School for the Deaf, but he is already wiring together his post-graduation plans.

Reininger, who is Deaf, wants to attend the National Technical Institute for the Deaf in Rochester, N.Y., to pursue a degree in either computer coding or as a robotics engineer.

While he is still undecided on his final career, he is making the most of high school, playing football and basketball, and running track. He has also competed on the school's robotics and academic teams.

His teachers describe Reininger as a model student who strives to do his best in school. They describe him as the perfect role model for younger students.

"He has great leadership skills, displays positivity and many students look up to him," Counselor Tina Crabtree wrote. "He encourages his fellow students to work hard and to try new things. He is polite, kind, and thinks of others above himself."

Being a good role model is important to Reininger. OSD graduate Isiah Holt who is now attending college, made an impression on him by the way he carried himself.

"He (Holt) is a positive person, is himself and athletic," he said. "That's what I try to be."

This football season, the sophomore is the starting running back, plays linebacker and is the second-string quarterback.

## School unveils new mascot

SULPHUR - Deaf community leaders joined Oklahoma School for the Deaf alumni, educators, staff and students in October for the reveal of the school's new Bison logo during OSD's homecoming celebration.



A committee of students, staff, coaches and alumni guided the search for the new school logo design.

OSD Superintendent Chris Dvorak congratulated artist Nathan Fylstra who won the logo design competition. Fylstra, who is Deaf, is a longtime OSD employee on the student life staff.

Reininger is leaving his mark at the school – one that is likely to last far beyond any athletic win-or-loss record.

"Recently, he volunteered to give up his nomination for homecoming king to another student who is special needs," Crabtree wrote. "It was a very touching moment to see the other young man's face when RyJan went up to him to congratulate him."

# Disability Determination



DDS Administrator  
Brian Nickles



Disability Determination Services staff work to determine if Oklahomans are medically eligible for Social Security disability benefits. DDS staff members understand how crucial their work is for people looking to build a secure financial foundation for their lives.

DDS processes applications made to the Social Security Administration for Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income.

For each disability claim, a team of para-professionals, disability specialists and medical/psychological consultants review each applicant's medical and work history. The team determines whether applicants meet federal medical eligibility criteria for disability or blindness.

The agency's claim processing time averages 130.7 days.

During Federal Fiscal Year 2021, DDS was on track to meet their budgeted workload, processing 99-percent of their allotted cases as of Sept. 9. The FFY 2021 numbers

are estimated.

The clearing of cases for other states has for several years been a particular point of pride for DRS.

DDS continues to be a national resource as an Extended Service Team site, which assists other states with their backlog of disability claims. Since its inception, Oklahoma EST has provided assistance to several states including Arizona, California, Kansas, Louisiana and New Mexico.

Disability Determination Services staff has also placed a high priority on saving taxpayers money by investigating fraudulent claims.

The Cooperative Disability Investigations unit investigates individual disability claims and identifies third parties to prevent fraud in SSA's SSDI and SSI disability programs and related federal and state programs.

DDS' budget is federally funded.



## DDS fast facts

**53,144**

Number of individuals served by Disability Determination Services staff.

**130.7**

Numbers of days that DDS takes on average to process a case. \*

**94.5%**

DDS accuracy rate on cases. \*

**99%**

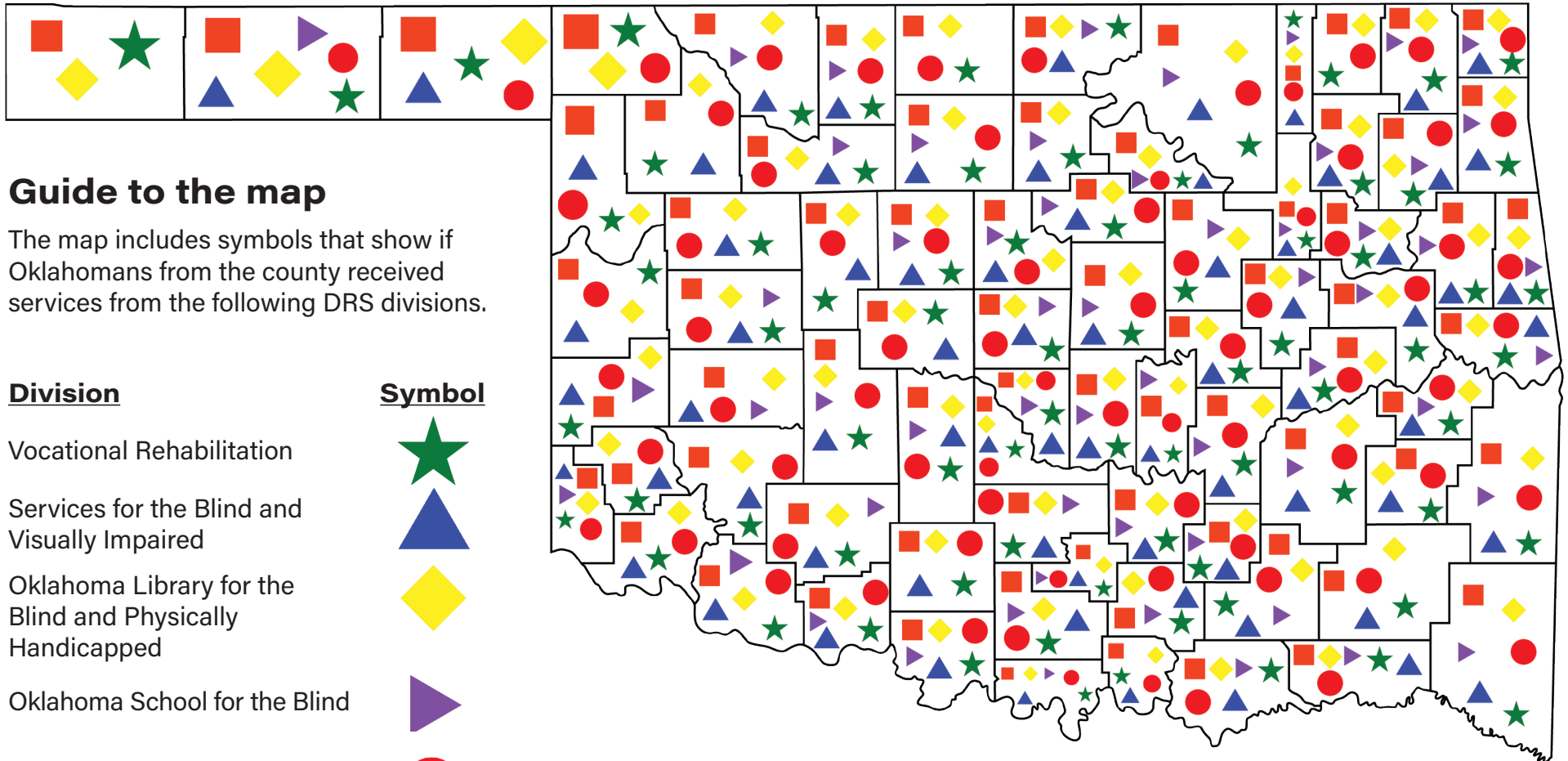
Percent of processed budgeted workload\*

\* FFY 2021 estimated as of Sept. 9.





# DRS impact by county



## Guide to the map

The map includes symbols that show if Oklahomans from the county received services from the following DRS divisions.

### Division

### Symbol

Vocational Rehabilitation



Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired



Oklahoma Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped



Oklahoma School for the Blind



Oklahoma School for the Deaf



Disability Determination Services



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County	Vocational Rehabilitation	Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired****	School for the Blind*	School for the Deaf*	Disability Determination	Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped***	Total by county
Adair	11	5	4	46	382	25	473
Alfalfa	10	3	4	14	49	22	102
Atoka	74	7	1	15	188	30	315
Beaver	1	3	0	3	28	8	43
Beckham	86	10	6	13	377	39	531
Blaine	13	1	0	12	116	17	159
Bryan	102	15	4	79	754	59	1,013
Caddo	45	9	1	37	516	31	639
Canadian	172	29	0	187	1,093	182	1,663
Carter	89	19	10	157	888	74	1,237
Cherokee	47	30	7	82	683	55	904
Choctaw	42	11	2	25	298	35	413
Cimarron	2	0	0	0	16	1	19
Cleveland	405	55	1	557	2,423	403	3,844
Coal	63	6	1	9	104	6	189
Comanche	301	39	10	142	1,849	137	2,478
Cotton	8	2	5	5	96	14	130
Craig	14	2	25	27	334	18	420
Creek	123	21	10	86	888	116	1,244
Custer	113	20	8	29	361	60	591
Delaware	35	8	12	73	677	60	865
Dewey	18	1	0	4	53	5	81
Ellis	8	1	0	2	38	5	54
Garfield	181	34	12	57	812	94	1,190
Garvin	96	18	3	74	423	47	661
Grady	81	13	1	85	645	66	891
Grant	5	0	0	5	44	8	62
Greer	32	1	0	2	98	6	139
Harmon	5	3	2	1	53	2	66



County	Vocational Rehabilitation	Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired****	School for the Blind*	School for the Deaf*	Disability Determination	Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped***	Total by county
Harper	5	0	0	1	28	6	40
Haskell	64	5	6	15	241	15	346
Hughes	36	5	8	28	219	28	324
Jackson	76	5	0	20	301	25	427
Jefferson	8	1	2	23	120	5	159
Johnston	33	2	1	31	201	11	279
Kay	114	17	7	31	695	57	921
Kingfisher	26	3	4	13	131	25	202
Kiowa	50	5	0	11	170	18	254
Latimer	36	9	0	6	133	21	205
LeFlore	111	19	20	41	925	48	1,164
Lincoln	73	7	2	49	461	56	648
Logan	68	5	1	29	445	70	618
Love	13	6	1	18	159	11	208
Major	12	5	10	17	77	6	127
Marshall	30	5	0	21	248	16	320
Mayes	85	12	12	66	662	39	876
McClain	52	4	0	57	534	62	709
McCurtain	53	20	5	22	612	57	769
McIntosh	27	10	2	54	413	34	540
Murray	42	8	3	106	210	34	403
Muskogee	83	64	60	93	1,389	164	1,853
Noble	14	3	3	6	141	15	182
Nowata	18	0	0	21	130	18	187
Okfuskee	21	2	0	34	214	23	294
Oklahoma	1,573	190	28	999	11,185	1,191	15,166
Okmulgee	135	7	1	53	763	58	1,017
Osage	82	8	2	51	456	68	667
Ottawa	39	7	5	28	807	44	930

County	Vocational Rehabilitation	Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired****	School for the Blind*	School for the Deaf*	Disability Determination	Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped***	Total by county
Pawnee	33	1	1	18	284	24	361
Payne	108	18	2	108	801	95	1,132
Pittsburg	155	24	2	100	780	76	1,137
Pontotoc	154	47	2	131	504	62	900
Pottawatomie	124	27	6	188	1,307	112	1,764
Pushmataha	34	13	0	20	206	16	289
Roger Mills	11	1	0	3	32	22	69
Rogers	131	20	4	165	861	99	1,280
Seminole	68	8	2	36	486	27	627
Sequoyah	48	18	5	42	873	65	1,051
Stephens	62	19	0	110	683	55	929
Texas	11	1	11	5	93	3	124
Tillman	8	4	1	9	98	6	126
Tulsa	1,197	239	121	862	8,173	869	11,461
Wagoner	72	23	15	121	463	69	763
Washington	92	11	4	76	704	99	1,280
Washita	46	7	1	12	159	27	252
Woods	59	5	5	8	63	13	153
Woodward	60	8	0	10	218	38	334
Out of state	39	6	0	6,932	0	11	6,988
Potentially eligible**	1,556	0	0	0	0	0	1,556
<b>Total by program</b>	<b>9,229</b>	<b>1,300</b>	<b>494</b>	<b>12,728</b>	<b>53,144</b>	<b>5,638</b>	<b>82,533</b>

\* Includes student outreach and other training and equipment programs as well as students at the physical school locations

\*\* Pre-ETS services for potentially eligible students are provided as required under WIOA throughout the state but specific county location is not available.

\*\*\* OLBPH includes services provided to students through the AIM Center.

\*\*\*\* SBVI includes clients served in the Older Blind Independent Living Program.

\*\*\*\*\* OSD offered ASL classes online without a cost, which allowed users to take the course more easily from home, out-of-state, and outside of the United States, substantially increasing the out-of-state participants the school could serve. OSD also received both an initial and later a second grant from the Masons for OSD's Senior Citizens Hearing Aid Program and equipment program that allowed a wait list to be cleared.





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