



# MONTANA SCHOOL *for* Deaf & Blind CHILDREN

*giving kids the building blocks to independence*

## PROGRAMS and SERVICES

The Montana School for the Deaf and Blind (MSDB) is a part of the Montana public education system providing a residential and day school for children who are deaf or blind or whose hearing or sight is so impaired that they cannot be successfully taught or receive an appropriate education in their home school district. MSDB is an executive branch agency governed by the Board of Public Education and the only education agency mandated to serve children ages 0 to 21.

In Montana, the repository of technical expertise in educating the deaf and blind students is the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind. There is no other educational program or resource in Montana that has the number of trained and experienced staff as does MSDB. Access to this resource has been and will continue to be vital to the success of most deaf and blind students across Montana.

### Purposes

In accordance with its statutory mandates the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind serves two primary functions. First, by the use of specialized instruction and training, MSDB provides an education for deaf and blind children that is commensurate with the education provided to non-disabled children in the local school districts. This education enables children being served by MSDB to become independent and self-sustaining citizens.

Second, in compliance with its statutory objects and purposes MSDB serves as a consultative resource for parents of deaf and blind children not yet enrolled in an educational program and for school districts where deaf and blind children are enrolled. Upon request MSDB ensures that

services and programs for deaf and blind children are appropriate.

### Goals

1. To provide parent services including disability and referral information, counseling to help the family adjust to their child's hearing or vision loss, and assistance to help parents participate in the educational planning process for their child.
2. To provide early educational intervention to deaf or blind preschool children in the home to minimize educational delays.
3. To provide educational services specific to the sensory impaired child's condition, including language acquisition, speech development, and maximum use of residual hearing and vision.
4. To provide students with a comprehensive educational program from preschool through 12<sup>th</sup> grade which includes extracurricular activities, social education, athletics, vocational education, and support services comparable to educational opportunities afforded to non-disabled children.
5. To provide students with vocational education and training which will enable them to develop marketable skills for employment and make enlightened choices regarding post secondary training and a career.
6. To provide students with comprehensive residential facilities, including care and supervision, health services, recreational opportunities and social education, which includes social adjustment and self concept development.



## Education Programs

Campus-Based Education Program The Montana School for the Deaf and Blind opened in Boulder in 1893 on the campus of the Montana state training school. In 1937 the school opened in a new single building facility on an 18-acre campus in Great Falls. Today the campus comprises 8 buildings including two academic buildings, two residential cottages, a dining facility, gymnasium and a heating plant with a combined space of over 180,000 square feet. MSDB is located directly across Central Avenue from two Great Falls Public School (GFPS) facilities, Lewis and Clark Elementary and East Middle School and a mile from Great Falls High School.



MSDB provides educational programs for the deaf and blind children from birth through age 21 and employs trained teachers of the deaf and the blind who are highly skilled, knowledgeable, and experienced in their fields. Staffing includes a fulltime school psychologist, physical therapist, occupational therapist, orientation and mobility instructor, audiologist, and two speech pathologists.

An Individual Education Program (IEP) is developed and placement is determined annually involving the student, parents, teachers, specialists, school administrator and a representative from the local district where the student resides. Through a cooperative agreement with the GFPS some students may take their classes at MSDB, GFPS, or a combination thereof. Inclusion options are available to students at the elementary, middle and high school levels for both academic and extracurricular activities. MSDB support specialists are provided for the blind, and sign language interpreters are provided for the deaf.

### Curricular Focuses for Deaf and Blind Students

Communication needs of deaf and hard of hearing students are the driving force behind the curriculum used at MSDB. The School provides a language enriched program with a staff and peer group who are fluent in sign language. These language role models are critical to the language development of each deaf and hard of hearing child.

For the blind, development of special concepts, instruction in Braille, assistive computer technology, the use of low vision aids, and orientation and mobility are unique educational needs. At MSDB, students are instructed in each of these areas by staff who are specifically trained and certified.

Each school day students receive instruction in language arts, reading, science, math, social studies, and health enhancement. Art, music, and vocational courses are taught as appropriate for age level and placement in school. Adaptations are made to access communication and develop concepts and literacy as required by each student's IEP.

On-campus and off-campus work experience is provided for high school students through their IEP. At MSDB, transition is a collaborative effort among the students, parents, MSDB faculty, and the personnel from Vocational Rehabilitation Services or the Department of Developmental Disabilities and the Blind and Low Vision Services.

Interpreter Tutor Program MSDB employees educational sign language interpreters and tutors who work with deaf students taking classes in the mainstream setting at Lewis and Clark Elementary, East Middle or Great Falls High School. The interpreter staff also serves students who are participating in extracurricular and club activities with the public schools. Having an adequate number of skilled interpreter tutors and grouping students together allows MSDB to develop a cost effective, yet appropriate educational plan for any deaf student who is placed here.

## Residential Program

For children who live too far from campus to attend as day students, the residential program provides a supportive, warm and understanding living environment while at the same time nurturing healthy bodies, the development of motor skills through participation in sports, and other recreational activities.

The residential facility consists of 5 cottages connected by 2 large activity rooms and a food service building. Each cottage is arranged like a large home with students grouped by gender and age. Bedrooms are designed to accommodate two students. Breakfast and dinner are served in the individual cottages, and lunches are served in the dining room during the week. Formal dinners are served in the dining room for holidays and special events.



During the week and weekends, residential students participate in a variety of activities that include bike riding, swimming, shopping, barbecues, roller skating, and movies. Special events include a Super Bowl party, the Christmas Stroll, the Ice Breaker Fun Run, Great Falls White Sox baseball games, and Paris Gibson Square art classes.

Students travel home once each month during the school year. These school breaks vary in length from two weeks at Christmas to travel weekends that are from Friday to the following Monday.

The residential program maintains a staff of health service workers, kitchen and dining room staff, and housekeeping staff. All of the residential program administration and counseling staff have college degrees, as do a

number of the house parents. All house parents complete training as certified child care workers during the first year of their employment at MSDB.

Health Services The Health Services Program is directed by a registered nurse and staffed by licensed practical nurses. Medications and treatments are given under orders of the child's health care provider(s). Health care is provided to students through scheduled and on-call staff, 24 hours a day.

The residential program also employs behavioral counselors who provide students with the opportunity to participate in a variety of outing and counseling related activities. Counselors are responsible for the management of the Independent Living Skills Program (ILSP). The purpose of the program is to assist our seniors and a select group of juniors in developing the skills they will need to successfully meet the challenges of living on their own in an ever-changing world. Through the ILSP students learn skills such as cooking, shopping, menu planning, time and money management, and how to access community services.

## Outreach Program

MSDB's outreach program serves as a resource center providing information, consultation, and technical assistance. Outreach consultants work closely with the service providers for deaf and blind children birth through age three and with the Office of Public Instruction in addressing the needs of these children. The Outreach consultants take on many roles. The consultants, in addition to other members of the educational team, plan appropriate academic programs for deaf and blind children wherever they may live. MSDB has 5 outreach consultants who serve 300 children in more than 90 school districts and community based preschools across the state. There are 2 consultants for the deaf who are based in Boulder and Billings and 3 consultants for the blind who are based in Missoula, Bozeman and Great Falls. These consultants provide public school districts with technical assistance in serving students and information, advice and support to parents of infants and toddlers regarding essential early intervention activities.

The work of these five consultants is critical because the 2002-2003 child count, the OPI reported 256 deaf, blind or deaf-blind children being served in Montana's public schools. Only four school districts in the state have teachers on staff with specific training in the disability areas of deafness or blindness; Missoula, Bozeman, Billings and Great Falls. In Montana fewer than 1/3 of our sensory impaired students are served in local school districts by teachers, trained in their specific disability areas, who can modify curriculum, evaluate progress toward IEP goals and make recommendations, based on disability specific experience or training.

In support of MSDB's outreach services the School provides on-campus assessments of deaf and blind students. The results of these assessments are then used by IEP teams in the local districts to develop suitable IEPs and make placement decisions about where students can best receive an appropriate education.

Summer Programs Week long summer camps for deaf and blind students are provided through the collaborative efforts of MSDB, OPI and the MSDB Foundation. These camps are designed to give students from both local school districts and MSDB, an extended opportunity to learn how to communicate and develop technology based communication skills, socialize with their peers and develop independence.

Through the same collaborative effort, MSDB also provides families and school personnel of deaf or blind students with the chance to participate in "Family Learning Weekends." These weekends are designed to provide opportunities for learning related to their child's disability, information on disability related resources, and an opportunity to develop supportive networks with other parents and professionals who work with deaf or blind children.

Specialized Programs and Services Early intervention is the key to the successful education of sensory impaired children. MSDB's Family Advisor Program educates and empowers families so they can begin to meet the needs of their deaf or blind infant or toddler. Through the MSDB Outreach Program, family advisors work with the entire families in the home setting on issues related to the unique

needs of their sensory impaired, preschool age children, including: communication, language development, speech and sign language, concept development, use of residual hearing or vision, assistive devices such as hearing aids, or visual stimulation devices.

Library Services MSDB manages several federal programs that provide specialized instructional material for Montana's deaf and blind children. The School is a depository for the Captioned Media Program (CMP) for the western region of the United States. The CMP provides captioned videos to enhance and supplement classroom studies for deaf and hard of hearing students. Anyone working with deaf and hard of hearing children may become a member and all members may borrow any of the videos housed here.

The American Printing House for the Blind (APH) provides large print, Braille text, tactile materials and some electronic aids for blind and partially sighted students. Federal funds are provided to states to help with purchases, and a census is taken each year to determine the number of students served in each state. MSDB processes orders, manages the APH accounts and maintains Montana's census data.



All services by MSDB are provided at no charge to parents, programs or local school districts and may be accessed by calling 1-800 882-MSDB (6732). Additional information about MSDB can be obtained through the school's website at [www.sdb.state.mt.us](http://www.sdb.state.mt.us)

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