

EXHIBIT 2  
DATE 3/9/05  
HB 438

Testimony: House Appropriations Committee  
Regarding: HB 438 Braille literacy services for blind or visually impaired children  
Steve Gettel, Superintendent  
Wednesday March 9, 2005

MSDB's Obligation to Outreach The Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind has the statutory authority and responsibility to, "...serve as a consultative resource for parents or hearing impaired and visually impaired children not yet enrolled in an educational program and for public schools of the state where hearing impaired or visually impaired children are enrolled. The school upon request shall ensure that services and programs for hearing impaired or visually impaired children are appropriate and sufficient. The school may provide assistance to the program that the school determines is needed." MCA 20-8-101.

MSDB is charged with the responsibility of providing technical assistance through its outreach program to parents, school districts and professional who serve the state's deaf and blind children. The current demand exceeds the school's ability to provide these services in a manner that adequately or appropriately meets the need.

Caseload Analysis and Regional Comparisons The vast majority of Montana's school districts do not have the technical expertise and lack the resources necessary to meet the program needs of the sensory impaired students who attend them. Of the 49 school districts serve by the VI outreach staff only Billings, Helena, Browning, Missoula, Great Falls and Sidney have trained teachers of the blind either working for or contracted by the districts. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act parents have the right to choose their local school district as the placement option for their deaf or blind child. With the present resources available, MSDB's outreach staff can not meet the request for services brought to them by parents and the public schools.

Currently MSDB's 3 VI outreach consultants are serving 174 school age children. This is an average caseload of 58 students per consultant. During the 2002-03 school year data was gathered to make a regional comparison of outreach programs. At that time, the state of Oregon had 20 educational service districts where instruction was provided by itinerant teachers, with caseloads of approximately 15. In central Oregon, the Linn-Benton-Lincoln Educational Service District, there were 3 teachers of the blind with caseloads of 14-16 students between the ages of 3 and 21. They served an area with a radius of between 60 and 75 miles and provide direct instruction and consultative services similar to that provide in Montana, to students from 8 hours a week to 2 hours a month. The South Coast Educational Service district covered 2 counties on the Southern Oregon coast. One teacher of the blind served the orientation and instruction needs of 17 students.

At he Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind, 13 outreach consultants serve 393 blind students. Though caseloads varied based on the needs of students, the average caseload for each consultant, who also was providing some level of direct classroom instruction, was 26 students.

The Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired and other professional associations in the field of blind education recommend case loads of 12 to 20 students for consultants who work with families. This recommendation varies based on the number of students who are Braille readers, as these students require additional for the delivery of appropriate services. When providing consultation only, a full caseload is considered to be

about 20 students if the job is to be done well. When providing direct instruction as an itinerant teacher, a full caseload is approximately 12 students. For each Braille reader it is recommended that the caseload be reduced by 3 students.

School Based Programs for the Blind The critical needs for blind and visually impaired students are Braille, Orientation and Mobility Instruction, and support for transitional programming including Independent Living and Work Attainment Skills. The IEP related issues include access to the curriculum through modification of materials, and support services provided by professionals with training specific to the unique need of Blind and visually impaired children.

An outreach caseload analysis was conducted in during the 2002-03 school year. Regarding the areas of curriculum and instruction, MSDB outreach consultants report that 156 students, or 85% had no one on their IEP team with training in the area of blind education and only 26 students, or 14% received instruction in their school by a trained teacher of the blind. In spite of this fact, MSDB outreach consultants reported that 73 students, or 40%, were being served with appropriate curriculum modifications which indicates that public school teachers, specialists and program directors are doing the very best they can to serve these students.

Regarding the area of technical assistance, MSDB outreach consultants reported that of 125 students, 60% were not seen enough by the consultants. For 125 students, 60% of requested contacts went unmet because they did not have enough time. Consultants reported that appropriate program management occurred for less than 50% of the students because there was no one available with qualifications to provide instruction necessary to meet student needs. This was evidenced by the fact that across the state 49 students needed instruction in orientation and mobility however only 25%, or 12 students received this instruction.

Current Data on VI Students served both at MSDB and in the School Districts The December, 2004 OPI child count indicates the statewide number of students receiving special education services, with a visual impairment as the primary disability, is 65. The number of students, with deaf-blindness as a primary disability, is 6. These numbers include those students served at MSDB where 10 students have a primary disability of visual impairment and 1 is identified as deaf-blind.

The APH count of students served statewide is 196. The eligibility criteria for this service is somewhat different than that for receiving IDEA services. The number of students identified as using Braille as their primary reading medium is 13 with 3 being served at MSDB. Students using Braille as a secondary medium is 16 with 7 being served at MSDB.

During the current school year, 21 students, including 4 pre-Braille readers, use Braille as a primary mode for accessing the curriculum. Of the total VI case loads, only 2 students are not receiving Braille instruction who MSDB consultants believe should be receiving this instruction.

	APH		Child Count		Outreach VI/DB
Primary Out Reach	10	Primary VI LEA	55	Primary and Secondary	154
Primary MSDB	3	Primary VI MSDB	10	Braille Instruction	17
Secondary Outreach	9	Primary DB LEA	6	Pre-Braille Instruction	4
Secondary MSDB	7	Primary DB MSDB	1		
Total	29		71		21

**Summary** This data indicates a very small population with variances in educational needs however, HB 438 addresses critical needs in the following areas:

1. Sections 3 and 4 requiring assurance of IDEA compliance in the development of the Individualized Education Programs for students and the instruction of Braille reading and writing. This provision will provide for additional outreach staff, skilled and knowledgeable in the area of blind education and specifically in the instruction of Braille. The addition of critically needed staff will provide for an appropriate level of technical assistance to the 43 school districts that do not have staff trained to address the unique needs of the blind students they serve.
2. Section 5 requiring the MSDB to loan equipment for the instruction of Braille to school districts on a temporary basis. This provision will assure that newly identified students do not have to wait for the equipment need for them to access Braille materials or receive instruction in Braille reading and writing.
3. Section 6 requiring the BOPE to establish standards for Braille instructors. This provision will assure that school district staff, responsible for Braille instruction, meet a measured level of proficiency promoting the overall skills of Blind students in this critical curricular area.

**MSDB STUDENT DATA BY COUNTY**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Semester 2004-05 School Year**

COUNTY	VI OUTREACH STUDENTS	HI OUTREACH STUDENTS	MSDB HI STUDENTS	MSDB VI STUDENTS
Beaverhead	3			
Big Horn	5	1		
Blaine	3		1	
Broadwater	2	1		
Carbon	1	1		
Carter				
Cascade	23	1	26	12
Chouteau		1		
Custer	1			
Daniels				
Dawson	2	2		
Deer Lodge	7	1		
Fallon				
Fergus	3	2	1	
Flathead	11	3	3	1
Gallatin	13	9	2	1
Garfield				
Glacier	4	1		
Golden Valley		1		
Granite				
Hill			1	
Jefferson	1	3		
Judith Basin	1		2	
Lake	8	9		
Lewis and Clark	10	8	4	
Liberty		1		
Lincoln	2		1	1
Madison	1			
McCone	1	1		
Meagher	1			
Mineral	1	1		1
Missoula	20	6	1	
Musselshell	2	1		
Park	1	5		
Petroleum	1			
Phillips	2	1	1	
Pondera	1	1		1
Powder River				
Powell				
Prairie				
Ravalli	2	4	1	1
Richland	1	3		
Roosevelt	7			1
Rosebud	5	3		1
Sanders	2	2		
Sheridan		2		
Silver Bow	3	4	1	
Stillwater	3	1		
Sweet Grass	1			
Teton		1		1
Toole		1	1	
Treasure				
Valley	3	3		
Wheatland	1	1		
Wibaux				
Yellowstone	29	9	4	1
Total	188	95	50	22

**Program Indicators for the 2005 Biennium – Year 1**

Indicator	FY 2000	FY 20001	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	Projected FY 2005
<b>Campus Based Services</b> 20-8-102 MCA, 10.61.102 ARM						
<b>Total Served</b>	<b>316</b>	<b>287</b>	<b>314</b>	<b>439</b>	<b>453</b>	<b>(459)</b>
Education Program - Deaf	55	51	53	48	51	54
Education Program – Blind	30	28	27	25	24	25
Residential Program	40	39	42	40	37	40
Evaluations – Educational	26	22	32	29	23	30
Evaluations – Audiological	165	147	160	297	318	310
<b>Outreach and Itinerant Services</b> 20-8-102 MCA, 10.61.102 ARM						
<b>Total Served</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>246</b>	<b>255</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>301</b>	<b>(303)</b>
Consultation Services - Deaf	52	59	75	89	95	95
Family Advisor Program	13	13	10	15	18	20
Consultation Services - Blind	164	174	170	188	188	188
<b>Summer Programs</b> 20-8-102 MCA, 10.61.103 ARM						
<b>Total Participants</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>287</b>	<b>(315)</b>
Summer Skills Program for Blind	9	6	8	13	8	10
Summer Camp for Deaf/Hearing Impaired	19	26	21	28	26	26
Family Learning Weekend - Blind	0	0	57	85	90	99
Family Learning Weekend – Deaf	126	107	120	125	163	180
<b>Professional Development – Parents, School Districts and Education Associations - (Not including training for MSDS staff)</b> 20-8-102 MCA						
<b>Total Participants</b>	<b>550</b>	<b>441</b>	<b>785</b>	<b>1100</b>	<b>1377</b>	<b>(1710)</b>
Number of Training Sessions	20	13	43	54	90	95
<b>Total Population Served</b>	<b>1249</b>	<b>1113</b>	<b>1560</b>	<b>2082</b>	<b>2418</b>	<b>(2787)</b>
<b>Percent Change Over Previous Year</b>	<b>+ 87%</b>	<b>- 11%</b>	<b>+40%</b>	<b>+33%</b>	<b>+14%</b>	<b>(+13%)</b>

