



MONTANA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF & THE BLIND *Express*

lifting students beyond expectations

Volume XXVIII Issue 1, Fall 2020



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Greatest Need**

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From Our Superintendent



The Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind is no different than any public school right now when it comes to student learning. Our staff are constantly looking for ways to educate our students while we work around the COVID Virus and everything it throws at us. MSDB has done an exceptional job with this and I truly believe the staff are becoming better educators as a result. Our staff has worked with students in the classroom, in the digital classroom, and with a combination of both. As an administrator, I smile every time I walk through the halls at MSDB and see the variety of instructional strategies being utilized. In a VI elementary room, the teacher is actively teaching students mathematics while one student is in the classroom and the other is attending school online. With a DHH secondary sign class, we have a majority of students online in the brick and mortar classroom while the teacher is instructing from home. I could provide many more examples of how our staff is rocking instruction in this very stressful time.

As the staff is making great strides with educating our students during this time, our school is also committed to improving the programs and services we offer our current and future families. Our entire school community; education, outreach, and residential have started the journey to become Cognia Accredited. Currently, MSDB is accredited by The State of Montana and it is our desire to become a stronger school with Cognia Accreditation. We are excited to know that the accreditation team will be here in May to help us celebrate our strengths and provide guidance with some of our weaknesses. Once we achieve this level of accreditation, we will begin working on CEASD and AER accreditation next year.

As accreditation processes are stressful and add extra work to others, I again find myself impressed with the staff at MSDB. The staff certainly have enough on their plates with educating our students in the current environment but have also embraced the challenge of working towards accreditation. Cognia Accreditation comes with the responsibility of a self-assessment against the standards designed by Cognia. The standards MSDB is measuring itself too consist of three general domains; leadership, learning, and resources. Each one of the standards have multiple key concepts. These key concepts are directly related to the elements of the i3 rubric and will help us define and clarify the meaning of each standard.

Our staff has spent much of the first part of the year understanding the i3 Rubric and how it will be utilized to help improve our programs and services. The i3 is a performance assessment rubric that consists of five elements that must be present in order for meaningful improvement and lasting change. The elements are categorized into three levels of improvement that consist of Initiate, Improve, and Impact. Initiate consists of two elements that incorporate Engagement and Implementation. Our team will use the element of Initiate to measure the amount of stakeholder involvement and the element of Implementation to help define the desired practices to be monitored. While exploring the category of Improve MSDB will look at two elements as well, Results and Sustainability. The element of Results will look at what the data evidence is indicating while Sustainability will look at how the data looks over time. The last category of the i3 rubric pertains to Impact which consists of one element of Embeddedness. Embeddedness is where we want all our programs and services to go as it helps us understand how ingrained the element is within our culture here at MSDB. With all of the 5 elements, the staff will rate each standard using 4 levels. The levels range from minimally to deeply ingrained and protected throughout.

As you can tell by the in-depth look at the i3 Rubric we will be using, the staff at MSDB has committed themselves to bettering our school during a time of a pandemic crisis. Not only are they paving the way for what COVID instruction looks like but they have also made the decision to make MSDB a better place. Instruction cannot stop during this time and neither can school improvement. MSDB staff continue to make "Montana's Magical Kingdom" better for future generations. 🍌

Thank you, Paul Furthmyre
MSDB Superintendent
pfurthmyre@msdb.mt.gov

First Home Visit of the Year

By Emily LaSalle - Outreach

First home visit of the year! My thanks to Jason and Tiana Valler from Lincoln for opening their home (actually home/coffee shop!) for my first home visit of the year. Social distancing practices in place, we were able to catch up and learn how they took an abandoned building and made it into a unique home and coffee shop. The smell of coffee beans roasting is indeed aromatherapy. Valler Coffee is located on Highway 200 the east side of Lincoln. The “grounds” are surrounded with uniquely carved animals. ■■



Valler family.

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COVID Can't Stop Families Learning with Families

By Kerri Norick and Michelle Cross - Outreach



Family learning weekend t-shirt.

Our first annual Virtual Family Learning Weekend was a complete success. MSDB Outreach and families from around the state met on June 5 & 6, 2020, in MSDB Outreach's ZOOM meeting rooms. Our new normal consists of *Online Etiquette, Mute, Chat Room support, Break out rooms, Mute, Join the meeting, Leave the meeting, Logging on, Camera on, Mic on & Mute.*

This new norm can be very overwhelming, but we have found that the need for human connection is still essential even through a computer screen. Our wonderful Gill family from Helena was the keynote speaker. Colt and Laura Gill shared their amazing story and how their daughter continues to exceed expectations with the power of their love and support. MSDB Outreach arranged family friendly ZOOM activities that consisted of the Hokey Pokey, Yoga, Bingo and a Scavenger Hunt. Professional presentations included using the APH Light Box for storytelling, Technology training on using the Prodigy Connect 12 magnifying reader and BrailleNote?. All participants received their coveted FLW t-shirts and the networking, sharing and love was felt through the internet waves of MSDB. ☒

Family learning weekend.



A Big Welcome to Our New Staff!!



Amber Bateen

Hi, everyone! My name is Amber Bateen, and I am originally from Helena, Montana. I am a true Griz fan and graduated from the University of Montana with a bachelor's in Elementary Education with a minor in Psychology. Next I moved to Greeley, Colorado, where I got my Master's degree in Deaf Education from the University of Northern Colorado. I began my teaching career in Salem, Oregon, with a K-2 classroom. However, I just couldn't acclimate to the rain, so after two years I moved to sunny Reno, Nevada. There I taught Deaf and hard of hearing students at Vaughn Middle school for the next 10 years. Eventually I moved back to Montana and took a job at Lewis and Clark Elementary, where I worked as a special education resource teacher. I am thrilled to be back in the field of deaf education and love teaching preschool! I am also grateful to be able to return to Montana and my family. It is my favorite place for hiking and camping! ☼



Jennifer Buck

Hi, everyone! It's great to be back at MSDB! I am returning to Health Services working the evening shifts Fridays through Mondays. I am originally from Arkansas but moved to the wonderful state of Montana in 1999 with my husband of 27 years who grew up in Kalispell. We raised our son and daughter here, and they are both away at college now. We miss them but have learned to enjoy being empty nesters as well. I love ASL, and I love working with the kids at MSDB. Seeing them always makes me smile. I like a good cup of coffee, and my favorite activity is hiking. But the most important things in my life are my family and friends. I am very grateful to be working at MSDB again and to be able to see all the people and students I have missed! ☼



Tabatha Arnold

Before I started working at MSDB I was a stay at home mom to 4 kids. Two highschoolers, (a girl and a boy) and two elementary (a girl and a boy). I am also a military wife of nearly 19 years. My husband and I are high school sweethearts and met where we grew up in Massachusetts. We've only lived in Montana for about two and a half years. Before that we lived in Albuquerque, NM, and Las Vegas, NV. I also love animals! We have a dog named Minnie and rabbit named Charlie Chip at home that I adore. I love music, babies, chocolate and watching my tv shows when the kids go to bed. ☼



Tiffany Wood

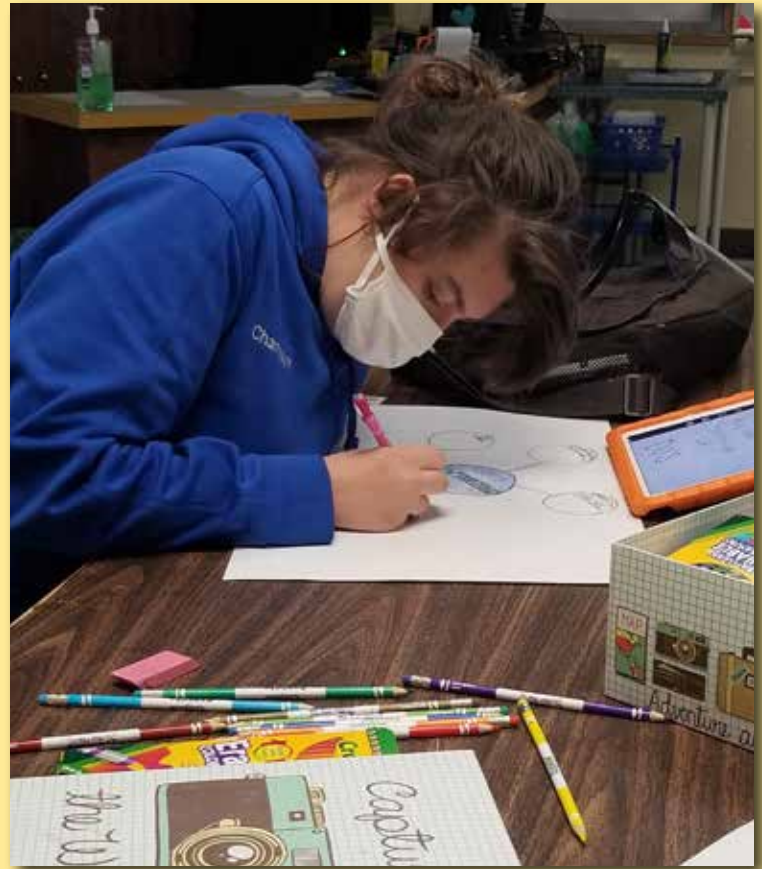
I grew up in the Sunshine State of Florida, but have called Montana my home for over 13 years. I have worked with children in the public schools for five years. I was employed by the school district in Livingston, Montana, prior to coming alongside the staff of MSDB. I have my Associate of Arts degree in Early Childhood and hope to complete my bachelor's degree in the near future. As a child, I always dreamed of working with the deaf/hard of hearing population and now, I can say, I am living my dreams. Now I am a paraprofessional at the school. I am grateful to be a part of the amazing team of professionals at MSDB. ☼

Life Skills 101

By Mackenzie Merja - Teacher

Growing up is hard work, but luckily for our students they have life skills classes to help them along the way. This year we have big plans for our high school life skills classes. Seniors started the year off learning about different careers, what they wanted to be, where they want to live, how they want to live, and everything in between. Seniors chose the career they wanted, learned how to create a resume and cover letter, learned how to fill out a variety of applications, and practiced their interview skills.

Within the next week they will “interview” for their chosen career and once they get the job they will then have to set up a budget. This budget will include: housing, transportation, utilities, student loans, groceries, and all the other good stuff adults pay for with some added incidentals. Each month I will “pay” them for their “work” and they will be expected to budget their money and pay me all their expenses. We will continue to work on a variety of life skills needed to succeed in the adult world including, laws, making appointments, protecting personal information, ADA law, cooking, laundry, nutrition, forms, soft and hard skills, finances, safety, work experience, and so much more! Our goal here at MSDB is give our students the tools they will need to be successful, safe, and independent adults. ■■



Charmayn hard at work.



Braille Popables.

Thinking Outside the Box for Braille Practice

By Kerri Norrick - Outreach

Braille is an essential part of many students' lives at MSDB, and they continue to work on their braille skills throughout the year. However, young students just learning need more practice reading and writing with braille. So what happens if students are homeschooled or distance learning starts again due to Covid-19? Kerri Norrick, an Outreach consultant at MSDB has wonderful ideas to help with that type of situation.

If homeschooling or distance learning, use snack time to practice your braille letters. Any circular snack will work: m&ms, Cheerios, round crackers etc.

As you can see by the picture, it is simple to put the items in the correct spaces to signify a letter. Start simple with words the student knows. Practice makes perfect. ■■

IEFA Week with a Twist

By Missie Hill - Indian Education Coordinator



Making Navajo Fry bread for lunch.

Indian Education For All (IEFA) is celebrated at MSDB every September. This school year was no different.

Every class had many opportunities to hear Native American stories, create Native American artwork, and have wonderful discussions about past and present issues that face Native American people.

The students are always very receptive to learning new things during this week of celebration and are full of enthusiasm.

This year we read stories about the star quilt, moccasins, and the smallpox epidemic among natives. We also painted with crushed berries, designed sand shields, drew on fake hides with charcoal, and made masks.

One of the most interesting conversations among the middle and high school students focused on the buffalo. We, in this day and age, tend to waste quite a bit. Once the students realized that every single part of the buffalo was utilized in one way or another, they began looking at our current waste as a whole and coming up with ideas on how we could reduce it. This discussion carried over into our science class.

The twist came when planning the culminating activity at the end of the week. Usually the whole school meets in one spot and we do an activity together. Due to COVID, we needed to be more creative. So three of my science classes, as an IEFA activity, gathered together and made fry bread. The students helped mix and stretch and fry over 80 pieces of fry bread. This bread recipe came to me from a Navajo lady that cooked at the Indian boarding school I worked at. She shared it with me and asked me to keep the recipe to myself but to always share the love of the

bread with others. We had the lunch staff make Bullet, which is an authentic meatball soup eaten by some tribes.

The students loved the meal and the decorations supplied from the art projects we had done through the week.

We discovered that, even when we can not be all together at one time, there are ways to share this rich culture so everyone feels the love. ■■



Painting.



Montana School *for the Deaf*

LIFTING STUDENTS

Tech Still Prevails as Greatest Need

By MSDB Foundation

This year, it is easy to say with certainty technology is more important than ever. With the pandemic, schools and funders alike experienced the advantages of technology keeping us all connected despite the socially isolated quarantine.

The school just finished a very successful \$300,000 statewide campaign to fund magnifying reading devices for 100 extremely low vision outreach students who live in their own hometown school districts. With this outpouring of statewide support, we created a Statewide Technology Lending Library for equipment to be available to students at home and school until they graduate.

Outreach staff serves hundreds of students from all over the state, and the campus is centrally located in Great Falls. Students living on campus during the academic year are not just from this area but from across the state as well. Our 10-acre campus is also used for educating families on how to better connect with and support the student. Visual enhancement is of utmost importance for students we serve who are deaf and those who are considered very low vision. Well over half of our students fall into this category. Technology is truly a bridge to the outside world, and it makes it finally accessible for our students to navigate with the support of specially trained staff using adaptive equipment.

This year's project is focused on supporting the students who live on campus during the academic year, as well as family members who depend on the school to assist them with educational and social tools for their child to succeed. MSDB is a hub for students, parents, and educators to receive ongoing specialized education for providing the best educational experience.

The greatest need for this 2020-21 academic year follows suit with the need for 26 smartboards for interactive learning.

Classroom Visual Enhancement at MSDB Project Budget 2020-21

Qty	Price	Description	TOTAL
23	\$3,322 ea	smartboards 65"	76,406
1	\$4,032 ea	smartboard 75"	4,032
2	\$6,052 ea	smartboards 86"	12,104
26	\$200 ea	smartboard stands	5,200
TOTAL			\$97,742

*Each smartboard includes 15' HDMI 4K cable, 16' USB cable, power cord, 2-20 watt integrated speakers, wall mount bracket kit

How You Can Help

With your help, the MSDB Foundation has been able to provide funds for services and equipment for the students at MSDB for 40 years. The Foundation is committed to funding academic and extracurricular activities that help prepare students for independent lives. Please join us in that commitment by making a tax-deductible donation to www.msdbmustangs.org/about-us/foundation/ or mailing it to:


MSDB Foundation • P.O. Box 6576 • Great Falls, MT 59406
For more information, please call 406-771-6040

The Deaf & Blind Foundation

ITS BEYOND EXPECTATIONS



Smart boards provide a visually enhanced platform for learning.

To date, the Foundation has received  2,602 from generous funders. We still need \$55,140 to complete this project. Your end-of-year gift will be applied to your goal, unless you specify otherwise. Please send your check to MSDB Foundation PO Box 6576 Great Falls, MT 59406-6576 or online at www.msdbmustangs.org/about-us/foundation/. ■■

“Individually, we are one drop. Together we are an ocean.” – Ryunosuke Satoro

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Building Braille Skills... With Legos?

By Tabatha Soliz - VI Teacher



Levi using Legos for a Braille lesson.

Many of us have fond memories of spending countless hours as children, building fantastic creations with Legos. Some of us may still enjoy building with them as adults. The love of building with Legos has been passed on to a new generation of builders. Imagination is the limit when it comes to what can be designed. And now, braille skills can be learned and practiced with the stackable bricks!

The LEGO Foundation teamed with various blindness organizations to develop Braille LEGO Bricks. These bricks have the traditional LEGO shape. Each brick has a braille letter or symbol on it. The corresponding print letter or symbol is printed at the bottom of the brick. This allows children with and without visual impairments to play and learn together.

Each kit contains several bricks with each letter, as well as bricks with punctuation and math symbols. Also included are three flat boards that the bricks can attach to so students can build words and sentences. Through creativity and play, children are able to develop and expand their braille literacy skills.

The LEGO Foundation has distributed kits to various schools and organizations for the blind for distribution. More information can be found at www.legobraillebricks.com. ■■



Sera using Braille legos.



Stock photo.

Rocket into the New School Year

By Erin Barr - Teacher

Rockets were flying on the first travel day of the year in celebration of a return to in-school learning. After putting the final touches on their rockets, students in the Visually Impaired Department launched Estes Alpha III rockets on one of our last perfect summer days of the year.

After planning the day around rockets, teachers were hoping that plans would go as expected. Since MSDB is in Malmstrom Air Force Base (AFB) and Great Falls International Airport (GTF) airspace, approval was required from both establishments to launch rockets. Malmstrom AFB gave approval and adjusted flights away from the altitude and area that the rockets would be entering, which is a maximum height of 1150 ft. However, teachers had to call GTF's tower for final approval and just before both launchings on the day of the event. Thankfully, the tower approved both launches!

In addition to finishing and launching rockets, students learned a bit about the design and purpose of each rocket part and the different phases of rocket flight. At the launch pads, students could be heard counting down, "3...2...1... launch"! Some students bravely pressed the launch buttons, eager to retrieve their rocket that would settle back to Earth with an orange and white parachute. Others more timidly pressed the buttons, while trying to cover ears and/or eyes. Regardless, rockets were retrieved and all students seemed to have a blast! ■■

COVID and the Cottage: A New Normal

By Erin Faulkner - Cottage Counselor

On March 13, 2020, the residents of Geyser, Obsidian and Shoshone Cottages traveled home for their monthly visit with family. What was supposed to be one weekend turned into almost six months! Not only were the students now forced to do their academics online, but “Cottage Life” went virtual, as well. The Cottage Counselors maintained connections with the students via Zoom meetings and games, Google Classroom activities and phone calls, all while fielding the same questions from the students: “When do we get to go back to school? When can I see my friends again?”.

Fast forward to August 23, 2020 ... Move-in Day for the 2020-2021 school year! The students arrived to find both new environmental and daily routine changes. Furniture in common areas are covered in vinyl for easier sanitizing and sanitizing wipes, sanitizer, and masks are in abundant supply. In the past, when students left for school, they grabbed their backpacks and said goodbye to the staff as they headed to the school. Now, they must put on their masks, wash their hands and get their temperature checked before they leave. After school, they wait in a socially distanced line, while staff take their temperatures as they use hand sanitizer upon entering the Cottage. After dropping off their backpacks in their room, they return to the kitchen to wash up for 20 seconds before having their snack. These students are wearing masks or face shields whenever they are outside of their rooms or eating, and yet they are still finding ways to be social and active.



Girls in the gym.

The activity room sees action daily via the Wii, billiards or movie watching. Swimming is available two days a week at the Mustang Center. Labor Day weekend was packed full of fun: snow cone truck, water balloons, pizza party, outdoor games, movie night on a projected screen, and a Hawaiian Luau complete with Hula lessons! The students have just planned a full weekend's worth of activities themselves: kickball and bingo on Saturday and the fundraising car wash and movie night on Sunday!

These students are showing us all how to adapt to big changes and disruptions in their daily lives with patience and flexibility! We are so proud of them! 🦋



MSDB students around town.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for Access and Comfort of Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

By Katie Opp - Outreach Consultant

Whether it be in the schools, the grocery stores, or medical offices, across the state we see and hear, “Mask Up, Montana!” For many people, they grab a cloth mask and place the bands around their ears and proceed with their day-to-day activities. For students who are deaf or hard of hearing, there are additional considerations that must be thought through regarding access to communication, receptively and expressively, as well as the comfort of wearing personal protective equipment (PPE).

Cloth masks cover the lower half of the face, including the mouth, removing a great deal of visual input that can aid effective communication via speechreading, ASL grammatical features, and/or facial expressions. Alternative PPE that allow for visual input include face masks with clear plastic windows and face shields. These alternatives are not a solve-all though. Speech sounds can bounce off of the clear plastic causing reverberation and a decrease of the auditory signal resulting in a distorted or quieter message. The clear plastic doesn't completely resolve the visual access either without some strategies. The clear window masks can fog up from the breath of the speaker and the clear plastic of a mask or shield can have a glare on it from a particular angle depending on location and lighting.

Luckily, there are many researchers working hard in the field since COVID-19 began to impact our students. For those students relying on the auditory signal, the use of a personal assistive listening device that sends the speaker's message from a microphone directly into the hearing aid/cochlear implant/

personal ear device has shown great benefit. While this lovely graph shows us some research results, we have discovered that each student has their preferences that must also be considered. We have also learned a lot from the community that continues to share tips and tricks, such as how to use Dawn dish soap, baby shampoo, or scuba diving anti-fog spray for the inside of the clear window masks every 90 minutes to 2 hours to prevent fogging to ensure clear visual access.

For the student who is deaf or hard of hearing needing to wear their own PPE, there are two areas of consideration. The first is their expressive communication needs. Whether the student speaks or signs, their message needs to be understood by their communication partners. Maybe the student's speech is impeded more so by a face shield and so they'd benefit from the cloth mask. Maybe they're more subtle ASL grammar on their face is blocked with a cloth mask and so they'd benefit from a face shield.

The second area for consideration is that of comfort. While I have yet to meet someone who loves the comfort of wearing masks and face shields in this “new normal”, some of our students have glasses and hearing aids/cochlear implants and perhaps a sensory sensitivity where adding one more thing behind their ears is enough to put them over the edge. Some of our students have microtia or atresia which can make it difficult or impossible to attach the band of masks behind the ear. ■■

Writing from Experience

By Lace Lesofski - Teacher

This year students are dipping their toes into a variety of writing pieces for English Language Arts (ELA)!

Earlier this year, students took part in creating their own BITMOJI classrooms, bedroom/living space, as well as their dream space. Once they completed their scenes, they wrote summaries explaining why they used each aspect of their scenario. They also wrote a short creative story about their dream scene. These beautiful scenes are displayed in the halls of MSDB.

Currently students are working on taking a life event of their own and turning it into a creative story, writing from their experiences. They went back to basics and brainstormed using only one word, progressed towards short phrases and then created their outline. Once their rough drafts were completed, they participated in their first peer review editing process. Students read each other's work and provided corrections/feedback to the writer. Everyone did a fantastic job taking their role seriously in providing suggestions without criticizing the writers' entire story.

As the year progresses, students will participate in more peer review workshops and help, one another truly find their voices! ■■



Taylor, Wesley, and Charmayn working on ELA assignments.

Live Transcribe

By Kim Schwabe - Outreach

With family, friends, teachers and community members wearing masks, shields or behind plexi-glass, communication can be challenging for Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing (DHH) individuals. Although shields or clear panel masks offer more access to lip movements and facial expression, these also have drawbacks and may not be the best solution for all. Therefore, some DHH individuals look towards real time captioning (taking speech and translating it into text on the spot) to provide them more access to communication. One example of captioning on demand is Live Transcribe by Research at Google with input from Gallaudet University. Live Transcribe is an app available for free in the Google Play Store (Android devices) and depending on the age of an Android phone (ex: Samsung, Pixel...), it may be built into it via its accessibility options.

Some features:

- provides the ability to change font sizes
- works with external microphones (depending on device may need an adapter)
- vibrates to alert you when someone is talking or said a particular name
- transcripts can be copied and pasted into other documents
- shows sound labels (like music, laughter, coughs...)
- transcripts can be saved for a few days
- and more!

Some ideas for application:

- visiting with a friend in noisy room (background noise impacting communication)
- getting an answer from a masked librarian (who is trying to speak quietly)
- listening to a teacher (who is utilizing a Bluetooth mic connected to your device)
- participate in a meeting or small group discussion where all are masked
- talking with a clerk behind plexi-glass in a store
- listening to a non-captioned podcast
- and many more!



Live Transcribe: <https://www.android.com/accessibility/live-transcribe/> or video: <https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=google+live+transcribe&&view=detail&mid=428BE47296A6F17D1B7F428BE47296A6F17D1B7F&&FORM=VDRVRV>


There is a similar app for the iOS (Apple) called Live Transcribe for iOS. Here is a link to information about that app: <https://medium.com/earagami/live-transcribe-for-ios-launches-on-global-accessibility-awareness-day-92cc9cf1f601>

For more information on speech to text apps/programs please refer to:

See Hear Communication Matters (Tina Childress) comparison chart: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/18goyTo8qPmboMX5WUvacOOvN8M9otvro_WtIhUxTdok/edit#gid=376066376

Tina Childress blog: <https://tinachildress.wordpress.com/>

(includes many resources on masks, PPE, captioning, video conferencing, etc.)

Knowledge Base: Strategies for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Communication at <http://connect-hear.com/> 

Just 15 Minutes a Day

By Sherri R. Widhalm - MSDB Speech Language Pathologist



Amber Bateen reading to Myra and Weston.

Did you know that reading to your child for just 15 minutes a day can build your child's brain? Research is showing that it is time to disconnect from technology and connect with your child. There is no better way to connect than to sit down together and read a book. Learning to read is fundamental to a child's success in school and to his or her optimal life trajectory. Language and literacy skills, however, start early – from birth. These skills can be learned through everyday moments with your child: reading books, talking, listening, laughing, and playing together. A strong body of research suggests that reading is intertwined with early experiences that children have with language and print from birth onwards.

First, what is language? Language is an organized system of communication which can be used to share information with others. Language may include facial expressions, gestures, body movements, spoken words, written words, or sign. The language environment at home is the basis of an infant's brain growth and best predicts the child's language ability, reading ability, and IQ outcomes. Dr. John S. Hutton, pediatrician and professor at Cincinnati Children's Hospital reminds parents, "It isn't just baby's body that is growing this first year – baby's brain is developing even more rapidly! Give your baby the best start by reading aloud every day, for at least 15 minutes, right from birth." Rich language interactions during a child's earliest years will establish the neurological foundation for future learning and literacy development.

Reading aloud to a child is one of the most important activities for building the neural pathways required for listening, talking, and reading. Why? Exposure to story books is the biggest factor influencing a preschooler's vocabulary. More parent-child interactions occur during story time than during any

other activity, which causes even further brain development. Children who have books read to them regularly show gains in overall vocabulary acquisition with more than twice as many new words. Parents are a child's first teacher, so let's begin a child's journey of learning by simply reading at least 15 minutes a day.

When reading, get excited! Read with gusto and delight. Remember, enthusiasm is infectious: make sure your child catches it. Read with expression. Go ahead! Use voices and sound effect. Your child will love it. Point to the pictures and talk about them. Relate the pictures to your child's personal experiences or toys. Let your child hold the book and turn the pages. Find books with awesome pictures. Read lots of books, and read the world around you!

Fill your home with books - books everywhere. Read a wide variety of books. Nurture the reader by making books accessible in the home. Make reading aloud a habit when your child is young. Incorporate it into your daily routine, and it will soon become a treasured part of your day! Read any time of the day. Read any place. Reading that bedtime story may not only entertain and calm your child, but it will develop vocabulary, improve his ability to learn to read, and – perhaps most important – foster a lifelong love of books and reading.

Reading to your child requires only a book and your willingness to spend quality time with your child. And while the sacrifices to read aloud are few, the benefits for your child are many: Your child will learn to read better, think better, imagine more richly, and become a lifelong reader. So, parents, it's up to you. Read to your child every day to grow vocabulary and knowledge, bond and provide enriching engagement, and foster a love of books and learning. Read 15 minutes a day and light up your child's brain! ❖



Brenda Warren reading to Bridger and Marissa.



Social Media & Adolescent Health

Our sense of mind and self is created through multiple interactions across everyone we come into contact with; particularly from those in our early/adolescent environment. These intimate interactions result in the construction of our personality. Personality becomes, in time, the consistent features of who we are, what we believe and how we act. About age 3, your personality begins to emerge. It is developed throughout our early and teen years, becomes consolidated in our late teens and early 20's, and in our 30's it becomes relatively fixed. The earlier a child has access to gaming, devices and social media (before late teens) – the greater the risk of detrimental physical and mental health issues arising throughout their life.

- **Physical Health** – Excessive device use is linked to significantly increased anxiety, decreased metabolism, sleep issues, eating disorders, long-lasting posture issues and has proven to physically re-structure / atrophy significant parts of the brain that controls: planning, prioritizing, organizing and impulses.
- **Emotional Health** – social media and gaming directly link to decrease in self-esteem, self-worth and confidence; while linking to increases in isolation, depression, anxiety, escapism, jealousy
- **Addiction** – defined as compulsive behavior leading to negative effects or interfering with other important activities including sleep, school, human interactions and work. Includes dependencies or excess in posting content, checking status updates, stalking profiles, aimless trolling.
- **Social and Functional Impairment** – Coping skills, having quality conversations, functional disagreements in person, in-person interactions, interpreting social cues and more are compromised as digital communications puts everyone in a nonverbal disabled context, where body language, facial expression and even the smallest kinds of vocal reactions are rendered invisible.

Benefits

As parents, we all want to provide the best opportunities for our children. Digital, social media and devices are no exception. With the proper guidance social media can have benefits:

Collaboration and Tolerance of new ideas and experiences

Support Networks especially for kids with illnesses, conditions or disabilities and LGBTQI youth

Connecting with Family/Friends across long distances

Keeping informed of school activities

Civic Engagement – learn, understand and empathize with others.

Challenges

Without proper guidance, access to digital can pose significant risks as well:

Education – multitasking on devices during class/studying decreases academic performance

Self-worth/esteem – peer acceptance is a big thing for kids. Communicating online / indirectly makes it much easier to be cruel

Body Image – Social media projects an idealized image that is impossible for most to live up to in-real-life

Isolation – lower self-esteem and confidence lead to social and physical isolation

Depression – leading to increased suicide rates

Risky Behaviors – Sexting, Personal data exposure

Predators / Groomers – leading to human trafficking

The Business of Addiction

Social media platforms are not philanthropic. They are in business to make money. While it may not cost you money to use Facebook, Snapchat, WhatsApp, etc, you pay with the data you create with every like, post, share, update and item you read. Looking at average revenue per user (ARPU) in 2018, Facebook made \$112 per user in North America; Apple \$194; Google \$256; Spotify \$64.



That means every time you log on; your actions are creating significant money for those companies. Therefore, every feature they add, new design, etc are carefully planned to make you spend more time on the site, click on more links, share more things – without regard for your well-being or if the content is accurate.

These companies intentionally make the site, the content, the activities addictive by design.

Digital Parenting Guidance

Being a parent in a digital world does add more complexity. Parenting still takes guidance, controls, discipline and leading-by-example. There cannot be a single list of do's and don'ts as every family situation is different. Here are some guiding principles for you to consider and adopt as appropriate:

- **Set a good example** – most of us are on our phones or computers checking email, social media, etc. Let your kids see your face and not the back of a device.
- **Engage your children** – teach them the nuances of communicating in person, by communicating in person, they need the practice. The alternative is they will turn to the internet for help or to process what is going on and the internet is full of information, but it doesn't filter the information according to your values like you do.
- **Treat social media and devices like you would alcohol** – go as long as you can without it; or like you would driving – would you give your kid the keys to your car without first teaching them to drive?
- **Keep tech "down times"** – no devices during meals, conversations or certainly bed times!
- **Limit tech usage** – even for teenagers. 2 hours for teens and 1 hour for pre-teens per day. Encourage other activities that result in more experiences building skills and/or self-confidence.
- **Put parental controls** on devices at least until they graduate high school
- **Stay engaged with their online lives.** Know their friends online, their experiences, etc.

More resources outside of DFi for information and help:

DFiNow.org/for-parents

DQWorld.net

hhs.gov/ash/oah/tag



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Letter from the Editor

By Missie Hill - Editor for the Express



Dear Readers,

I would like to continue to thank you, the readers, for all the input you send. This helps me know what is working and what is not. You help make this publication better.

I recently received a letter from a reader that truly touched my heart. She explained how she grew up being told to look at people as if she were blind. This gave her the ability to look past appearance, disability, economic status, etc., and to truly

see the person for who and what they are. I believe this is a wonderful way to face the world. There would be no judgement, no snap decisions, no preconceived notions. There would only be the open and unabashed view of the other person.

Sometimes I think past ideals and learned bias cause us to miss out on any type of relationship with some wonderful people.

I have always tried to judge others for who they are inside rather than outside and accept any differences openly. Having differences makes the world a much more interesting place. With that being said, I ask two things of you:

- Continue to send any and all thoughts on this publication to me. I will take each comment to heart and use it to improve. Contact me at mhill@msdb.mt.gov
- Take a moment daily to look at the world in a more indepth fashion. Don't focus on the disability or ethnic/economic background, but rather focus on the true core of the person. By doing this you open up your world and take the chance to meet a future friend that touches you to the core and may change your life for the better. ❖

Enjoy.

Missie Hill, Editor
mhill@msdb.mt.gov

Where in the 406?



The location of the 406 picture from the summer issue can be found between East and West Glacier. Did you guess right?

Happy Holidays!

The MSDB Express is published three times a year and is graciously funded by the MSDB Foundation. The current and past editions of Express can be found on the MSDB website at: www.msdb.mt.gov. To be removed from this mailing list, please contact Paula Mix at pmix@msdb.mt.gov