

Testimony: Senate Finance and Claims Committee
Regarding: HB 438 Braille literacy services for blind or visually impaired children
Steve Gettel, Superintendent
Monday, April 11, 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 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. 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.

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 more than 90 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. At the 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 provided 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.

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 American Printing House for the Blind, a federally funded program, provides approximately \$280 worth of Braille and large print material for each visually impaired student who meets eligibility criteria. Eligibility for this program is somewhat different than that for IDEA special education services. The APH count for the current service year is 196. 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.

Central Issues of Quality Programs for Visually 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.

Regardless of whether a blind child is educated at MSDB or in the local school district, a system of quality education must have the resources necessary to support an instructional program provided by an educator trained to meet the unique needs of the sensory impaired child. And for the student who has been identified by the IEP team as needing to develop literacy through Braille, the teacher must have access to necessary specialized equipment and materials. HB 438 will improve the quality of educational services for blind students by increasing the availability of these important resources. Through the collaboration and cooperation of MSDB and the local districts, more blind students will develop literacy through Braille instruction, and as a result, achieve their potential as independent, self-supporting and successful members of communities throughout Montana.

MSDB STUDENT DATA BY COUNTY
1st 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
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%)

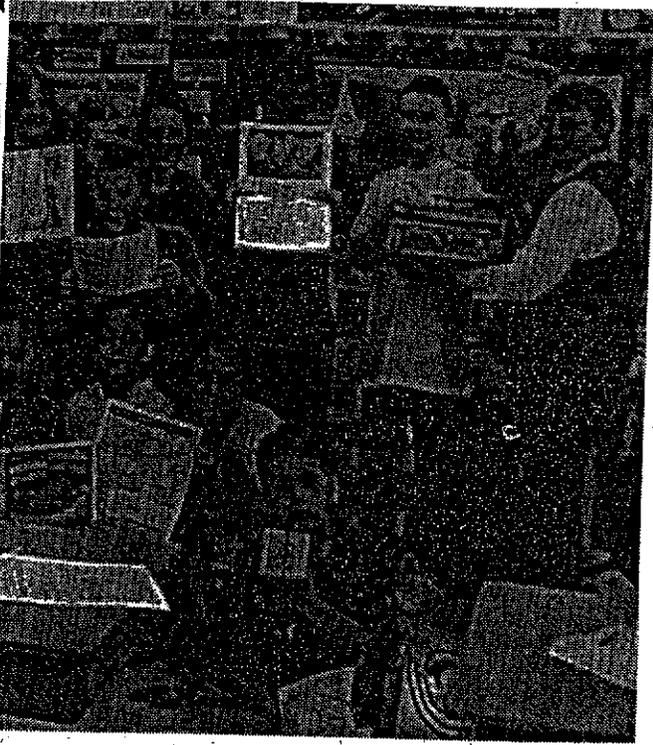
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Culbertson Fourth Graders Have Deaf And Blind Presentation

Valerie Burgan, from the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind in Great Falls, gave an interesting and informative presentation to fourth graders and Mrs. Hekkel's reading group recently at Culbertson Elementary School.

She talked about what it might be like for a person to be hearing and/or visually impaired and how students in Montana receive services from the school located in Great Falls.

She brought with her a machine that resembled a typewriter, but had only six keys and a bar in the middle for spacing. This is called a Brailier — the machine used to write in Braille. Instead of black ink on the page, a series of raised dots appears when the paper is removed from the machine.

She demonstrated a teaching block, called a cell, containing two columns of three

holes in which teachers place cylindrical shapes to help students learn the patterns of Braille letters.

Every letter of the alphabet has a particular arrangement of dots. The Braille alphabet also has patterns for punctuation marks and abbreviations of some words.

Burgan gave each student a card with the raised dots of the Braille alphabet and a bookmark designed by students at the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind showing hand positions for sign language.

She also presented fourth graders with a 2005 calendar with Braille dots to identify the days and weeks of each month. It is illustrated with beautiful watercolor paintings and sculptures created by visually impaired artists.

Burgan's visit afforded students a rare glimpse into a fascinating world.

Notebook

old calanders and etc. after Mrs. Burgan's presentation.



Braille Machine

A machine that resembles a typewriter but with only six keys and a bar in the middle for spacing is called a Brailier and the fourth-grade students at Culbertson

