



MONTANA SCHOOL *for the Deaf & the Blind*

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TO: Interim Education Budget Committee Members
FROM: Paul Furthmyre, Superintendent
DATE: June 8, 2024

RE: 2025 Legislative Session Bill Support

Chair Bedey and Members of the IEBC:

Often times the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind (MSDB) misses out on great opportunities that are provided for public schools and students in Montana. Legislation such as staff recruitment and retention, transformation learning, early reading intervention are just a few. Often times it is the funding mechanism in the bill as we don't receive Annual Number Belonging (ANB) funding but House Bill 2 (HB2) funding. Other times, it can be because of the specialty of the education that we provide. As a young superintendent at MSDB, I now know it is my duty to watch for opportunities during a session that can benefit our educational system.

I will be asking for legislation that will help MSDB meet the opportunities found in Education Interim Committee document, *"The Teacher Recruitment and Retention: What's in Montana's Toolbox created in September of 2023."* I am hoping to find a legislator or a group of legislators that would be willing to sponsor a couple of bill changes on MSDBs behalf and/or draft legislation to offer MSDB the same opportunities found in the following statutes:

Updating 20-8-121, MCA to allow MSDB to transport student's home via a school bus. It could be as simple as adding "the superintendent may choose to transport residential students on school buses as defined by 20-10-101, MCA." Our parents have been very supportive the past two years transporting their children. However, MSDB lost enrollment as result as well.

Adding Educational Interpreters to be included in the language of the Quality Educator Loan Assistance Program under 20-4-502, MCA. They are not currently able to receive loan assistance with the current bill. They also do not have a current certification in Montana but I think it is possible. This would help with our recruitment and retention of educational interpreters. Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind is listed as an impacted school.

Adjust HB 883 to allow MSDB to utilize the teacher residency program. The bill currently in Section 2, directs the superintendent of public instruction to contract with professional educator preparation programs located in a unit of the Montana university system. Currently, no MUS program offers a program for Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVI) and/or Teachers of the Deaf (TOD). As a result, this excludes MSDB from participation with this program. This would help with our recruitment and retention of teachers that serve our low-incidence population.

Adjust 20-7-602, MCA to allow MSDB to compete for funding with the Transformation Learning Grant. The funding formula is based on the quality educator payment program. MSDB is not funded that way and not

eligible to be awarded funding. The BPE has approved the application but MSDB was not in the allocated appropriation at this time. MSDB could be eligible to receive funding for fiscal years FY 26 and FY 27. Although MSDB would receive roughly \$45,000 per year, that would help provide the necessary training found in our application.

Again, as a young superintendent I am constantly learning. If these changes can be made, it will help MSDB recruit and retain staff members. I feel these changes would benefit our educational program. I am also willing to learn of any other potential programs that could benefit MSDB and find a way to make sure MSDB is included in competing for the program benefits.