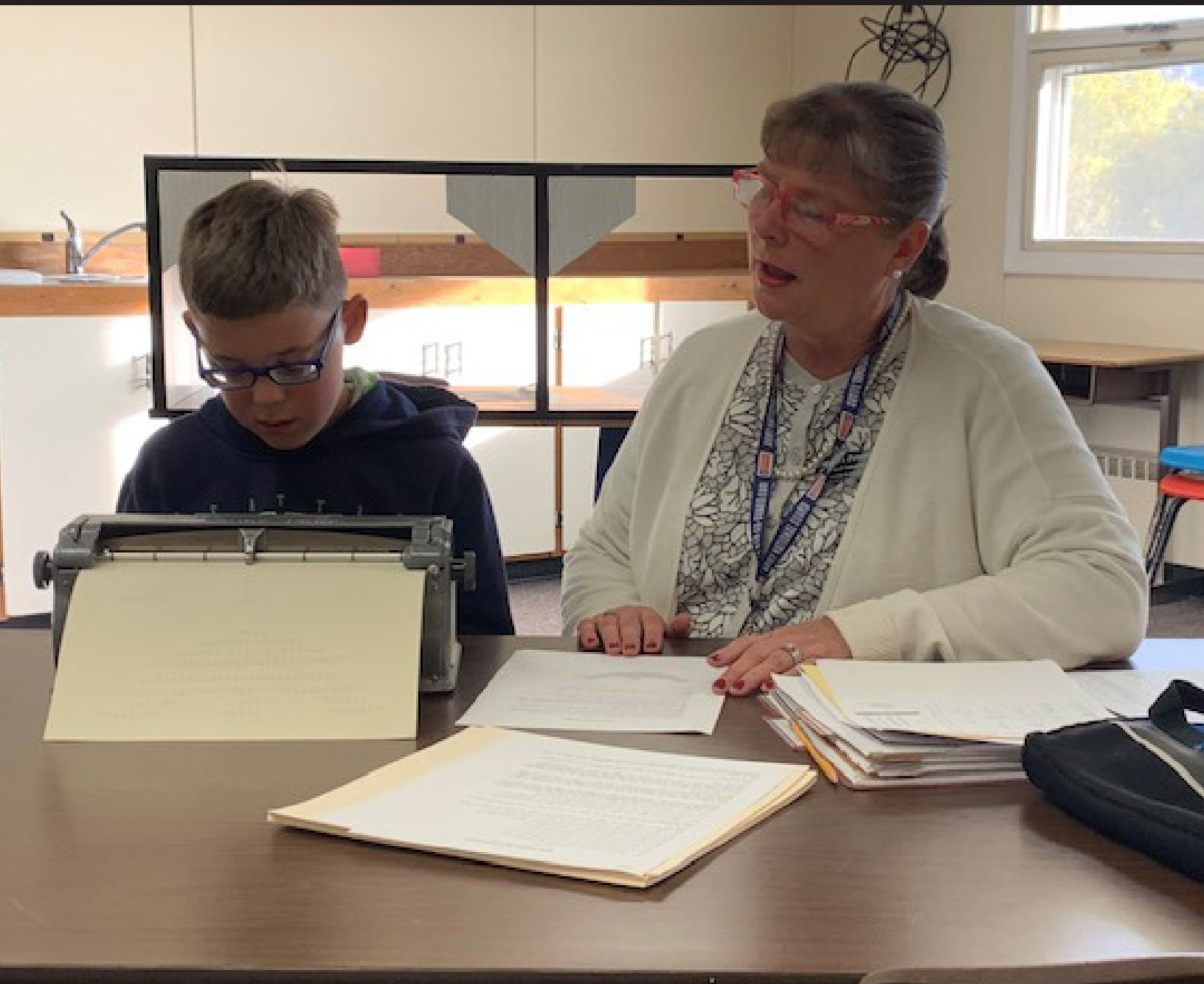




MONTANA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF & THE BLIND *Express*

lifting students beyond expectations

Volume XXX Issue 2, Spring 2021



**Rockin Ryley Receives
Braille Writer Award**

Page 7

**Director of Outreach Awarded,
New Scholarship Created**

Pages 8 and 9

From Our Superintendent



Making sure that teaching and learning continues to move forward during our current health crisis needs to be our number one priority here at MSDB. We are fortunate that we have our students back on campus receiving the instruction face-to-face in brick and mortar and not relying on Zoom and Meet like we did last spring. Many of our colleagues around the country and even our state have not been as fortunate to open their doors. I am so grateful for our staff, our parents, and our students for believing in MSDB to do the right thing.

At times this pandemic has been tough on all stakeholders here at MSDB. I for one would like a chance to lead this organization forward in a more typical setting. Our DHH teachers would like the chance to communicate with our students without masks covering their faces. Our VI teachers would like to explore assistive technology without having to wipe everything down after every use. However, we are starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel and look forward to educating our students in a non-health crisis.

Having our students on campus, we have been able to care for their overall health. This very issue has shown to be detrimental for so many around the country. I can proudly say that our behavior counselor, cottage counselors, and Alluvian partners have provided our students with the support they need. Our students did not receive this type of support very well last year when we conducted instruction online. We have been able to provide home cooked meals for our students daily. Last spring, we were only able to supply nutrition to our local students in Great Falls. Our students participate in our physical education class, allowing them a chance to be active on a daily basis. As we know, mental and physical health play a major role with meeting the demands of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

With students on campus, we also can help meet some of their psychological needs. Students are exposed to other students and continue to develop their friendships. They do this in the classroom, cafeteria, and cottages after school hours. It brings a big smile to my face watching students happy and engaged with each other. The same is true for when I see the students respond to the staff they encounter daily.

In conclusion, although it has created an environment that can change daily, I am so grateful we have been able to bring our students on campus this year. Of course, we have had some hiccups over the course of the year but none that have stopped us from providing the quality education our families deserve. We look forward to serving our stakeholders the remainder of the year. 🍀

Best,
Paul Furthmyre
MSDB Superintendent
pfurthmyre@msdb.mt.gov

Google Extensions to Increase Accessibility and Productivity

By Denise Rutledge - TVI

MSDB, like most schools nationwide, has jumped feet first (or maybe head first?) into online learning. Students and staff have experimented with a variety of teleconferencing programs, online learning hubs, and virtual education applications. MSDB is primarily using Google Classroom to facilitate learning connections. Google Classroom allows students both on campus and at home, the ability to receive, complete and return assignments; collaborate with peers and staff; and access Google's entire suite of products for a variety of tasks including virtual classrooms with Google Meet and production needs like word processing (Google Docs), portfolio completion (Google Slides), and organization needs (Google Keep).

Erin Barr, teacher at MSDB, won the Samsung Education Grant in the spring of 2020. This grant included \$15,000 in new equipment for the school. Some of the items selected were Chromebooks. The Department for Students with Visual Impairments has been working on integrating Chromebooks into the classrooms (both on campus and at home). The Chromebooks have allowed our students the ability to use their school iPads as their video conferencing tool while simultaneously completing class assignments on the Chromebook.



Chromebooks have a similar look and feel as a laptop, but the majority of the work is completed within Google's web-browser based, online operating system. Since everything is cloud-based, all student work completed within their school profile automatically saves to the Cloud and can be retrieved and work resumed regardless of the device used. The Chromebooks are designed to be minimalistic and don't require multiple software licenses to be useful. For students with visual impairments dependent on accessibility software, there is a slight learning curve to create access comparable to what they are used to on a standard desktop or even the accessibility features present on an iPad. The built-in accessibility is fairly limited, though there is the ability to alter contrasts, enable a screen reader and manipulate sizing and allow for magnification.

IN THIS ISSUE

Page 2

- Letter From Our Superintendent

Page 3 and 4

- Google Extensions to Increase Accessibility and Productivity
- QR Codes in Preschool

Page 5

- The Three R's in the Time of COVID

Page 6

- Building Fluency

Page 7

- Rockin' Riley Receives Braille Award
- New Staff

Page 8-9

- Inspiring Women from the Golden Triangle

Page 10

- Team Braxton

Page 11

- MSDB Academic Bowl

Page 12

- Former MSDB Employee Elected Superintendent of Jefferson County Schools

Page 13

- Technology Supports

Page 14

- Holidays in the Cottage

Page 15

- COVID and You

Page 16

- Letter from the Editor
- Where in the 406

One of the ways to make Chromebooks more powerful and accessible is through the use of Extensions. Chrome Extensions are programs that can be installed to run within the Chrome operating system to change the functionality of the browser. There are several that students with visual impairments may find useful.

Mercury Reader

This extension removes visual clutter from the layout of online web pages. Extra buttons, ads, menus, etc. are all removed, leaving a clean, “noise-free” webpage so that students are viewing just the actual print and associated images for the article. This is also helpful when using a screen reader so that there aren’t as many distractions to search through when listening for just the ‘meat’ of the article.

Dark Reader

There are many accessibility extensions available to assist with altering the contrast on the Chromebook. Dark Reader is one of the more simplistic and efficient ones. Most students at MSDB that have used Dark Reader and compared it to other extensions and the accessibility tool built into Chromebooks prefer the controls offered within Dark Reader.

Read&Write for Google

While this is a premium extension (meaning you have to pay for it through a subscription), it does include things like speech-to-text, text-to-speech, a visual dictionary and word prediction software, all to help with reading and writing assignments.

ChromeVox

This is Chrome’s answer for screen readers. Unlike most screen readers, it is entirely web-based. It does utilize some different keyboard commands for control, so there is a slight learning curve associated if the user has previous experience with NVDA or JAWS. Additionally, most avid screen reader users still prefer the more robust features of the traditional software-based tools.

The extensions listed above are just a small sample of the many available that may improve student access to Chrome OS. For additional information, don’t be afraid to Google the type of assistance you need for Chrome, as well as check within the Chrome Web Store and even search youtube for videos on popular extensions for the classroom. ■■

Happy Googling!

QR Codes in Preschool

By Miche’ Jarvey - TVI

That is a QR code? QR stands for “Quick Response.” When scanned with a smartphone, the QR code allows the user to access information instantly. It seems as if QR codes are found almost everywhere these days. I looked around my house and found QR codes on many items such as, shampoo, vanilla coffee flavoring, a box of cookies, and chili seasoning. I have also noticed that many restaurants are using them for contactless menus.

Until I saw a post on Facebook, I had not given QR codes much thought in my setting as a preschool teacher. The idea I found on Facebook was to record yourself reading a book and then to create a QR code so the child has an audio recording to go along with their book. I had to try it out!

I decided to give it a try with my Christmas gift to my students. I wanted to give the students two options: 1) Listen to the story, or 2) Read along with the story. Therefore, I recorded myself reading Llama, Llama Red Pajama twice. For the first option, I simply read the story and gave a description of the illustration on each page. For the second option, I read the story, gave a description of the illustrations, and I also told them when to turn the page. After recording myself, I uploaded the recordings to my private YouTube channel which then created a link to each of my recordings. I found many free QR code generators online; I used QR Code Generator at www.qr-code-generator.com. It was very user-friendly and only required me to cut and paste the link to my video in the designated box. The program then created the QR code and gave me the option to customize it. I printed both

codes out and taped them into the back of each student’s book. For my braille learners, I made sure to provide them with braille in their books.

Overall, it was a fun experience creating an auditory book for my students and I plan to do it again for classroom use. I’d say the hardest part was recording myself and trying not to mispronounce a word or to say “turn the page.” Whether it’s snuggling with their family to read the book or using the QR code to hear me read the book, I hope the students enjoyed their gift because I know I certainly enjoyed making it for them. ■■

Note: To try out a QR code, simply use a camera phone or a scanning app and aim it here:



The Three R's in the Time of COVID

By Kitty Griffin - MSDB DHH Outreach Consultant

Remember the good old three 'Rs for education: "Reading wRiting and 'Rithmetic"?

MSDB added a few more very important R's during the time of COVID.

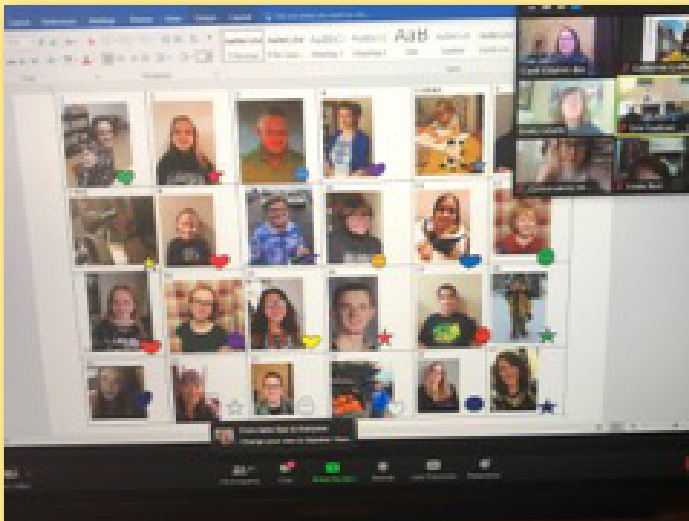
R-RESILIENCE

R- RESPECT

R-READY TO LEARN

2020 is a year that we will never forget. I never uttered the word "PANDEMIC" or gave a single thought about wearing a mask other than to a costume party. And how deep the impact on education would be for not only our children in Montana, but also every state in the US and worldwide.

It brought about a tidal wave of technology. I had been using the video platform ZOOM for the past 6 years, but on a very limited basis. Video platforms were about to become the lifeline to providing services to families and students both on campus and in the Outreach Program. As tidal waves are known to do, it engulfed us all.



Bingo at Deaf Enrichment Weekend.

MSDB was **RESILIENT** providing information and supplies to staff on practical issues such as mask recommendations, personal protective equipment (PPE) and sanitation protocols. In addition, trainings on Google Classroom, using Google Docs to work collaboratively on sign classes being offered and references for communication, language, listening and spoken language, milestone charts and more.

MSDB was **RESPECTFUL** to our students and staff, providing words of encouragement when frustrations occurred with "connectivity" including email, Zoom links, and microphone and video settings. "You are muted.....muted....?" Never once did I push my computer nor iPad off to the floor. Although, there were close shaves in that department. There were supportive emails, text messages and phone calls between friends and colleagues. The undercurrent of caring touched us

Checklist for Teaching Deaf Students Online



- ☐ **Check for Captioning and Transcripts**
Check that all videos, podcasts, and any other audio content in the course is captioned and accurate; if not, provide transcripts. Visual media such as charts, graphics, and photos should have clearly defined image descriptions for students who need them.
- ☐ **Connect With Deaf Students**
Deaf students are familiar with what they need and what works best for them. Start a dialogue with your students and check in throughout the semester to solicit feedback on any issues related to access.
- ☐ **Partner With Access Providers**
Connect with the student's sign language interpreter or other access provider to ensure they can log in to your learning management system (LMS), video conferencing, and all platforms you're using for online instruction. Develop protocols for live video sessions and office hours. Contact the disability services office for additional assistance and help with coordination.
- ☐ **Clarify Assignments and Offer Alternatives**
After sharing a revised syllabus, check in with the student, identify areas of concern, and consider alternative assignments. If getting an access provider outside of class time is not possible for group assignments or other work, consider alternative assignments.
- ☐ **Develop Turn-Taking and Discussion Flow**
Develop and share a turn-taking protocol for online discussions. This protocol should prioritize visual attention-getting strategies, such as raising a hand and using the chat box or other similar built-in platform features.
- ☐ **Create Space for Collaboration and Information**
Establish a place for students to post questions, share notes, and interact with each other in a few different formats, such as cloud-based services or a discussion board. Be sure to post answers to commonly asked questions and share resources as needed.
- ☐ **Be Prepared for Technical Issues**
Record all class sessions in case there are technical issues. Coordinate with access providers to provide interpreted class recordings or transcripts. A good practice is to provide lecture notes, slides, and other resources to deaf students and their access providers to review content before and after class.



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nationaldeafcenter.org

MSDB was **READY TO Learn**:

- ASL tech seminar to learn how to access new apps and features to generate custom sign and written language materials for families and students
- Seminar on new guidelines for Educational Interpreting standards
- Google Docs to share with our colleagues
- I learned how to use a CHAT BOX during meetings.... BIG WOW, when I finally got it



Personally, I grew a lot for a girl of my vintage:

- I learned how to send a ZOOM link to more than one person
- I attended the Montana Speech Language and Hearing Association conference (MSHA) virtually for 3 days of classes and colleague support
- I learned how to screen share pictures and videos during a meeting
- I learned that my dog, Steffi will cut out my mic when she starts barking (MUTE! Steffi, MUTE!)
- I learned that leaning forward to a screen all day can put a crick in your neck and back
- I learned how to Google DUO with my Dad on his smartphone (way to go, Dad!) ❖



Mya in music class.

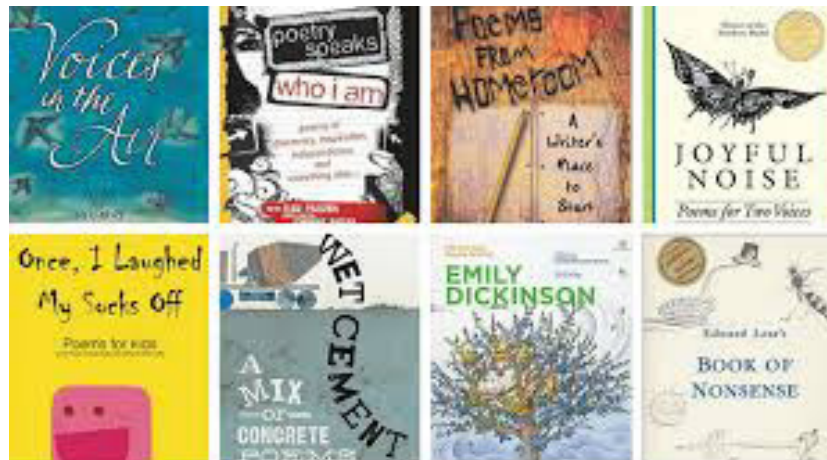


Ted E. Bear shows how to beat the virus.

Building Fluency

By Brenda Warren - DHH Teacher

The National Reading Panel examined 51 studies of oral-reading fluency instruction and found a substantial pattern of evidence supporting the idea that teaching oral fluency improves reading achievement. (National Reading Panel Report, 2005).



Poetry for kids.

Shel Silverstein. Naomi Shihab Nye. Jack Prelutsky. Joyce Kilmer. The words of these poets (and more!) have danced through my third grade reading classroom this year. Every week my students engage in repeated oral readings of a poem. The repeated practice of reading poetry aloud increases reading fluency. While rate is one element of fluency, the goal is not speed. Fluency is the accurate reading of connected text at a *conversational* rate with appropriate smoothness, phrasing, and expression. Why does fluency matter? Fluent readers do not have to devote their concentration to decoding, their brain is free to devote attention to the meaning of text. Fluency is a bridge to comprehension.

The students in this class are hard of hearing. Oral reading provides an opportunity for these students to apply the strategies learned in the speech therapy room, and generalize them in a classroom setting. They learn to slow down, to separate their words, to articulate them clearly, and to read with proper intonation and expression. This repeated practice also increases their speech intelligibility.

Every Monday, a new poem is introduced to the students. The poems are connected to seasons and holidays. The poems

are funny. The poems are moving. The poems introduce new vocabulary. Any unknown vocabulary words are explicitly taught prior to introducing the poem. If there is a multi-syllabic word, or a word that is difficult to pronounce, we work on articulation. Students also learn to use punctuation and the structure of a poem to pause, raise their voice, or speak quietly. Recently, we added poems in two voices. The students really enjoy this. The back and forth dialogue has increased their expression and intonation.

After practicing their poems each day, on Fridays they are ready to present them. We have an eager audience in Judy and Arlee, our education secretaries. Charlee and Lucia stand in front of their desks, poems in hand, and read to a rapt audience. When they finish, Judy allows them to select a prize from a bowl on her desk. The girls LOVE this. As their teacher, I am proud of their effort.

We call this activity POW—Poem of the Week. It packs a punch. The students build fluency, increase their vocabulary, practice presenting to an audience, improve their articulation, and increase their reading comprehension. This activity is a winner. ❖

Rockin' Riley Receives Braille Award

By Barbara Peterson - Outreach Vision Consultant



Kathy Sehorn, Ryley Dismukes and Barb Peterson.

Meet Ryley Dismukes, a seventh grade student attending Lolo Middle School in Lolo, Montana. Ryley was the recent winner of the 2020 Braille Writer Award offered each year by the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind. Ryley is a student in the MSDB Outreach Program for the Visually Impaired. In order to win this Award, a student must complete their full instruction in braille reading and writing. Ryley passed his braille studies with flying colors! Ryley began his instruction with his braille teacher, Kathy Sehorn in Missoula Public Schools and studied with her over the course of seven years. He was supported by his parents, Emily and Matt, and outreach vision consultant, Barb Peterson at MSDB. In 2019 Ryley transferred to Lolo Middle School where he completed his braille curriculum.

In visiting with Ryley he shared that he liked many things about learning braille. Ryley likes learning new things. He said that braille will help him in his future endeavors by allowing him to complete assignments in school. Learning some of the contractions was difficult and he was sometimes “tripped up” when he first learned a new braille contraction. Ryley’s advice to new braille readers and writers is to “try, try, and try again! Just keep trying and never give up because it will get easier!” Ryley also shared that learning braille was so worthwhile for him because of all the wonderful people he met in his life that he otherwise may not have ever known. Ryley’s mother expressed that it was important to them as parents that Ryley receive all of the resources he needed including braille. He needed many tools in his “tool box” and they shared it was their responsibility to make sure that Ryley’s tool box was full. Ryley’s braille teacher Kathy, commented on Ryley’s excitement to learn braille... “Ryley always came to his braille lessons with a smile and he worked very hard to gain the braille knowledge he has today.” Congratulations Ryley! 🍀

A Big Welcome to Our New Staff!!



Cheyenne Tucker

Hello all, my name is Cheyanne, and I am the new Cottage Life Attendant in Geyser and Shoshone. I moved to Montana in 2016 from Washington, where I lived all my life up until that point. I have wanted to work here since taking my first Sign Language class in 2018 with Bev and Brenda LeMieux.

In my first week here I have had the opportunity to be a part of a few events and have enjoyed that immensely. One of my goals while working here is to get better every day with my signing, so if you see me around I encourage you to assist me with learning a new sign/word. I am excited to meet everyone here and look forward to the coming months of getting to know you all better. 🍀



Montana School for the Deaf and Blind

LIFTING STUDENTS

Inspiring Women from the Golden Triangle: Geraldine Women Serves the State's Deaf and Blind Youth

By Bethany Monroe DeBorde, *The River Press* news January 20, 2021 (reprinted with permission)

Working with the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind (MSDB) for more than 20 years, Carol Clayton-Bye of Geraldine is a passionate advocate for children with hearing or vision loss, making sure they have access to the proper accommodations to live normal, fulfilling lives.

She wants parents to know their deaf, hard of hearing, low vision, blind or deafblind child can have the same dreams and career goals as any other child – they just need to be equipped with the right tools.

As the director of outreach for MSDB, Clayton-Bye works with numerous state and federal agencies and other organizations to serve these students, from infants through age 22.

Her job puts her in regular contact with Montana's Family Support Services Advisory Council, and last month she was appointed to serve on that same council by Governor Steve Bullock during his final weeks in office.

The appointment added one more hat to the many Clayton-Bye juggles as a farm wife and mom with a full-time career. She lives on the family's Geraldine farm with her husband, James Bronec, and children and also serves on the Geraldine School District Board of Trustees.

MSDB's outreach office is located in Great Falls, but Clayton Bye has 15 outreach staff members around the state, plus 50 subcontractors.

She has a home office in Geraldine, but travels throughout the state for work. However, the current pandemic has limited that travel and she now conducts many meetings virtually via Zoom – sometimes spending about 30 hours a week in Zoom meetings alone.

THE PATH TO MSDB

Clayton-Bye started out as a general education teacher, completing her student teaching at Lewis & Clark Elementary School in Great Falls. She was then hired to work at Morningside Elementary, also in Great Falls. At both schools, she had a student who was either deaf or blind.

She learned about MSDB and offered to volunteer, but instead they told her to consider applying for a teaching position.

The following year, when Malmstrom Air Force Base closed some missile sites, the Great Falls School District lost many families and was not able to renew contracts with many of their new teachers.

Clayton-Bye decided to check back in with MSDB and found they had a classroom position open. The rest is history – she's now worked for MSDB more than two decades.

She returned to college to learn how to teach students with vision loss and ended up becoming head of MSDB's blind department.

Seven years ago, Clayton-Bye accepted the director of outreach position, shifting her focus from students who attend MSDB's Great Falls campus to any hard of hearing, low vision, blind or deafblind infant, child or young adult in the state.

THE RIGHT TOOLS

MSDB's Great Falls campus is Montana's only school for deaf and blind students, but the outreach office works with students across the state, including many who attend their local public or private schools or are homeschooled.

Children and young adults do not need to be fully deaf or blind to qualify for services through MSDB. Any Montanan ages birth through 22 can receive a free hearing test and Montana's InfantSEE program provides free eye screenings for every Montana baby, Clayton-Bye said.

A family resource guide for vision and hearing resources is available to locals through the Chouteau County Health Department.

MSDB coordinates with Montana's seven major hospitals, receiving referrals for infants who did not pass their newborn hearing screening. Clayton-Bye's team makes sure each family knows the resources available and has the tools they need to support their child's development.

"We don't look at it so much as a disability as an access issue," she said. "A lot of the kids we serve are very cognitively intact. They are developing just like any other child as long as they have access."

MSDB offers no-cost enrichment activities to students and their families, helping them learn about the technology and resources available. With today's technology, there are many options. A blind person can enjoy a movie, for example, with the help of audio descriptions. Likewise, a deaf person can benefit from a video phone allowing them to communicate with sign language.

"What we want is for parents to have their kids do things on the same timelines as any other kid," Clayton-Bye said.

They also invite deaf or blind adults to share their stories with families so children can have relatable role models. Guest speakers have included a deaf store owner and a deaf chef of a 5-star restaurant in Washington, DC and a deaf woman who works as a police officer.

"It teaches our kids to not set limitations," Clayton-Bye said.

When Clayton-Bye started working at MSDB, they had around 100 on-campus students, but today they serve around 60. However, she works with around 1,000 youth around the state.

"Now with vaccines those numbers have gone down substantially," she said.

The measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) vaccine has played an important role, she said, since rubella patients often suffered hearing loss.

Out of around 11,000 births per year in Montana, Clayton-Bye said they typically see about 22 infants referred due to hearing or vision concerns. Lately, they have seen an influx in referrals with school-age children moving to Montana from other states.

Many states have large deaf communities where it is easy to find others who know sign language, but that isn't the case in Montana. Great Falls, Missoula or Bozeman probably have Montana's highest population of deaf and sign language fluent people, Clayton-Bye said.

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

STORIES BEYOND EXPECTATIONS

"But even here (in Great Falls), we don't have great access or many qualified interpreters," she said.

Some MSDB students live on campus and others commute. Sometimes students come for a few months to learn skills to support them, such as using a screen reader or a cane, and then return to their hometown public school.

OUTREACH

Clayton-Bye became a teacher because she enjoys working with children and never intended to seek an administrative position. However, when she saw the programs, technology and resources offered in other states, she wanted Montana students to have the same opportunities.

So, she moved out of the classroom and into the director of outreach position and began working to close that gap. She secured grants to start a deaf mentor program in Montana where deaf adults work with parents of deaf children to teach them sign language and deaf culture.

She also worked with the former warden of Crossroads Correctional Center in Shelby to design a prison braille program where inmates are trained to become nationally certified braille transcribers. In exchange, they provide braille transcription to MSDB at no charge. They are, however, paid an hourly wage through the prison work program.

"He made it one of the highest paid jobs in the prison because we expect a high level of skill from them," Clayton-Bye said.

Learning braille is a time-consuming task, making it an ideal challenge for inmates willing to put in the work. Their efforts also pay off once they're released from prison, as nationally-certified braille transcribers make an average of roughly \$50,000 a year, Clayton-Bye said.

"There's a lot of people who have made a bad choice in life but are not really bad people and pretty high intelligence," Clayton-Bye said. So far, she's had 12 men, all with post-high school education, join the braille program. It takes most people three years to become certified braille transcribers, but she had three men complete the program in just 18 months.

She mails them packets of schoolwork and other materials to transcribe for the MSDB students.

It used to be that there were only a couple major textbook companies, so getting braille copies of their books wasn't difficult. Today, there are numerous companies and often the books being used by a student's peers aren't available in braille.

"The cost for us to send braille out of state is ridiculous," Clayton-Bye said, noting it can cost anywhere from \$1,200 to \$27,000 to have one calculus textbook transcribed.

However, one of the inmates in the braille program is a gifted mathematician and is working toward his math certification. She hopes that next time they need an advanced math textbook transcribed, he'll be able to take the job.

For convicts who committed crimes online, such as embezzlement or hacking, they may be banned from using the internet once they're released back into society. With many jobs today requiring at least some internet usage, this adds another hurdle for convicted felons seeking work.

Braille transcribing, however, is a job that can be done almost anywhere and does not require the internet, Clayton-Bye said. Instead, the transcriber can use a scanner and save files to a flash drive to mail.

LIONS CLUB PARTNERSHIP

MSDB set a goal to provide all low-vision students in the state with updated technology – saving students from having to push a cumbersome cart with a magnifier down the hall with them to each class. With the help of Lions Clubs throughout Montana, they met that goal before the pandemic hit – equipping students with the technology they need to succeed at both home and school.

Lions Clubs often support projects providing vision support, so Clayton-Bye reached out and was invited to attend their conference.

They set a goal to raise \$300,000 and purchase 100 devices for Montana's low-vision students.

"We said if we can meet that goal in two years it would be a dream come true and we met it in eight months with the Lions," Clayton-Bye said. "We want to continue to dream big to open the doors to Montana's deaf, hard of hearing, blind, low vision and deafblind." ❖

New Board Members



Dee Dee Franzen

Hi, I am Dee Dee Franzen. I was born and raised in Glasgow, MT, the official "Middle of Nowhere". I have 2 children. My son Jesse and his wife Joice live in Helena, MT and my daughter, Jennifer, lives in Glasgow. Jennifer attended MSDB in the blind department from 1989 until she graduated in 2003. I feel my daughter received a GREAT education at MSDB, and I am honored to serve on the MSDB Foundation board to ensure all students and staff receive the same gracious gifts and wonderful experiences my daughter received.



Catherine Copeland

I learned to sign when I was 14 years old. From the beginning, I fell in love with the Deaf community and ASL. I knew at age 14 I wanted to be an interpreter and to embrace the Deaf community. I kept learning sign language and most of my interpreting was in a religious setting. At age 20, I became a nationally certified interpreter. I later took the updated test and now hold a Certificate in Interpreting and a Certificate in Transliterating. I have a AA degree in interpreting. A bachelor's degree in communication and a master's degree in Education. I have always wanted to teach interpreting. Currently, I am teaching for two universities. I also have a degree in being a Master Mentor. While getting that degree I set up a mentorship program for interpreters in Montana. I love the Deaf community and it has always been my goal to help interpreters to improve their skills so that our MT Deaf community has the best interpreters. I live in Billings MT where I work for Montana State University Billings as their Lead Interpreter. I am very excited about being on the MSDB Foundation board.

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

MSDB Foundation Board of Directors

Scott Patera, Great Falls, President • Shawn Tulloch, Bozeman, Vice President • Laura Walker, Great Falls, Sec/Tres

Cathy Copeland, Billings
Bonnie DeNoma, Great Falls
Dee Dee Franzen, Glasgow
Hollis Fudge, Great Falls

Jim Kelly, Great Falls
Doug Little, Great Falls
Gary McManus, Great Falls
Casey Schreiner, Great Falls

Travis Stevenson, Great Falls
Rick Thompson, Glasgow
Mark Willmarth, Great Falls

Team Braxton

By Susan Davis - Outreach Consultant



The great thing about my position at MSDB is that I get to meet and work with a host of fantastic people. One such instance is working with Braxton's team. Braxton was born with Ocular-Facial-Cardio-Dental (OFCD) Syndrome and is the only known male in the world to have this syndrome. Due to his condition, Braxton was born without eyes, is hearing impaired, and has defects of the heart and brain. However, Braxton doesn't let any of this stop him.

Braxton, who had been in the hospital from the time he was born, was released in May as he turned two. He was going home and was ready to take on life. I, on the other hand, haven't had a lot of experience with deafblindness, so when Theresa Baldry with the Montana DeafBlind (DB) Project approached MSDB consultants about a pilot communication program they were putting together with Philip Schweigert, I jumped onboard.

Mr. Schweigert is known for his work with multi-involved children and meeting their communication needs. He has more than 40 years of experience and co-authored articles and curriculum materials in the area of communication and cognitive development. The DB Project's pilot program – Communicative Competencies Peer Learning Community – is a collaborative endeavor in which the Montana DB Project provides intensive technical assistance in conjunction with MSDB Outreach support to teams across the state who are working with children who have dual sensory loss and additional disabilities.

The program is supporting four teams who in turn serve four children of a variety of ages. It is slated to end at the close of the school year, however, there may be potential for it to be

extended. I think that would be fantastic, particularly, with Braxton transitioning from early childhood to preschool services and potentially adding people to his team.

Braxton has lots of team support. His team consist of his parents, TJ and Trista Brooks, therapists at the Glendive Medical Center: Lindsay Murnion (SLP), Tiffany Coon (PT), Vanessa Schmitt (OT), DEAP Family Support Specialist, Courtney Ban, and MSDB Outreach Consultants Emily LaSalle (DHH) and Susan Davis (VI). Theresa Baldry (MT DB Project) coordinates the consultative sessions and Mr. Schweigert assists the team in using the Communication Matrix assessment tool to develop goals for Braxton.

The Communication Matrix helped the team identify the level of Braxton's current communication which includes finding and biting his dad's feet to interact, and pushing an unwanted activity away from him when he is done. The matrix helps guide the team to identify interventions to support Braxton in expanding his communication. Our next step will be to help Braxton recognize the role of the receiver in his communication. For him to intentionally engage them to continue an interaction. These activities will help us build a solid foundation of pre-symbolic communication, to later develop the use of switches or symbols or sign language based upon what Braxton needs.

From what I've seen so far, nothing is going to hold Braxton back. He was born fighting the odds and continues to do so. It is exciting to see the progress he has made, and I look forward to working with his family and team in the coming years. ■■

MSDB Academic Bowl

By Jen Wasson - Teacher

Meet this year's Academic Bowl team! Tayler (Class of 2021), JD (Class of 2022), Wesley (Class of 2021), and Anna (Class of 2024) along with assistant coach, Yvette Smail, and head coach, Jennifer Wasson.

Academic Bowl has a long history at MSDB, but due to COVID-19, this will be the first year Gallaudet's entire Academic Bowl Competition will be held virtually. The competition dates are March 8-12, 2021. Although it's unfortunate the team won't experience traveling to another state to compete and meet other Deaf and Hard-of-hearing students in person, they are very excited to still have an opportunity to participate in such a fun and prestigious event.

To prepare, the team practices weekly. They not only practice questions from all areas of knowledge including math, current

events, English and literature, science, pop culture, sports, history, and more, they practice strategy, too.

As a senior, this will be Tayler's last year on the team. She states, "I have really enjoyed being on the Academic Bowl team, and I cherish all the opportunities I was given and the memories I made with my coaches and teammates over the past four years. It's been a lot of fun learning new things, competing in challenges, and working as a team. This year is definitely different, we are still having fun, but it feels very different. I will miss meeting all the new people and experiencing traveling to new places."

Please join us as we wish MSDB's 2020-2021 Academic Bowl team good luck! 🍀



Anna



JD



Tayler



Wesley

Former MSDB Employee Elected Superintendent of Jefferson County Schools

ByLeann Gross - Outreach Consultant

We won't soon forget that 2020 was an election year and while many TV ads may have caused us to pause and wonder about our candidate of choice; there was one name on the ballot in Jefferson County that I would not have hesitated to vote for if given the opportunity! Obviously, many residents in Jefferson County felt the same way, as enough votes were cast to elect Sarah Eyer as the Superintendent of Schools!

Sarah left MSDB in 2017 after more than 20 years working as an Interpreter, Classroom Teacher, and finally an Outreach Consultant for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. It is no surprise that her career would lead her to an administrative position because throughout her time at MSDB Sarah held positions on various boards such as Montana Council of Exceptional Children (MCEC), Montana Youth Leadership Forum (MYLF), State Special Education Advisory Panel, Montana Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD), and worked with parents to bring new legislation to the forefront for such things

as adding more Outreach consultants to the MSDB staff and establishing Interpreter Standards, and did annual presentations at state and national conferences such as MCEC, Montana Education Association (MEA), and Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI). Sarah is credited with helping to shape our Outreach program into what it is today with Deaf Enrichment Weekends that bring students together from across the state and Family Learning Weekends that bring Montana families together for a weekend of learning, connecting, and friendship.

Families and professionals who have had the privilege of working with Sarah in the past still ask how she is doing and let us know how much she is missed; so it is heartwarming to know that she is once again touching the lives of students, families, and educational professionals in Montana. MSDB's loss is most definitely Jefferson County's gain! Congratulations Sarah, we wish you only the best always! 🍀



Sarah swearing in.

Technology Supports

By Stephanie Annis - Occupational Therapist

Technology is everywhere in our schools – computers, smart boards, iPads, refreshable Braille displays, Chromebooks, webcams, video phones, etc. It is a natural part of our students' and teachers' everyday lives. It serves many purposes including completing homework, participating in meetings, teaching concepts, access to curricular materials, communication, and recreation.

Assistive technology is an item, piece of equipment, or product that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the function of a child with a disability. It can range from *low-tech* (slant boards, checklists, picture-based schedules) to *mid-tech* (talking calculators, switch based toys) to *high-tech* devices (tablets, smart phones, apps). Depending on the skill being addressed, I start with low-tech when possible. This allows the student a more concrete learning experience. Low-tech options also don't rely on internet access and generally don't require as much training for use across environments and staff.

As an occupational therapist, I consider how assistive technology can enhance student participation, learning, and increased independence. This school year, I have collaborated with several student teams to implement low-tech, mid-tech, and high-tech into student programming. One team is using picture-based schedules to encourage task completion of classroom learning activities. Another student's team is using switch based toys during play time. Another team has recently introduced a student to an iPad app with a categorized, symbol based dictionary. The symbols can be modified to photos, clip art, or sign language. As the student's language and vocabulary grow, the app can be customized to support communication and participation in the classroom. I am working with another student's team to incorporate low-tech and high-tech tools for time management skills.

We are certainly fortunate at MSDB to have access to these tools and the team collaboration that allows assistive technology to be part of a student's programming! ■■



ipad



Slant Board



Talking Calculator

Holidays in the Cottage

By Dorothy Nutter - Cottage Staff



Jordan ugly sweater.



Anna Halloween.

During the holidays the students and staff enjoy decorating the cottages. Halloween and Christmas are probably the most popular time to decorate with spooky decorations hanging from the ceiling through the cottages and in each of the student's bedrooms. Christmas is always a very festive time with trees, garland, decorations, and lights inside and outside the cottage. Also during Christmas time each cottage wing has a party with gifts, games and snacks and/or going out to eat.

One of the traditions we all enjoy is the cookie decorating. Staff and students and families come to enjoy decorating sugar cookies with a possibility to win a prize. This year was a little different due to COVID19 as we only did it with our cottage students. We also did something new and made gingerbread houses which the kids really enjoyed. We usually make some kind of craft and we made placemats for Thanksgiving and ugly sweaters for Christmas.



Making ginger bread house.

Another tradition is our formal dinners for Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter. Usually we invite teachers, cottage and infirmary staff not on duty, outreach, board members and their families to come. The kitchen crew works hard to make us a wonderful meal. Students enjoy helping set the tables with festive tablecloths and napkins. Some help in the kitchen and some like to greet the guests and escort them to a table. The students make a craft project to display as centerpieces. Again it was a little different this year and we did not get to have our Easter dinner since we were all quarantined at home. We did get to have Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners but only cottage staff and students we were able to invite a few guests.

We do our best here at the cottage to keep our traditions going to help make good memories that our kids will always remember. ❖❖

COVID and You

By Yvette Smail - MSDB Behavior Specialist

The COVID-19 pandemic has likely brought many changes to how you live your life, and with it, uncertainty, change in daily routines, financial pressures and social isolation. We may worry about getting sick, how long the pandemic will last, whether or not you will keep your job, and what the future will bring. Information overload, misinformation, and rumors can make you feel you have little to no control in your life.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, you may experience stress, anxiety, fear, sadness and loneliness. Mental health disorders, including anxiety and depression, can worsen making it that much more important to practice self-care.

Self-care strategies are good for both your mental and physical health and can help you take charge of your life. Take care of your body as well as your mind and connect with others to benefit your mental health.



Take care of your body

Be mindful about your physical health:

- Get enough sleep. Go to bed and get up at the same times each day. Stick close to your typical schedule, even if you're staying at home.
- Participate in regular physical activity. Regular physical activity and exercise can help reduce anxiety and improve mood. Find an activity that includes movement, such as dance or exercise apps. Get outside in an area that makes it easy to maintain distance from people, such as a nature trail or your own backyard.
- Eat healthy. Choose a well-balanced diet. Avoid loading up on junk food and refined sugar. Limit caffeine as it can aggravate stress and anxiety.
- Limit screen time. Turn off electronic devices for some time each day, including 30 minutes before bedtime. Make a conscious effort to spend less time in front of a screen — television, tablet, computer and phone.
- Relax and recharge. Set aside time for yourself. Just a few minutes of quiet time can be refreshing and help to quiet your mind and lessen anxiety. Many people benefit from practices such as deep breathing, mindfulness, yoga or meditation. Soak in a bubble bath, listen to music, or read or listen to a book, or whatever helps you relax. Select a technique that works for you and practice it regularly.

Take care of your mind

- Keep your regular routine. Try to maintain a regular schedule as it is important to your mental health. Try to stick to a regular bedtime routine, as well as keep consistent times for meals, bathing and getting dressed, work or study schedules, and exercise. Be sure to make time for activities you can enjoy. Schedules can help make you feel you have more control.
- Limit exposure to news media. Social media may expose you to rumors and false information. Also, limit reading, hearing or watching other news, while keeping up to date on national and local recommendations.
- Stay busy. Distractions can help get you away from the continued negative thoughts that feed anxiety and depression. Engage in hobbies that you can do at home, find a new project or start a project you've been putting off finishing. Doing something positive is a healthy coping strategy.

- Focus on positive thoughts. Make a choice to focus on the positive things in your life. Try to start each day by listing things you are thankful for. Maintaining a sense of hope, and working on accepting change can help with anxiety as well.
- Use your moral compass or spiritual life for support. If you draw strength from a belief system, it can bring you comfort during difficult times.
- Set priorities. Set reasonable goals each day and give yourself credit for every step in the right direction. Recognize that some days will be better than others.

Connect with others

- Make connections. If you need to stay at home and distance yourself from others, avoid social isolation. Find time each day to make virtual connections by email, texts, phone, or FaceTime or similar apps. If you're working remotely from home, ask your co-workers how they're doing and share coping tips. Enjoy virtual socializing and talking to those in your home.
- Do something for others. If you know someone who can't get out, ask if there's something needed, such as groceries or a prescription picked up, for instance.



Recognizing what's typical and what's not:

Stress is a normal psychological and physical reaction to life's demands. Everyone reacts differently to difficult situations, and it's normal to feel stress and worry during a crisis.

Many people may have mental health concerns, such as symptoms of anxiety and depression during this time. And feelings may change over time.

You may find yourself feeling helpless, sad, angry, irritable, hopeless, anxious or afraid. You may have trouble concentrating on typical tasks, changes in appetite, body aches and pains, or difficulty sleeping or you may struggle with routine tasks.

When these signs and symptoms last for several days in a row, make you miserable and cause problems in your daily life so that you find it hard to carry out normal responsibilities, it's time to ask for help.

Get help when you need it

Hoping mental health problems such as anxiety or depression will go away on their own can lead to worsening symptoms. If you have concerns or if you experience worsening of mental health symptoms, ask for help when you need it, and be upfront about how you're doing. To get help you may want to:

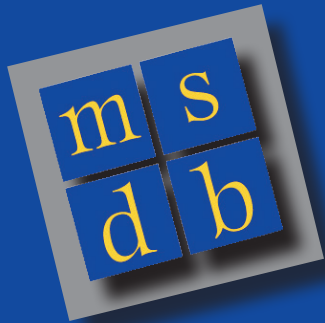
- Contact a close friend or loved one — even though it may be hard to talk about your feelings.
- Contact a minister, spiritual leader or someone in your faith community.
- Contact your employee assistance program (MSDB's is through RBH), if your employer has one, and get counseling or ask for a referral to a mental health professional.
- Call your primary care provider or mental health professional to ask about appointment options to talk about your anxiety or depression and get advice and guidance. Some may provide the option of phone, video or online appointments.

RBH for MSDB staff and their families:

Phone- 866-750-0512

www.MyRBH.com

Have a great 2021!



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Letter from the Editor

By Missie Hill - Editor for the Express



2020 has been marked by many changes that have had quite an impact on everyone in multiple ways. COVID-19 brought about the wearing of masks, staying home rather than going out, social distancing, learning via the computer, and so on. However, in this very different time where many struggle, our students continue to shine.

These wonderful youngsters make me realize there is always good and hope in the world. They don't let a thing like a pandemic get them down. They continue to be curious and thrive in this learning environment. They have good days and bad, like anyone. However, when they have bad days, they get over it quickly and return to smiling, laughing, and relishing life.

We, as adults, can continue to learn from them. I personally learn as much from them as they learn from me. I am learning to find joy in many small things. I am learning to communicate with my hands, facial expressions, and body posture. I am learning that it is ok if they see me make a mistake because I am human. I have learned, when they laugh at something I have done by accident, to laugh with them and find the humor in life.

The Express continues to be a small snapshot of the joy and wonder that goes on at MSDB. Share it when you finish enjoying the articles. Let others see what we do.

I hope you, the reader, can find joy in all things, laugh with the heart of a child, and learn new things from others.

Thank you for your continued interest and for your suggestions and comments. They help this publication get better. Continue to contact me with them at mhill@msdb.mt.gov. ☒

Missie Hill, Editor
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Where in the 406?



Last issue's picture was located in East Glacier

Happy Spring