



*Education, Communication and
Independence for Life*

*Montana School for
Deaf and Blind Children*

*3911 Central Avenue
Great Falls, Montana 59405*

*Giving kids the building blocks
To independence!*

Testimony: Education Appropriations Subcommittee
Regarding: MSDB 07 Biennium Budget
Steve Gettel, Superintendent
Monday, January 10, 2005

Background

The Montana School for the Deaf and Blind is state supported special purpose school, a part of the Montana public education system, providing a residential and day school for 72 children who are deaf or blind or whose hearing or sight is so defective that they cannot be successfully taught and are unable to receive a sufficient or proper education in their home school districts. MSDB is the only education agency mandated to serve children ages 0 to 21. For these students, centralized educational services at the MSDB in Great Falls are critical to their successful education and transition into postsecondary education or work.

In Montana, the repository of technical expertise in educating the deaf and blind students is the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind with the professional expertise and experience of its 34 licensed professional staff and 23 certified residential staff who are able to meet the unique communication, education and social needs of sensory impaired, preschool, school age, and transition students it serves. 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.

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 receiving educational services. Upon request MSDB outreach staff provide consultation and technical assistance to the families, teachers and administrators of 18 infants and toddlers, and 283 school age students in 87 school districts and 44 counties across the state.

I would like to call your particular attention to the School's "Program Indicators" for FY 2004. While the number of students served in our on-campus education program remains steady, the School continued to make impressive growth in the numbers of students, parents and professionals served through our Summer and Professional Development Programs.

Central issues of quality programs for sensory impaired children

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 core curriculum through modification of materials, and support services provided by professionals with training specific

to the unique needs of blind and visually impaired children. Both deaf and blind children need support for transitional programming including independent living and work attainment skills. 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. Across Montana, only 4 school districts employ teachers who have specific training in the area of deaf or blind education and only 1 district has a certified orientation and mobility specialist on its staff. This is, in part, why it is so critical that the programs of MSDB be adequately funded.

Regardless of whether a deaf or blind child is educated at MSDB or in his or her local school district, a system of quality education includes an instructional program provided by a professional trained and experienced to understand and meet the unique educational needs of that sensory impaired child. At MSDB, the ability to meet the needs of the student through the IEP, require that the School have the resources necessary to recruit and retain teachers with specialized training that goes beyond the current accreditation standards. Providing a quality program requires that the School has a budget sufficient to supply the specialized equipment and materials necessary to carry out appropriate instruction techniques within the IEP and unique to the needs of sensory impaired children. With a budget sufficient to recruit for and fill all teacher and specialist positions currently vacant and with an operating budget that allows for the purchase of equipment and materials necessary for those staff to carry out instruction appropriate to the IEP of each student, MSDB can ensure that all students currently enrolled will receive a quality education and can achieve their potential as independent, self-supporting and successful members of communities throughout Montana.

Budget for FY 2006-2007

Regarding the budget for fiscal years 2006 and 2007, the School is pleased with the Present Law Adjustments that were made by the budget office under the Martz administration for extra curricular compensation \$10,930, and for replacement of lease vehicles. Although this adjustment is revenue neutral, it is significant that the school maintains a replacement schedule for vehicles essential to both the campus-based and outreach programs.

The School is particularly pleased with the new proposals added to the Schweitzer budget for yearly adjustments to Repair & Maintenance NP 3, \$75,000, Computer Replacement NP 6, \$25,000 and most significantly funding for Teachers and Other Professionals Salaries NP 8 \$150,000. These new proposals help to address the critical budget issues which stem from the long-term effects of underfunded operating and personal services budgets.

Since FY 85, total FTE at the School has been reduced by 4.41. To meet the budget this fiscal year is leaving 3.5 (2.51 FTE) positions vacant in the Education Program and 4 positions vacant in the Residential program (2.88 FTE). As a result, the school has been unable to admit students who would have been in previous years, because of a lack of staff necessary to meet their needs. This school year the average disparity in pay between licensed professional staff at MSDB and their peers in the Great Falls Public Schools is \$5,870 with a high of \$11,488 (MA+30/12 yrs) to a low of \$681 (BA/28 yrs). As a result, when the school attempted to recruit a teacher this past

summer, we had only 2 applicants, one of whom was not minimally qualified. When apprised of our entry level salary, the other withdrew her application and took a job in Washington State. Of the 34 licensed/ professional staff at the MSDB, as of June 30, 2004, 35% have 25 or more years of service. Like other public schools, MSDB is facing a recruiting crisis. However, our problem is compounded by the fact that there are no training programs within the Montana higher education system that prepare teachers of the deaf or blind. Our teachers must be recruited from a highly competitive regional pool of candidates.

As a school providing instruction and direct supervision to students entrusted to our care, MSDB must be able to fill all positions, within the Education and Residential Programs, necessary to meet the instruction, care and supervision needs of all the students enrolled. The addition of \$150,000 for personal services in the Schweitzer budget will help to close, although not completely, the pay gap for our licensed professional staff.

I again want to thank the Governor and the staff in the budget office for their serious consideration of the School's needs and the adjustments that have been proposed to address our program needs. I want to thank Chairwoman Franklin, and the members of this committee for your attention. I ask for your support for this budget as proposed by the Governor recognizing the steps it takes in solving the School's critical funding issues and recognizing that additional steps will be necessary to ensure that MSDB can fill all essential staff positions, provide equitable salaries making recruitment of qualified professionals possible, and provide specialized materials and equipment that meet the unique instructional needs of our students. For MSDB, this is our definition of a "quality" education for Montana's deaf and blind students.

Program Indicators for the 2005 Biennium – Year 1

Indicator	FY 2000	FY 20001	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	Projected FY 2005
Campus Based Services						
20-8-102 MCA, 10.61.102 ARM						
Total Served	316	287	314	439	453	(459)
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
Outreach and Itinerant Services						
20-8-102 MCA, 10.61.102 ARM						
Total Served	229	246	255	292	301	(303)
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
Summer Programs						
20-8-102 MCA, 10.61.103 ARM						
Total Participants	154	139	206	251	287	(315)
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
Professional Development – Parents, School Districts and Education Associations - (Not including training for MSDB staff)						
20-8-102 MCA						
Total Participants	550	441	785	1100	1377	(1710)
Number of Training Sessions	20	13	43	54	90	95
Total Population Served	1249	1113	1560	2082	2418	(2787)
Percent Change Over Previous Year	+ 87%	- 11%	+40%	+33%	+14%	(+13%)

**Salary Comparison with Great Falls Public Schools
Exempt Professional/Licensed Staff
2004-2005 School Year**

Title	Degree	Experience	MSDB	GFPS	Difference
			Salary 04-05	Salary 04-05	
Teacher – HI Dept. Preschool	BA + 15	21	\$ 34,885	\$ 36,869	\$ 1,984
Teacher – HI Dept. Elementary	MA	7	\$ 25,236	\$ 33,494	\$ 8,258
Teacher – HI Dept. Elementary	BA + 30	29	\$ 35,924	\$ 41,981	\$ 6,057
Teacher – HI Dept. Elementary	MA + 30	15	\$ 33,873	\$ 46,403	\$ 12,530
Teacher – HI Dept. Secondary	MA	14	\$ 31,017	\$ 41,485	\$ 10,468
Teacher – HI Dept. Secondary	MS + 10	5	\$ 25,257	\$ 32,292	\$ 7,035
Teacher – HI Dept. Secondary	MA + 30	20	\$ 40,408	\$ 50,141	\$ 9,733
Teacher – HI Dept. Secondary	MA	12	\$ 29,247	\$ 39,201	\$ 9,954
Teacher – HI Dept. Physical Education	MA + 10	31	\$ 38,100	\$ 44,437	\$ 6,337
Language Clinician – HI Dept.	PhD	25	\$ 40,408	\$ 51,106	\$ 10,698
Speech Therapist – HI/VI Dept.	MA + 30	32	\$ 40,408	\$ 51,106	\$ 10,698
Teacher – HI/VI Dept. Vocational	BA + 10	26	\$ 36,768	\$ 38,862	\$ 2,094
Supervising Teacher – HI Dept.	MA + 30	24	\$ 40,575	\$ 51,106	\$ 10,531
Teacher – VI Dept. Preschool/Elementary	BA	3	\$ 22,024	\$ 26,086	\$ 4,062
Teacher – VI Dept. – Secondary	BA + 30	8	\$ 25,257	\$ 33,263	\$ 8,006
Teacher – VI Dept. Secondary/Technology	BA	8	\$ 24,322	\$ 30,580	\$ 6,258
Teacher ½ – VI Dept. Physical Education	BA	0	\$ 10,491	\$ 12,145	\$ 1,654
Teacher – VI Dept. Braille	BS + 20	4	\$ 23,333	\$ 29,097	\$ 5,704
Orientation & Mobility Instructor – VI Dept.	MA + 30	12	\$ 31,017	\$ 42,505	\$ 11,488
Supervising Teacher – VI Dept.	MA + 30	31	\$ 43,261	\$ 51,106	\$ 7,845
Librarian	MA + 30	7	\$ 27,581	\$ 37,234	\$ 9,653
Audiologist	MS + 30	26	\$ 31,390	\$ 37,123	\$ 5,733
Physical Therapist	BS	24	\$ 36,170	\$ 42,378	\$ 6,208
Occupational Therapist – ½	BA	24	\$ 18,085	\$ 21,189	\$ 3,104
School Psychologist	MA + 30	26	\$ 40,552	\$ 51,106	\$ 10,554
Counselor – Student Services	MA	4	\$ 24,331	\$ 30,070	\$ 5,739
Counselor – Student Services	BA	5	\$ 22,330	\$ 27,884	\$ 5,554
Supervising Counselor – Student Services	BS	28	\$ 33,493	\$ 34,174	\$ 681
Supervising Counselor – Student Services	BA + 10	34	\$ 36,165	\$ 36,869	\$ 704
Outreach Consultant – HI Dept.	MA + 30	31	\$ 45,683	\$ 55,249	\$ 9,566
Outreach Consultant – HI Dept.	MS + 30	12	\$ 35,530	\$ 45,952	\$ 10,422
Outreach Consultant – VI Dept.	MA	12	\$ 33,617	\$ 42,380	\$ 8,763
Outreach Consultant – VI Dept.	BA + 10	10	\$ 30,710	\$ 33,918	\$ 3,208
Supervising Outreach Consultant	MA + 30	31	\$ 40,446	\$ 51,106	\$ 10,660
Teacher – Vacant – HI Dept. Elementary	MA	0	\$ 22,929	\$ 28,928	\$ 5,999
Teacher – Vacant – HI Dept. Secondary	MA	0	\$ 22,929	\$ 28,928	\$ 5,999
Teacher – ½ Vacant – HI Dept. Secondary	MA	0	\$ 11,465	\$ 14,465	\$ 3,000
Lead Interpreter – Vacant – HI Dept.	MA	0	\$ 22,929	\$ 28,928	\$ 5,999
Teacher – Vacant – VI Dept. Secondary	MA	0	\$ 22,929	\$ 28,928	\$ 5,999
				Total	\$ 268,937
				Benefits	\$ 49,404
				Total Cost	\$ 318,341

All salaries are based on 185 contracted days.

Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind
Critical Budget/Personnel Issues for 2007 Biennium

- A. Pursuant to House Bill 0002 the school is to prepare an FTE reduction to save \$62,587 in GF in the 2007 biennium (\$31,328 FY06 and \$31,259 FY07).

- B. The 2007 Biennium budget process calls for 4% vacancy savings of \$155,023 in FY06 and \$155,002 in FY07 assessed against the school would potentially result in a Reduction-In-Force depending on the schools' staffing needs during the 2007 biennium. At a minimum it would mean the school can not fill positions currently vacant which the school needs to fill. The school currently employs 34 licensed professional staff.

- The school has a very difficult time coming up with vacancy savings given the nature of our business and from running a 24/7 residential program. The school is not a large agency and given the fact most positions work a 185 day contract, there is very little flexibility in the budget to generate vacancy savings. We have had to generate vacancy savings via the fact it has been assessed against all programs at the school. The direct result of this is a reduction in services to the students we serve.

- C. Of the 34 licensed/professional staff at the MSDB, as of June 30, 2004, 12 (35%) have 25 or more years of service. This includes 3 teachers, 2 outreach consultants, 4 specialists, 1 supervising teacher, and 2 supervising counselors. Approximately one-third of the schools' licensed professional staff will retire in the next 5-6 years. The school will not be able to fill these positions under the current salary schedule. As a result, the state will not meet its obligation to Montana's sensory impaired students if the school is unable to maintain a core of expertise in the areas of deaf education and blind education. Currently, only five school districts in Montana employ personnel certified in the areas of deaf or blind education. The MSDB is currently serving students from 90 school districts across Montana. Without the resources and expertise available from the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind, these districts will not be meeting the educational needs of the sensory impaired students they are currently serving.

- D. If not provided an appropriate education because of a lack of specifically skilled and knowledgeable teachers, the lost earnings for a third of MSDB's graduates, those students that will go from "school to work," could minimally be \$410,450 for each student over his or her lifetime. Over the past 7 years the average number of "school to work" students has been 2.7/year creating a total lost earning potential of \$1,108,215 for every year that MSDB is without qualified, competent teaching staff.

- E. The average wage for our licensed/professional staff in the education and residential programs lags that of peers in the Great Falls Public Schools by \$5,870 with a high of \$11,488 (MA+30/12 yrs) to a low of \$681 (BA/28 yrs).

F. With an average ending salary \$5,870 below that of peers working in the GFPS, retirement benefits for teachers with 30 years experience retiring from MSDB in 2005 will be \$2,957 less than that received by GFPS teachers with comparable degrees, experience credits and years of experience. Over 20 years this amounts to lost benefits of \$58,700.

G. Until 2002, the school received an average of 36 inquiries per year related to professional positions at the school. We typically had an active applicant pool of 10 qualified individuals for teaching positions. Since 2002, we have had only 13 total inquiries. We currently have no qualified applicants in our pool and this is after a nationwide search for a teacher of deaf from July through October of this year. That search resulted in 2 applicants, one of whom was not minimally qualified. We did offer the position to the other applicant who turned it down in preference for a better paying position in Washington State.

H. The School is currently holding the following positions vacant to meet the FY05 Personal Services Budget.

Education –

- 3 1/2 – Teachers (not planning to fill 2 1/2 positions at the present time)
- 1 – Lead Interpreter

Student Services –

- 1 – Cottage Life Attendant
- 1 – Lead Houseparent
- 2 – LPN/Nightwatch

I. MSDB has lost a total of 6 positions from all program areas since FY 85 as noted in the table below.

Comparison of FTE and budgets between FY 85 and FY03

	FTE - FY 85	FTE – FY 05	FTE – FY 06
Education	46.89	42.94	42.21
Administration	5.25	5.00	5.00
Student Services	28.74	29.74	29.74
Maintenance	4.75	4.00	4.00
Total	85.36	81.68	80.95