

Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind Initial Educational Plan

The following outlines the instructional procedures that the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind will use while the school is shut down due to emergencies. We understand that the best education for our students is when they are face-to-face with our instructors that are trained to work with the deaf and the blind. However, due to the recent virus the school is developing an online platform in order to provide the same level of service.

When developing this plan, the school took into consideration the specific needs of each one of our students. Trying to develop an online plan that can consist of both auditory and visual instruction was key with the program. Our students who are deaf need to be able to visually see instructors signing to have access to language. Our students who are blind need to be able to auditorily hear our instructors. It is also critical that our students have access to the teachers during this time on a regular basis. Again, access needs to be available in the learning mediums required of the student.

MSDB is unique in that all of our students are currently served under an IEP plan. With each IEP plan students have minutes that are connected to goals in which the school is expected to provide direct instruction. So this plan not only takes into account providing the same service to our students online as we would on campus, but also takes into account the minutes listed in each student's IEP. During the entirety of our online programming, case managers are expected to work with teachers and keep track of all goals listed in student IEPs and the amount of direct instruction the student receives for each goal. As the Department of Education and the Montana Office of Public Instruction Special Education Division continue to provide updates on flexibilities with regards to IEP minutes, it is our goal to maintain the same level of programming for each child.

MSDB provides students with consultation from many specialists. The same services will continue while the school is closed with regards to our specialists. Speech and language services will begin on March 24th with our therapist providing Telecom Services via both video and phone. Our orientation and mobility specialist will begin services as soon as we receive approval from Objective Ed to use their online curriculum. We will also use The Objective Ed software to continue providing students instruction in Braille for those students that have Braille goals and minutes. Occupational therapist and physical therapist do not have any direct goals with our students IEP other than being available for consultation. The same service will continue to happen through a phone and video service. These services will begin once we have students and staff comfortable with our online platform.

Starting on March 23rd the school will begin providing lunches for all students living in the Great Falls area. With many of our parents not able to drive to pick up the lunches, the school will be delivering the lunches to the students doorsteps. At the same time any materials prepared by staff will be delivered to the students and/or any materials completed by the students will be picked up and brought back to the teacher. Beginning on March 30th if school is closed, breakfast for the following day will be delivered with lunch. Since the school will not be using the school lunch program we are able to deliver the lunches and breakfast to the students.

We will use Google Classroom as our online platform to share assignments, materials, and announcements with students grades 6-12 at this time. Our staff was previously trained with this environment which will hopefully lessen the amount of time our staff needs to learn new software. Instruction in this platform will begin on March 23rd. During the first week of online instruction teachers and students will be asked to become proficient using Google Classroom. Actual classroom instruction of materials will begin on March 30th as students will understand Google classroom. Also during the week of March 23rd, we will begin using Google Meet as an online virtual meeting room. This software allows for closed captioning as the teacher talks and also provides the option for the meeting to be recorded. The recorded videos can then be placed in Google Classroom and linked to an assignment as either an instructional video or supplemental video. If Google Meet does not meet the needs of our deaf and hard-of-hearing students, we will use Zoom in the same manner. Zoom might allow us to have both the teacher and an interpreter window open at the same time. This platform has been chosen with collaboration with Administration from the Montana Digital Academy.

Students Pre-k through 5 will be provided packets of daily work to complete with their parents at home. Packaged work will be delivered and picked up during lunch delivery daily. It is our hope that by mid-April these students will be on our online learning platform as well. The main reason for packets at this time is that we are currently making sure all staff are set up for online learning at home. Once all staff have the needed equipment we will then start working with families to provide any equipment they may need during this time. Since some of our students are from out of the Great Falls area, we will have Cottage staff deliver iPads and other needed technology to students by the end of the week of March 23rd. We currently have two students that do not have access to the Internet and we will be sending them Verizon jetpacks for them to gain connectivity.

We understand that the learning curve for some staff during this time is very steep. That is why we have created a schedule where teachers and support staff come onto campus and receive any specialized instruction with the online platform. Teachers are scheduled in 3 hour blocks and the time is to be spent on preparing classroom materials and/or training as outlined above. It is our hope if this closure continues that less and less teachers will need to come on campus as they will

feel proficient with using the software implemented. At this time all staff of MSDB, including cottage staff have been asked to complete Educator 1: Google training by the end of this week.

As a school we understand that each household could have several students learning in this online environment during this time. Therefore, we will be shifting services to best meet the needs of the students and parents. Teachers will be asked to prepare lessons on a weekly basis. They will give a general idea of when assignments should be completed but will accept assignments up until each Monday. This will allow parents and students the chance to use the weekend to complete any necessary work. With instruction most likely being asynchronous, instructors will be asked to hold office hours 5 days during the week so parents and students can have access to them live. If a student needs individual help, the student can reach out to the teacher and they can set a mutual time to meet.

Another big part of our school is providing interpreters with our sister schools with the Great Falls Public School System. Beginning March 23rd, our lead interpreter will be in touch with students' families that utilize interpreters in the public schools. As the public schools are in the same situation we are with regards to providing online Educational Services, it is taking time for the public school teachers to develop their platform. Therefore, we will be in contact with families directly to make sure we are meeting the needs of the students with regards to interpreting services.

Outreach consultants will continue to support families, schools and other agencies via phone calls or distance technology in place of face-to-face. We have cancelled two Outreach Events happening on campus in the next 3 weeks and all regional events or gatherings throughout the state following the time lines schools are following. We are working to assure families and schools have the resources and contact information they need to move forward during this unknown time.

To support families of birth to school age children, we will coordinate with Part C providers and assure parents have resources to help support their interaction with their young children. We are working with Part C as they determine how they will deliver their home services. Parents will be able to call or video chat with the Outreach Consultant to get advice and discuss resources to meet milestones. Family Advisors and Deaf Mentor services are temporally suspended at this time while we determine how services will be delivered and the needs of parents to use distance technology. Outreach is reminding parents of the Resource guide for Deaf and Hard of Hearing, which parents can refer to for a resource links and informational phone numbers.

Public School staff will have the ability to use Outreach Consultants as a resource and technical support as they put together programming for school age students. Outreach is sharing resources for online learning that is specific to American Sign Language (ASL), Braille and Blind or Low Vision Technology. Outreach has been putting together informational resources for parents on

ASL and Listening and Spoken Language. We have reached out to our Prison Braille Program to see if they will be able to continue providing braille materials for us and have not heard back as of 3/21/20.

As we move forward through the unknown, we continue to collect information from other agencies we work with to share resources and information. Some of our partners are putting out online resources, which we can share with our team to get out to their public school teams, and others are still determining what they will do. Outreach staff have home offices and we are using our time very similar to how we would use it with school in session. We are continuing to assess which families need technology from our Lending Library and how we can get that technology out to them. Several of our families do not have technology in their homes and are working to see what options are available since many libraries are closed. We expect to hear more from parents and schools once programs are trialed.